

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

03 NOVEMBER 2009

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR - CHILDREN

ROLE OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING OFFICER - CORPORATE PARENTING TRAINING

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 To advise the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee on the role of the Corporate Parenting Principal Officer and to seek agreement for Bridgend County Borough Council's corporate parenting training programme to be delivered to the said cabinet committee.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority.

- 2.1 Looked After Children are a key responsibility for the Council as corporate parents and meeting their needs connects with the corporate theme of "Young Voices".

3. Background.

- 3.1 It is the legal duty of all Councils to make sure that every child and young person in their care does not miss out, and are provided with opportunities so that they can reach their full potential. Councils have a legal duty to act as a 'corporate parent' for each and every child and young person that is looked after, whether this is as a result of a voluntary agreement with their parents, or under a care order agreed by the court. All children and young people in this country have rights which mean that they must be treated fairly and with respect and care. Their rights are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which underpins all policy in Wales for children and young people. In addition, there are a number of key pieces of legislation which spell out the responsibilities of agencies towards looked after children and young people:
 - The Children Act 1989 - which says that housing, education and health Authorities must help social services in being corporate parent to the children in their care.
 - The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 - requires local authorities to ensure individual 'pathway plans' are developed to support young people to independence.
 - The Children Action 2004 - provides a legislative spine for the wider strategy for improving children's lives. The Children Act 2004 places a new duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children.
 - The Children and Young Persons Bill 2008 proposes to reform the statutory framework for the care system to ensure that children and young people receive high-quality care and support and to drive improvements in the delivery of services focused on the needs of the child.
- 3.2 Every Member has legal responsibilities under the Children Act 2004 as a corporate parent to the children in the care of Bridgend County Borough Council. It is the responsibility of all councillors, as corporate parents, to be satisfied that there is a

joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of looked after children through policy and planning. The Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee came into existence in October 2008 and is one of the main vehicles of the Council for ensuring it meets its responsibilities in this area.

- 3.3 “As the corporate parent of children in care the State has a special responsibility for their well-being. Like any good parent, it should put its own children first. That means being a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and helping children to make a success of their lives”. (DfES 2006)
- 3.3 Translating theory into practice is a challenge for all councils and their partners but the impetus for a focus on corporate parenting is the recognition that the outcomes for looked after children continue to be poor, with worse educational achievements, more likelihood of being convicted of an offence and more likelihood of becoming homeless than their peers.
- 3.4 The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) in partnership with the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) have recently updated and published ‘If this were my Child’. It is a requirement for Members and relevant officers to be supported through training so that they have a clear understanding of their duties and responsibilities in order that that they can effectively exercise their role as corporate parents. WLGA have written a training module to give a practical resource to Members to increase their understanding of the policy and legislation relating to discharging their responsibilities as a corporate parent.
- 3.5 To aid Members with these responsibilities a post of Principal Officer of Corporate Parenting has been created within the Safeguarding and Family Support Service in the Children’s Directorate. The responsibilities and activities of the role include:
- undertaking regular analysis of performance data and quality audits and implementing systems and practice guidance that will enable managers to achieve improved performance;
 - being a champion for looked after children and young people, ensuring that their voice is heard and providing advice, support and guidance to staff and Members who have responsibilities within this service user group;
 - implementing the placement strategy, ensuring consistency with the family support strategy;
 - developing and overseeing an independent visitors’ scheme;
 - safely reducing the looked after children population through leading the looked after children project within the Supporting Vulnerable Children programme;
 - ensuring permanency of placement for looked after children, as appropriate, through the development and implementation of a permanency policy;
 - ensuring participation of children and young people and their carers when planning and reviewing services;

- contributing to the corporate parenting committee and the development and implementation of a corporate parenting policy for the local authority in partnership with Members and officers. This includes bringing forward issues for their attention and which may require their decision making powers;
- representing the interests of looked after children and young people on key strategic developments, with partners, as required;
- identifying and progressing opportunities for an integrated approach to service design and delivery for looked after children and young people across the Authority and with partner agencies;
- undertaking independent inspections of the four children's residential homes under regulatory requirements and to collate rota visits.

4. Current situation / proposal.

Corporate Parenting Training

- 4.1 WLGA have drafted a training programme to provide practical guidance on how Members should discharge their duties and responsibilities as corporate parents. The module has been designed to take place over the duration of a morning or afternoon session, reflecting the need to be concise. It is an interactive exercise that will require members to draw on experiences and discuss ideas for future development. It is relevant to all members and the module also highlights the importance of the different roles of a Councillor, including executive member and member of a scrutiny committee.
- 4.2 It is proposed that the Principal Officer for Corporate Parenting will undertake the training of Members as part of a pilot exercise in liaison with Emily Warren, Policy Officer with the WLGA. Lessons learnt from this pilot will be shared with the WLGA to assist them in finalising the training module. Thereafter, training will be facilitated by the Corporate Parenting Principal Officer on an annual basis to ensure that the Members are kept up to date with legislation, regulations and practice regarding supporting the needs of Looked After Children.

It is proposed that the training will include information/discussion on the following topics:

A. What all Councillors should know

- Understand the concept of corporate parenting
- Introduce them to the legislative framework
- Provide Members with an opportunity to understand and explore their role as a corporate parent
- Provide Members with key information about looked after children in Bridgend and how their needs are being met
- What Resources are available to Members and Looked After Children.
- The roles of key local authority services- e.g. education
- The importance of multi-agency partnership working
- How to support care leavers

B. Key responsibilities for a corporate parent

- To prioritise the needs of looked after children and young people in decision making
- To accept responsibility for their wellbeing and future development
- To find ways to support their growth and attainment
- To ensure they have access to services
- To ensure their voice is heard

C. Key Questions for Scrutiny

- Are looked after children a regular item for scrutiny?
- What are the key issues that are of most concern to looked after children and young people in Bridgend?
- How do you monitor whether the needs of looked after children and young people are being met?
- How do you monitor the educational achievements and wellbeing of the children in your care?

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

5.1 None.

6. Legal Implications.

6.1 None.

7. Financial Implications.

7.1 None.

8. Recommendation.

8.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the role of the corporate parenting principal officer and agrees the proposal for the Committee Members' training as part of a pilot programme with WLGA and thereafter for such training to take place on an annual basis.

Hilary Anthony
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Background documents

Corporate Parenting Policy Statement – 14th July 2009

Corporate Parenting: Roles and Responsibilities of Members, Officers and Partners – 14th July 2009

Draft Corporate Parenting Training Module - WLGA