



## Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2021-2022

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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

## 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 Vice-Chair the Corporate Parenting Committee in what has been another busy and inspiring year. The Committee started the year with an update on Corporate Parenting Fostering Recruitment Strategy, which outlined the work carried out on the Fostering Recruitment Strategy. The Fostering Service had, in conjunction with the Communication Service, refreshed the Thurrock Fostering Brand; with a launch of the new brand and the marketing strategy being updated. Members learnt the changes and events which were planned to create increased opportunities for the recruitment of foster carers.

In September, the Committee acknowledged a report on the Adoption and Fostering Statements of Purpose. During discussions it was explained,

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

The new year brought a report from the Children in Care Council which was presented by the Chair of the Children in Care Council (CICC) and their representative from Thurrock Open Door. We learnt that over the last 12 months due to the pandemic, the Children in Care Council (CICC) had taken the support of its members online as they were unable to meet with the young people they supported.

It was interesting to hear that once restrictions had been lifted members of the CICC were looking forward being able to meet face to face, as this was not only an important part of socialising but also assisted with recruitment within the group, as most of this was by word of mouth. The Thurrock Open Door representative explained that with meetings now being able to be held in person and therefore face to face, it was easier, to have interactive meetings which were more child lead which is what the CICC was all about. The Committee agreed it was important that young people were given the opportunity to speak and give their views and the CICC gave them the opportunity to promote their voices.

Following on from last year the Committee was kept informed as to Initial Health Assessments (IHA) the average percentage of referrals made by social care to health colleagues within 5 days between April – December 2020 was 83.8% with 58% completed in time, to ensure good performance is achieved working relationships between Thurrock Social Care and Health Providers is key. This is something the Committee is keen to keep an eye on to ensure that improvement is made over the next year.

Members acknowledged and thanked Officers for the presentation from the Independent Reviewing Officer on Children Looked After Reviews, it was pleasing to hear that Officers were engaging with young people to make the reviews more child

friendly and easier for them to understand. Following the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer which was presented in order to meet the statutory requirement. 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:

- National Care Leaver Advisors Visit
- The Annual Report of the Virtual School Headteacher for Children Looked After - Academic Year 2020-2021
- Children's Social Care Performance
- Independent Visitor Service for Looked After Children
- Update on the Youth Offending Service, Youth Justice Plan and the role of the Service for Children Looked After

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the support given to our young people and the foster families who look after them. It is important that we remember the unique role they have to play not only throughout the pandemic but on a day to day basis. 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 Jennifer Smith***

***Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee 2021/20/22***

## Looking Forward...2022/2023

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 2022/2023. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Initial Health Assessments of Looked After Children
- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Thurrock Fostering Service: Recruitment Strategy
- Children in Care Council Update
- Sufficiency Placement
- Annual Report of the Virtual Schools