



Corporate Parenting

Annual Report

2018-2019

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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 as 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 a busy and inspiring year. The Committee started the year with a focus on external placements for young people during which the Committee were informed that there had been a reduction in the number of looked after children this year and that this was largely attributed to the reduction in Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) remaining in the borough.

It was explained that this period had continued the consistent decrease in UASC placed in Thurrock and that this was due to the Eastern Region Protocol. The Eastern Region Protocol saw local authorities allocated a 0.07% of population number (for Thurrock this is 28) which determined the number of UASC that could reasonably be accommodated within borough, and as Thurrock was above this number, further UASC were distributed amongst the Eastern Region local authorities who were not at their 0.07% number.

The Committee were further briefed that:

- The majority of Children Looked After were in foster care placements and a focus had been placed on the recruitment of additional foster carers.
- There had been stabilisation in the use of residential placements and an emphasis had been placed on the review of the suitability of these placements and whether the needs of the young people could be better met in foster care.

Members requested continuous updates on the Children's Social Care Performance throughout the year. In June, it was explained that Thurrock had experienced a high level of demand placed on its statutory social care service for children within the last year and considerable work had been undertaken by the department in managing this demand. This had seen a reduction in the number of contacts and referrals; easing the demand pressure of children becoming looked after and children being placed on a child protection plan.

The Committee were also informed most indicators had shown improvement and the service was coming in line with its statistical neighbours. During the September update of the report, Councillor Liddiard congratulated the service on the good results on care leavers in education and training.

The Committee also acknowledged a report on unregistered and private homes of multiple occupancy for young people in Thurrock, during which Members were informed of the measures that had been implemented to ensure owners are required to register with the Council. The report also highlighted that there is no requirement for providers of Supported Accommodation for 16-18 year olds to be registered with Ofsted but that steps had been taken to implement local quality standards for this type of placement for young people.

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.
- Report on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) – The report explained the process and protocol for UASC that also covered missing UASC.
- Children in Care Council Updates – Highlighted the change in Chair of the Children in Care Council which now has a joint arrangements of 2 Chairs but would continue to work as before.
- Transition - Preparing Care Leavers for Adulthood – The Committee praised the success of the Headstart scheme which was helping care leavers in their transition from care to independence.
- Report on Merton Assessments – The report clarified how a Merton Assessment was undertaken with UASC which gave reassurance to the Committee on the ethical nature of the assessment.
- Families Supported By Early Help – the Committee had been pleased to see that the Early Help Intervention service worked well due to its strength-based model of intervention.

Finally, there had been a strong focus on the raising achievement in all areas of education for Children Looked After which was a key priority for Thurrock Council. It is a statutory duty for the Council to have a Virtual School Head. The Council has a Virtual School team who champion the educational progress and attainment of our most vulnerable children who are in care and fulfil this duty for all children aged 3 – 18 years irrespective of where they are placed in the country. This was achieved through working closely with educational establishments, foster carers, social workers and local authority departments to ensure that our children attend school, make progress and achieve.

Thurrock children looked after are achieving well educationally. The educational attainment data for our children was better than the national looked after data in all reported areas from the Early Years through to Key Stage 4. Our children are performing better than other boroughs in the Eastern Region and compare favourably against our top five statistical neighbours. The Council's attainment data was improving year on year with more pupils meeting age related expectations and the national standards for all children.

There have been no permanent exclusion of Thurrock children looked after in over 5 years. The rate of fixed term exclusions is the lowest it has been for 5 years. This compares favourably against other local authorities who have high rates of excluded children.

Last academic year saw 94% of our children with high attendance rates and there was a reduction in unauthorised absence. This compares broadly in line with the national data of 95%.

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



Looking Forward...2019/2020

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 2019/2020. Some of the topics to be explored are:

- Fostering & Adoption Reports
- Intensive Foster Carer Training Action Research
- Looked After Children Pledge
- Annual Report of the Virtual School
- More direct engagement with children who are looked after and care leavers