

2 March 2021		ITEM: 9
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Corporate Parenting: Communicating with Members		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not Applicable	
Report of: Naintara Khosla Strategic Lead CLA, Aftercare and Placements		
Accountable Assistant Director: Joseph Tynan, Assistant Director Children Social Care and Early Help		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Childrens Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides an outline to the Corporate Parenting Committee of the Roles and Responsibilities of a Corporate Parent. The report refers to the Government Guidance and expectations for Councils in their role as Corporate Parent. Thurrock has a good approach to its Corporate Parenting role, providing information to members on Children Looked After (CLA), their progress and the performance of the CLA, Placements and Aftercare Service. This report provides further considerations for the Council and Members to develop the Corporate Parenting approach, ensuring we promote the voice of children and young people across the Council.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Members are updated on their Corporate Parenting Responsibilities.

1.2 Consider and note the options for raising the profile of Corporate Parenting activities in Thurrock.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Good and Effective Corporate Parenting in Thurrock.

The role of the Corporate Parenting Committee is to lead on and ensure that the corporate parenting roles and responsibilities of the council are being met.

The Corporate Parenting Committee is chaired by Councillor Elizabeth Rigby. It is the responsibility of all members, not just the lead member for Corporate Parenting Committee or the Lead Member for Childrens Services, to be a

corporate parent by ensuring that our children receive the right support to enable them to reach their full potential. At Thurrock we take seriously our moral duty as well as our legal responsibilities to our children and we will continue to strive to improve our services so that our children and young people can experience happy and fulfilling lives by providing warm and nurturing care.

What it means to be 'in care' or 'looked after'; the term 'Children Looked After' has a specific legal meaning based on the Children Act 1989. A child is looked after by a Local Authority if he or she has been provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours, in the circumstances set out in sections 20 and 21 of the Children Act 1989 or is placed in the care of a Local Authority by an order made under part IV of the Act.

There are 3 main routes by which children can be taken into care:

- Care Orders made by the courts under section 31 of the Children Act 1989
- Voluntary accommodation arrangements under section 20 of the Children Act 1989
- Police Protection or involvement with the Youth Justice System and, since 2013, all young people who are remanded into custody within the Youth Justice System

2.2 Good corporate parents, just like all good parents, need to understand and know what is happening to their children and young people. In Thurrock this means ensuring the information that all agencies collect about children in care and care-experienced young people is used to the best advantage, sharing information with each other appropriately. Performance data for Children Looked After and Care Leavers are reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee for scrutiny, oversight and future work planning to help ensure improved management of performance and outcomes delivered by our services as well as ensuring our children are not disadvantaged by their characteristics or background.

Good corporate parenting is about doing what any parent should do to promote the safety and welfare of their child by: -

- Keeping children at the centre of everything that we do
- Ensuring good results through the support needed to fulfil their potential in life especially in relation to education and health
- Providing the quality of care necessary in achieving the best possible outcomes

- Effective partnership working including working across the multi-agency partnership and geographical boundaries
- Knowing how many children and young people are in care
- Knowing the profiles of the children and young people (gender, age, race, religion, sex, disability) they have responsibility for within Thurrock
- Being ambitious for our children and celebrating their achievements
- Providing good quality local placements through a range of services including Fostering, Adoption, Virtual School (VS) and the Aftercare Service, taking into consideration the needs of the child, their background and where they would be best placed. This means:
 - Opportunity for young people in foster care to remain with their carers after the age of 18 (Staying Put)
 - Ensuring education needs are appropriately assessed, supported, and maximized for future life chances through further education, training and employment

2.3 Health services ensure health needs are appropriately assessed and supported, and the opportunity to maximize their health through life skills development and healthy choices, with guidance and support around healthy sexual relationships and reducing risks associated with using alcohol and substances. Further considerations include:-

- Reviewing the emotional wellbeing of children and young people; ensuring their needs are assessed and supported to minimize the impact of adverse life experiences, such as access to mental health and offering support or treatment. Additionally, offering opportunities to build protective relationships such as maintaining contact with siblings.
- Identify social needs, creating opportunities for building positive relationships and friendships.
- Opportunities to undertake positive activities and contribute more widely to their communities.

2.4 As Corporate parents, there are areas of interest that Members will want to ensure they are aware of:

- Childrens Services should be monitoring instances of children going missing, and how regularly the independent return interviews are taking place (including for children placed out of area), as well as any emerging themes. The Local Authority should also collaborate and

share information and intelligence with other countries if a child in care goes missing and is thought to have travelled abroad.

- Child victims of modern slavery are particularly vulnerable. A strong multi-agency approach should be in place to protect victims from further risk from their traffickers and preventing trafficking from taking place. In particular, there should be a clear understanding between the Local Authority and the Police of roles in planning for this protection and responding if a trafficked child goes missing.
- Children in care are also disproportionately likely to be at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE) than those in the general population, though it is important to remember that the vast majority of CSE victims are living at home. While those issues that led young people to need Local Authority care in the first place may increase their vulnerability to CSE, the experience of care itself can also be significant, especially if the child's placement lacks stability. Those at risk of CSE will need to have clear plans in place to protect them, and all Social Workers and partners should know how to spot signs of risk and deal with them appropriately.
- Participation, ensuring that children in Thurrock are being listened to. Local Authorities have wide-ranging duties to give due consideration to the wishes and feelings of children in care and care-experienced young people. This applies to decisions and actions affecting children and young people as individuals, and to wider strategic policy issues that impact Children Looked After and Care Leavers. As corporate parents, all councillors should take an active interest in how well Children Looked After and Care Leavers are listened to and how this is acted upon. Care-experienced people of all ages have valuable, direct knowledge of how it feels to be in care, and what needs to change for the better.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Members can become involved with the many aspects of the Corporate Parenting Role.

Participation and Children in Care Council (CiCC)

There are events which take place to engage and seek feedback from the children who live in Thurrock. Many of our Children Looked After participate in these events. The Committee may wish to provide a regular, short opening slot on the agenda for the CiCC to update on the participation events and activities planned. The regular updates can include a variety of information including newsletter updates, videos of the children and young people or a report on the issues where feedback has been sought. Members can request to attend a CiCC or meet with some young people in Aftercare when there are regular Zoom meetings in place.

Thurrock Fostering and Adoption Services

Foster carers are represented on the Corporate Parenting Committee and can make representation to the Service through the Thurrock Foster Care Association. Members may wish to understand further the role and responsibilities of foster carers and they are welcome to attend any of the fostering information sessions that are regularly held to recruit new foster carers into Thurrock. There is also the potential for Members to visit (virtually) the Placements Service Team to understand their role in locating placements and matching children to their new homes.

The new branding is in development for the recruitment of foster carers and there is a marketing plan with Key Performance Indicators to recruit new foster carers. The brand is being refreshed to include the offer of Thurrock's Council Tax rebate.

The Adoption Service has a good offer to our adoptive families and is part of the developing Adopt East Regional adoption agency. Members may wish to take up the opportunity to meet with the Adoption Service and understand how they are recruiting and supporting adopters, prior to and following an Adoption Order being granted.

The Service would also be able to organise for Members to meet with Thurrock adopters and hear about their experiences of the service.

Aftercare

Members may wish to meet some of our care-experienced young people. This would provide an opportunity to listen to their experiences, understand the challenges for them as young people transitioning into adulthood and contextualise the reasons for entering into care. The Aftercare Service have a number of themed WhatsApp groups which are popular and used to communicate with Thurrock Care-Experienced young people. The service are encouraging Zoom or Teams meetings so there are opportunities to meet online for support.

Members may want to gain a greater understanding the role of Inspire and their remit for supporting our care-experienced young people into education, employment and training. An event could be organised so that Members can meet the Inspire Team and understand their role facilitating young people to develop work skills and work placements.

Training and Information

Further reading about the role of Corporate Parent is provided in the Appendices. A presentation from the Strategic Leads in Childrens Social Care will be delivered to Members annually, and Members are encouraged to attend.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

4.1 Members to consider and note the options available.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

5.1 There is consultation with Children in Care Council who meet monthly; Foster Care Association, care experienced young people and Inspire.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 N/A

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead, Finance

There are no financial implications in this report.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Education and Social Care)

There are no legal implications to this report.

Corporate parenting principles are set out in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017. Local authorities must have regard to the seven needs identified in the Children and Social Work Act when exercising their functions in relation to looked-after children and care leavers (relevant children and former relevant children). It should be read and applied alongside the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review and The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**
Community Engagement and Project
Monitoring Officer

The diversity information is communicated to the Corporate Parenting Committee to ensure that services are inclusive of the children and families in Thurrock. The information that Members should be familiar with is outlined at 2.2 which includes the characteristics of the CLA population.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, or Impact on Looked After Children)

- None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. Appendices to the report

- https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/15.74%20Corporate%20parenting_05_web.pdf
- <https://ourcareoursay.files.wordpress.com/2021/01/ocos-executive-summary-2021-finished-1.pdf>

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