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 Y Dirprwy Weinidog Plant a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
 Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
 Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
 Ein cyf/Our ref: MB/GT/02350/12
 To:

Elected Members, including Lead
 Members for Children & Young
 People's Services and Children's
 Social Services

June 2012

c.c. Lead Director for Children &
 Young People
 Directors of Social Services and
 Heads of Children's Social
 Services

Dear Elected Member

When you became an Elected Member you also become responsible for ensuring that the council acts as a good corporate parent to the children in its care. The role of the corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the same outcomes every good parent would want for their own children. The local authority has a legal and moral duty to provide such loyal support to the children it is responsible for looking after.

The importance of your responsibilities as corporate parents cannot be overemphasised. Elected Members have a key responsibility to ensure that the children in their care are able to thrive. These children will often have faced significant challenges and will need the help of powerful adults who have a responsibility to advocate for them as their corporate parents.

Elected members, managers and staff have different tasks and levels of responsibility, but all must take an active part in listening to the child and ensuring the best possible care and opportunities are available for children in care. Corporate parenting responsibilities will only be delivered when there is clear political commitment and leadership and when senior managers agree that this is a priority and make it explicit in strategic and business plans.

The Children Act 2004 places a duty on statutory partners to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This includes Local Health Boards, NHS Trusts, Police, The Probation Service, Youth Offending Teams, Prison Governors and Youth Support Services amongst others. This will include assisting local authorities in their corporate parenting responsibilities. The Lead Member for Children and Young People's Services and the Lead Director for Children and Young People's Services, along with the Lead Member for Social Services and the Director of Social Services, should be responsible for leading improvements in corporate parenting and for ensuring that looked after children are seen as a priority by the whole authority. It is of equal importance to ensure that children and young

people have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive. Strategic planning in respect of these arrangements, including recognition of the contribution of partners to improvement in outcomes for the children and young people concerned, and participation of children and young people in the planning process, is now carried out through the single integrated plan led by the Local Service Board. Guidance on the integrated planning responsibilities of local authorities and their partners is to issue in June 2012

It is important to bear in mind that it is not just social services that impact upon these children. Once a child is in care, all members and officers of the council, as their corporate parents, need to be concerned about that child as if they were their own. This concern should encompass their education, their health and welfare, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements. It is of equal importance to ensure that children and young people have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive. Children in care have a right to have a voice in their care and their future, to be truly listened to when they want to contribute or raise something. They also have a right to access independent professional advocacy to support them when they need someone on their side to stop, start or change something and it is part of your role as a corporate parent to ensure that they are actively offered this service. This is vital to safeguard the child or young person and contributes to the quality assurance of the services they receive. The guidance in relation to advocacy is found at this link:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/complaint/?lang=en>

Effective Corporate Parenting is a vital part of the high quality, responsive, citizen centred social care services that are described in the Social Services (Wales) Bill. The purpose of this Bill is to give us the legislation we need to deliver the Welsh Government's white paper "*Sustainable Social Services for Wales: A Framework for Action*" and to make sure that we have the social services that we want to see in Wales.

It also provides, for the first time, a coherent legislative framework for social services in Wales. The Bill makes legislative proposals in the following areas:

- maintaining and enhancing the wellbeing of people in need;
- giving citizens a stronger voice and real control;
- ensuring a strong national direction and local accountability for delivery;
- safeguarding and protection;
- regulation and inspection; and
- adoption and transitions for disabled children and young people.

Although consultation on the Social Services (Wales) Bill ended on 1 June, the consultation documents can be found at this link:

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/healthsocialcare/bill/?lang=en>

In June 2009 I issued jointly with the Welsh Local Government Association revised guidance to elected members on their corporate parenting role. I have set out in the annexes to this letter the Welsh Government's expectation of corporate parents. The document can be found at this link:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childrenyoungpeople/publications/corporateparent/?lang=en>

Elected Members should be able to ask and receive satisfactory answers to the following sort of questions:

- Are children safe?
- Have they got good homes in a secure and caring environment?

- Are they placed within the local authority area, close to their homes and communities, if not, why not?
- Do they get decent schooling?
- Are they being drawn out of antisocial behaviour?
- Are they healthy?
- Are they thriving and developing socially and emotionally as they should?
- Are they able to participate meaningfully in planning the services they receive?
- Are we giving them enough help to cope with the problems they have in growing up?
- How well do we prepare them for their transition to adulthood?
- Are we ambitious enough for them?
- Do we help them achieve to the maximum of their ability?
- Do we have high aspirations for them and show pride in their achievements?
- Can we help them cope with their failures?
- Can we cope with the problems they give us?

It is with the corporate parent that responsibility and accountability for the wellbeing and future prospects of children in care ultimately rest. I hope that you will approach your corporate parenting responsibilities with the enthusiasm and commitment they deserve.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gwenda Thomas".

Gwenda Thomas AM

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Deputy Minister for Children and Social Services

THE WELSH GOVERNMENT'S EXPECTATION OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AS CORPORATE PARENT**The Welsh Government expects local authorities to:**

- Provide care, a home, and access to health and education and other public services to which all children are entitled according to their needs;
- Ensure that children are placed close to home, wherever possible, in placements that meet their needs including any special health and education needs;
- Provide a mixture of care and firmness to support the child's development, and be the tolerant, dependable and available partner in the adult/child relationship even in the face of disagreements;
- Prevent offending and reoffending, bearing in mind that antisocial behaviour damages the young person as well as victims and the wider community;
- Protect and educate the child against the perils and risks of life by encouraging constructive and appropriate friendships, and discouraging destructive and harmful relationships;
- Celebrate and share their children's achievements, supporting them when they are down;
- Recognise and respect their growth to independence, being tolerable and supportive if they make mistakes;
- Provide consistent support and be available to provide advice and practical help when needed;
- Advocate their cause and trouble-shoot on their behalf when necessary;
- Be ambitious for them and encourage and support their efforts to get on and reach their potential, whether through education, training or employment.
- Provide occasional financial support, remember birthdays and Christmas or annual celebrations within the individual child's religion and culture;
- Encourage and enable appropriate contact with family members – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and brothers and sisters.
- Help them to feel part of the local community through contact with neighbours and local groups.
- Be proactive, not passive, when there are known or suspected serious difficulties.

QUESTIONS FOR ELECTED MEMBERS TO ASK**Children in Care**

- How many children are looked after by your council, whether on a care order or through voluntary arrangements:
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What type of placement are they in – with friends and family, foster care, residential homes or secure units?
- How many are in placements outside your local authority area?
- How much is your council spending on services for looked after children?
- Do all of your looked after children have an allocated social worker?
- How many placement moves have children had?
- How many attend school regularly and how many are excluded from school?
- What progress are they making and how well are they doing at examinations and teacher assessments?
- Is every effort being made to avoid their having to move schools?
- How many are registered with a GP, have access to a dentist and receive regular health assessments?
- How many children run away or otherwise go missing from residential care and foster care?
- How many children have a statement of special educational need or are on school action or school action plus programmes?
- How many children are involved in offending behaviour?
- What action is your authority taking in partnership with other agencies to reduce this?
- What mechanisms does your authority have for hearing the views of children and young people about services and providing feedback for those involved?
- How well does your authority train and support its foster carers?

Care Leavers

- How many young people leave care at the ages of 16, 17 and 18 and where do they go to live?
- How many young people who left care after the age of 16 are still in touch with the local authority?
- How many are in education, training or employment?
- How many are in suitable housing with support if needed?
- How many go on to University?
- How much is spent on after care services, including direct financial assistance to care leavers?
- How do you ensure that their views are taken into account to inform service development?