



# Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2020-2021

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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 an update from Councillor Halden as the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Adult Social Care to update Members on the work of his Portfolio. During which he advised the Committee on the two main areas in which he wished to focus on, which were mobility and vulnerability.

At the start of the year Members received a report on the support provided to our Foster Carers during Covid-19 pandemic, it was explained how our Foster carers usually received a package of practical and financial support to meet the needs of the Councils Looked After Children. This included:

- Regular face to face supervision with a qualified Social Worker
- Training relevant to their role
- An out of hours phone line to provide advice and support at evenings and weekends

Members heard from the Chair of the One Team, Foster Carer Association who agreed the start of the pandemic had had a big impact on their families, along with the young people they looked after. She continued by informing the committee that Foster Carers had been home educating the young people in their care as well as their own children and supporting them with the difficulties and worries faced in regards to covid-19.

In September, I took over the reins from Councillor Redsell and the Committee acknowledged a report on the Corporate Parenting Committee Strategy 2020 – 2022. During discussions it was explained, the term 'corporate parent' was broadly understood in relation to how local authorities should approach their responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. However, it was vital that all parts of a local authority beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning recognised they have a key role too.

The key priorities of the strategy included:

- Children remaining cared for within their family where it was safe to do so
- Young people staying within the foster placement until they are ready to leave and feel that they are prepared to live independently
- To involve children and young people in decisions that affect their lives and maximise the opportunity for them to make their own choice

January 2020 following the Committee's previous request, Members received continuous updates on the Children's Social Care Performance, Officers highlighted the impact on the Social Care team since the initial lockdown in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Members were advised there were 300 looked after children in the Councils care and 275 were to be Care Leavers. During discussions Members heard the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children entering the Borough

had reduced, as preferred routes had been through the Ports, for example through Dover.

Following on from last year the Committee were kept informed as to Initial Health Assessments (IHA) which had been improving and during September 2020 the number of completed IHA within 20 working days was now 75% compared to the 50% to the previous year.

Members acknowledged and accepted the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer which was presented in order to meet the statutory requirement. During which we discussed the timeliness of reviews and how they were being completed on time recording over 90% completed within timescales.

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

- Overview of Academic Year 2019/20
- Update on Ofsted Recommendation – Timeliness of Initial Health Assessments
- Sufficiency Placement
- Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers
- Corporate Parenting Communicating with Members
- Support Provided to Foster Carers during Covid-19

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the support given during the pandemic to the Council's Foster Carers. It was important that we remember the unique role they have had to play throughout the pandemic. Not only do they support children being placed into care, but also as like most children in the borough have been dealing with being in and out of school and offering them the support and guidance of being someone they can talk to. My thanks goes to all of Thurrock's Foster Carers for their continued support and for opening their homes to the borough's children who needed it most.

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 Elizabeth Rigby***

***Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee 2020/2021***



## Looking Forward...2021/2022

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 2021/2022. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Report for Members on Missing Children, Child Exploitation, Return Home Interviews and Contextual Safeguarding focussed on Children Looked After
- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment Strategy
- Children in Care Council Update
- Sufficiency Placement
- Annual Report of the Virtual Schools