



Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2023-2024

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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 One Team, Foster Carers Association
- Vice-Chair of The One Team, 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 report on the Children's Social Care Performance that informed Members the overall performance for the service was good and Thurrock continues to provide services to approximately 300 Children Looked After (CLA) and approximately 297 Care Leavers. Members were also provided with an update on the Initial Health Assessments for Looked After Children, which updated members on what actions were being taken by the Children's Social Care and Health colleagues to address the timeliness of initial assessments for children were the council looked after.

In September, the Committee acknowledged a report on After Care Service and the Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leavers which explained the joint protocols should cover:

- Arrangements for achieving planned, supportive transitions to independent living.
- Identifying homelessness risk early and acting to prevent it.
- Providing a quick, safe, joined up response for Care Leavers who do become homeless.

The new year brought a report from the Children in Care Council which was presented by representatives from the Children in Care Council and from Thurrock Open Door. Thurrock Open Door ensure that members of the Children in Care Council are able to meet at regular intervals, currently monthly and discuss, to have the opportunity to debate and be consulted on about various issues and possible Policy changes. The CICC is open to young people whether they are currently a Child Looked After or care experienced. The role of the Council is to be consulted on many varying issues that may be put to them. Following discussions within the Children in Care Council they felt that a new younger group would be more productive and be able to provide more insight into life in care currently. We have made great efforts to encourage new members to come forward.

Members were provided with a report on the transitions to adult services for care leavers and children in care, that highlighted the role and performance of the Thurrock Council in relation to supporting young people in care or leaving care to be assessed for and be provided with Adult Social Care services.

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

- Statement of Purpose Adoption
- Statement of Purpose Fostering
- Staying Put – Overview and Outcomes
- The Annual Report of the Virtual School
- Monthly updates on the Children's Social Care Performance
- Missing Children from Care and Return Home Interviews

Finally, Members were asked to review the statutory item of the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual report. In the report it had highlighted the appointment of an Independent Reviewing officer for a child or young person in the care of the Local Authority was a legal requirement and held the following specific responsibilities:

- Promoting the voice of the child.
- Ensuring that plans for Children Looked After are based on a detailed and informed assessment, are up to date, effective and provide a real and genuine response to each child's needs.
- Making sure that the child understands how an advocate could help and his/her entitlement to one.
- Offering a safeguard to prevent any 'drift' in care planning for Children Looked After and the delivery of services to them; and
- Monitoring the activity of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent in ensuring that care plans have given proper consideration and weight to the child's wishes and feelings and that, where appropriate, the child fully understands.

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 Paul Arnold

Chair of the Corporate Parenting Committee 2023/24

Looking Forward...2023/2024

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 2023/2024. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Initial Health Assessments of Looked After Children
- Adoption and Fostering Panel Chairs report
- Transitions to Adult Services
- Joint Housing Protocol for Care Leaders
- Staying Put – Overview and Outcomes
- Youth Justice Service