

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE
HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOMS 1/2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND,
ON TUESDAY, 14 JULY 2009 AT 3:55PM

Present: -

Councillor A E Davies - Chairperson

Councillors

M E J Nott - Leader
D Sage - Deputy Leader
H J David - Cabinet Member - Resources

Invitees:

Councillors

M W Butcher
K S Hunt
R D Jenkins
K J Watts

Officers

H Anthony - Corporate Director - Children
A Phillips - Head of Property and Finance
S Pryce - Head of Regeneration and Development
C Turner - Group Manager – Assessment/Case Management
S Davies - Assistant Solicitor
J Monks - Cabinet and Committee Officer

24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members and Officers:-

Councillor L C Morgan - Holiday
Councillor J C Spanswick - Holiday
Councillor M Thomas - Other public duties
L Harper - Family Commitment
M Shepherd - Other Council business

25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

26 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting - Cabinet Committee held on 26 May 2009, be approved as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendment:-

The last paragraph at page 14 should reflect a further item to be added to the Forward Work Programme regarding the

training and employment of social workers, to be considered at the July meeting.

27 CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY STATEMENT

The Corporate Director - Children submitted a report in order to seek the Committee's agreement of the Corporate Parenting Policy Statement shown as an Appendix to the report. Looked after Children was a key responsibility for the Council as corporate parents and connected with the corporate theme of "Children Today, Adults Tomorrow".

A draft Corporate Parenting Policy Statement was previously considered by the Committee in January 2009; amendments were made and the document was then circulated to a number of multi-agency partnerships for consultation. There had been one suggested amendment to the Policy Statement, i.e. that "Care Leavers" should be incorporated into "Looked After Children and Young People" rather than being added each time throughout the document, as shown at paragraph 3 of the report, however, this amendment was rejected by the Committee.

The Group Manager – Assessment/Case Management stressed the importance of conveying to looked after children and care leavers that the Authority still had a responsibility towards them during their transition to independence including where they would live once they left the care of the Authority. He had received feedback from many youngsters that they did not want the stigma of being referred to as "looked after children" but would rather be recognised as "leaving carers".

Discussions took place and Members welcomed the Policy Statement, which they believed was long overdue, and agreed that it showed the commitment the Authority was demonstrating to looked after children and care leavers.

RESOLVED: That the Committee endorse the final Corporate Parenting Policy Statement.

28 CORPORATE PARENTING : ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS, OFFICERS AND PARTNERS

The Corporate Director - Children introduced her report, the purpose of which was to describe the roles and responsibilities of Members, Officers and Partners in relation to corporate parenting. She explained that all Councillors and Managers should be aware of the corporate parenting role and the shared responsibility to ensure the needs of looked after children and care leavers are met. Referring to the background of the report she highlighted the fact that as a corporate parent, looked after children and care leavers should be shown the same concern and treated with the same regard, as they would show towards their own children.

Awareness was the underlying factor, to ensure that all Councillors, Officers and Partners understand their responsibility towards looked after children and care leavers. The Corporate Director - Children informed Members that a Presentation by the Cabinet Member - Children and Young People was due to go before full Council this week. This Presentation would be the first of several, alongside other activities to raise awareness amongst Councillors. She added that Councillors and Officers may have a range of other roles such as a school governor, where they could champion a looked after child coming into the school.

She continued that although there would be times when there would be conflicting priorities, for example regarding resources expenditure, it was important to get the right balance and to remember that children only experience childhood once. The Children Act 2004 had recognised the requirement for all partnership arrangements between different agencies and organisations to work together to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers, and that they have a duty under the said Act to promote the wellbeing of all children and young people and also to safeguard them. Therefore, resources could be pooled and services delivered jointly.

Discussion took place and reference was made to the list of Councillors and Managers who have a key role in corporate parenting as shown at page 2 of the report. The Leader and the Chief Executive had not been included, which Members agreed they should, as it would emphasise its high importance, particularly as they had both taken a personal interest in safeguarding looked after children.

The Group Manager – Assessment/Case Management in response to a question from Members on what happens when the system fails, explained that the Children Act 2004 had made significant recommendations which had permeated throughout Wales and this Authority to ensure that from the Leader down everyone gives recognition to the responsibility of safeguarding children. This had arisen as a result of the Victoria Climbié case in recognising the need for all agencies and organisations to work together, which resulted in Local Safeguarding Children's Boards being set up throughout the country. The LSCB's brought together senior personnel, investing them with key responsibilities to protect children, promote their welfare and to take the business of corporate parenting responsibly. He believed that BCBC were achieving this aim.

He continued that it was important in the long term to invest in looked after children and care leavers by giving them a flying start when they reach 16, as many of these youngsters experience multiple accommodation situations, as well as other problems and often end up in trouble. Research had shown that 62% of young people who live within a family environment, depend on their parents for a deposit when purchasing their first home and it would make a difference if the looked after children were given financial assistance and a choice of where to live, together with help in seeking employment or encouragement to go on to University, as he believed it was important for them to have choices. This could also save on resources in future years.

In response to a request from Members, the Corporate Director - Children confirmed that a report on rota visits would be presented at the next meeting with relevant Officers being invited to take part in the discussion.

The Head of Regeneration and Development advised Members that she would research a range of available services within the Borough including Kenfig Nature Reserve and the implications these services would have on corporate parenting. She would then report her findings back to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee note the roles and responsibilities of Members and Officers as set out in the report, and approve the proposal that the Forward Work Programme is reviewed at each meeting to ensure that it reflects all the responsibilities the Council has towards looked after children and care leavers.

29 WORK EXPERIENCE

The Corporate Director - Children presented her report, to inform the Committee of the current position with regard to work experience placements for children and young people, including looked after children, and to explore improvements in these arrangements.

She explained that there were two types of work experience, a five day block placement for all Year 10 pupils organised by Careers Wales and an extended placement offered to pupils in Year 11. Although there was a wide range of employees within the Council prepared to participate in the work experience programme, there were limited opportunities for young people to access in-house work placements and some trades work placements. There was also concern that work experience for some young people, who were struggling academically, was not enough. It was therefore important to match the young person with the appropriate placement and to make sure employers supervising these young people had the necessary skills and patience.

There was currently no support mechanism in place for looked after children seeking work experience, apart from the Looked After Children Team and the designated teacher at each school. However, the report outlined suggestions for improvement for the Committee to consider.

Members referred to "Work Experience Week" when many Council employees bring their own children along for work experience. They believed this opportunity should be extended to looked after children, with definite timescales regarding progress and reports feeding back to the Committee. All Directorates should be involved in the work experience programme, to allow young people an introduction to professional roles as well as vocational training, with a structured work programme for each young person in agreement with the employer.

The Cabinet Member - Children stated that a policy regarding work experience for all children which took into account looked after children, needed to be put in place and the report to the Committee was the first of a series of reports.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- (1) Note the current situation.
- (2) Note the suggestions for improvement including the amendment of the referral form to ask whether the young person is looked after.
- (3) Note that further discussion will be undertaken with service managers and Human Resources to identify ways in which opportunities for looked after children to access "in-house" placements can be extended.
- (4) Receive further reports on looked after children attending work experience placements.

The meeting closed at 5.00pm.