



# Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2019-2020

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# Overview of Corporate Parenting

## What is Corporate Parenting?

Corporate Parenting describes the collective responsibility of the local authority to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are Looked After. Effective corporate parenting requires a commitment from all Council employees and Elected Members. This responsibility was first set out in the Children Act 1989. Councillors have a lead role in ensuring that their Council acts as an effective Corporate Parent for every child in care by actively seeking high quality outcomes that every good parent would want for their child. Councillors need to aspire for looked after children in the same way that you would for your own children.

The role of the Corporate Parent is demanding. It requires energy, attention to detail and a willingness to engage with looked after children and care leavers in order to improve the services they use and their future outcomes. It is challenging to form a listening and learning relationship with vulnerable children but this is what we instinctively do for our own children and what we must consciously do for children entrusted to our care. As Officers of Thurrock Council we welcome scrutiny and challenge from Elected Members. By holding us to account we will continue to improve services and outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

## Every Member should:

Every Elected Member and manager within the Council, in conjunction with members of governing bodies of partner agencies, needs to:

- Be aware of their 'Corporate Parenting' role
- Have some knowledge of the profile and needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers
- Understand the impact on looked after children and young people of all Council decisions
- Receive information about quality of care and services children and young people are experiencing and consider if this would be 'good enough' for their own child
- Ensure that action is being taken to address any shortcomings in services and support for looked after children and young people and strive to continually improve outcomes

# Role of the Corporate Parent

## Key to improving the outcomes for looked after children

- It is with the Corporate Parent that responsibility and accountability for the wellbeing and future prospects of looked after children ultimately rest
- A good Corporate Parent must offer everything that a good parent would including stability
- It must address both the difficulties, which looked after children experience, and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services
- Equally, it is important that children have a chance to shape and influence the parenting they receive

## What makes Corporate Parenting effective?

An effective Corporate Parent makes sure that looked after children and young people and care leavers have good care, nurture, health and well-being and life chances as they would expect and want for their own child. The Corporate Parent must act as a responsible parent. We believe that good, responsible parenting involves, but is not limited to:

- Making sure that children and young people have a strong sense of belonging
- Ensuring that they are cared about as well as cared for
- Supporting children and young people through school, college or work, being ambitious for them and helping them develop a sense of aspiration and belief
- Making sure children and young people are healthy and health-aware
- Making sure children and young people are actively listened to, respected and valued
- Encouraging them to develop and participate as citizens
- Encouraging them to form and sustain a range of healthy relationships
- Supporting them to manage their feelings and behaviours

In Local Authorities where services were effective, Ofsted found articulation of the leadership, ambition and objectives for looked after children.

In these authorities, they found that the Corporate Parenting Board/Panel:

- Demonstrated a strong cross-party commitment to looked after children, championing their rights.
- Had high aspirations for their Children Looked After and monitored their progress

- Planned for and prioritised the needs of Children Looked After, resulting in a greater focus on improving outcomes
- Actively engaged with their young people

## **Membership**

The membership of Thurrock's Corporate Parenting Committee is made up of eight Councillors drawn from all the political parties of the Council. It also includes the Co-Opted members appointed by Council:

- A nominated representative from Open Door
- Chair and/or Vice-Chair of the Children in Care Council
- Chair of the Foster Carers Association
- Vice-Chair of the Foster Carers Association

# Corporate Parenting Committee

It has been a pleasure to Chair the Corporate Parenting Committee in what has been another busy and inspiring year. The Committee started the year with a focus on external placements for young people, during which the Committee were informed the percentage of referrals received relating to a child previously referred within a 12 month period were being monitored and on average the percentage of repeat referrals had increased from 10.6% for 2017/2018 to 13.3% for 2018/2019.

It was explained the average time for a child from entering care to being placed with adopters had reduced from an average of 565 days between 2015/2017 to 423 days for 2019. This was lower than the national average of 486.

Following the Committee's previous request, Members received continuous updates on the Children's Social Care Performance throughout the year. In June, it was explained that children with missing episodes had reduced from 26 at the start of 2019 to 19 as of March 2019. The number of new foster carers being approved between April 2018 and March 2019 had increased, and the percentage of care leavers in education, employment and training had risen from 61% 2017/2018 to 65% for 2018/2019. This was better than similar authorities where the average was 50.89%.

The Chair of the Committee queried at the June meeting, as to the reason children were placed with in-house foster carers. It was explained that there was a matching process which also took into account if a child had any siblings. By placing children with in-house foster carers, this meant that additional support could be provided if it was required and kept siblings together.

In September the Committee acknowledged a report on the Council's Pledge for Looked After Children. During this item it was discussed how all Elected Members were Corporate Parents to the Council's looked after children. It was discussed how important it was to ensure that our looked after children were able to influence and shape the services provided for them in both a statutory duty and a key priority. With this in mind the Pledge was therefore informed and developed with the Children in Care Council.

The Committee were informed the Local Government Association (LGA) had produced a resource pack on 'Support for Care Leavers' for all Elected Members in their Corporate Parenting role. It was explained the resource pack set out an introduction for Members about care leavers and statutory responsibilities for Local Authorities and Elected Members. The resource pack highlighted a number of sessions that could be of use to Members such as:

- Key Lines of Enquiry for all Councillors, which set out the issues that Members would need to consider when having oversight of services for Care Leavers.
- Case studies from Local Authorities who have tried different ways of working with their care leavers.

The Chair commented she felt the resource pack would be useful for all Elected Members and for the pack to be circulated to all Members of the Council, so they could better understand their Corporate Parenting role.

Throughout the year, Members requested a number of reports on a range of topics, such as:

- Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report
- Looked After Children Health Report – this was a detailed report on the health needs of looked after children.
- Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research – this was a report into the training provided to a range of colleagues including social workers, designated teachers and foster carers by the Virtual School.
- Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection of the Council's Children's Services Directorate, where Members acknowledged the ILACS inspections by Ofsted focused on the effectiveness of local authority children's services and arrangements in four areas. At the end of the Inspection Ofsted rated Thurrock's services as Good.

Following the inspection, Ofsted left three recommendations, which the Committee were advised the Council was already working on. Members were further informed that Thurrock's children's social care last Ofsted inspection was judged to be 'requires improvement'.

It was commented that during the inspection there were up to seven Ofsted inspectors within the service. The Chair of the Committee thanked staff for the way they embraced the inspection, she had been advised that many had been preparing for weeks in advance, staying late and even working weekends.

Thank you to Officers, Democratic Services and the outside organisations who sit on the committee for all their hard work and to fellow Councillors on the Committee.



***Councillor Joy Redsell***

***Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee 2019/2020***

## Looking Forward...2020/2021

Corporate Parenting Committee Members are dedicated to being Corporate Parents and are looking forward to working with Officers and the outside organisations who sit on the committee on new and updated reports in 2020/2021. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 – 2022
- Children Looked After Initial Health Assessments
- Annual Report of the Virtual School
- Pupil Premium Plus Report for the Virtual School
- More direct engagement with children who are looked after and care leavers