

Meeting: Corporate Parenting Panel
Date: 22 July 2013
Subject: Development of the Corporate Parenting Panel
Report of: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services
Summary: This report sets out the outcome of the work undertaken to review the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Contact Officer: Gerard Jones, Assistant Director Children's Services Operations
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

Central Bedfordshire Council's Strategic Plan 2012-16 Priority 3 – Promote health and wellbeing and protecting the vulnerable

The Children and Young People's Plan 2011-2014 Priority 2 – Protecting children and keeping them safe.

Financial:

1. There are no financial implications

Legal:

2. There are no legal implications.

Risk Management:

3. There are no risk implications.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

4. There are no staffing issues.

Equalities/Human Rights:

5. Children in care often experience discrimination. These measures will improve the support provided to them through a more effective Corporate Parenting Panel.

Community Safety:

6. There are no community safety issues.

Sustainability:

7. There are no sustainability issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The frequency and timing of the Corporate Parenting Panel be varied throughout the year to enable the participation of school age children in care.
- The membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel should be extended to include key Officers who could make an important contribution to the work of the Panel. These Officers should include the Head of Housing or a representative, the Head of Leisure or a representative and a Health representative for the children in care health services. In addition, the Head of Looked After children and the Looked After children Participation Officer will make regular presentations to the Panel. Also, more foster carers should be recruited.
- Young people from the Children in Care Council should be represented and/or participate in each Corporate Parenting Panel.
- The format of the Panel should be varied to include presentations and discussions led by carers and children in care as well as formal written reports.
- Themed Corporate Parenting Panels should be held during each annual cycle of the Corporate Parenting Panel to address key issues such as health, housing and education and training.
- A programme of events and activities should be developed in conjunction with the Children in Care Council and Foster Care Association to raise the profile of the issues facing children in care and the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Background

8. The current format for the Corporate Parenting Panel was established over 2 years ago. It is serviced by Committee Member Services and meets approximately 6 times a year. There is a well populated Forward Plan in place with a regular reporting schedule. The Children in Care Council attend 3 times a year, including an annual presentation.
9. The Corporate Parenting Panel includes 8 Central Bedfordshire Councillors, 4 lay members, the Director of Children's Services and the Director of Adult Social Care, Health and Housing and is Chaired by the Executive Member for Children's Services. The Lead Officer is the Director of Children's Services. However, as she is a full member of the Panel, the officer for the Panel meeting is delegated to the Assistant Director Operations, Children's Services.
10. The OFSTED Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children undertaken in 2012 identified the need for improvements to services to children in care and an Improvement Plan was developed in response to this. Although there were no specific issues arising from this, the Corporate Parenting Panel decided to undertake a review of its role to ensure that local arrangements met best practice standards.

11. The review was undertaken through two main activities; desktop reviews of Lambeth, Gloucester and Milton Keynes Corporate Parenting Panels and Member and Officer visits to Hertfordshire and Norfolk Corporate Parenting Panels. Latterly, the Lead Member has also undertaken a visit to Milton Keynes Corporate Parenting Panel.

Outcomes

12. The review found that practice in Central Bedfordshire was very similar to the comparator Councils. There was mixed representation of Members and Officers. Panels met at a similar frequency of 4-6 times per year and the format of the meetings varied in style from less formal and structured to the Committee style approach in Central Bedfordshire.
13. The key difference identified was the activity undertaken to deliver the Corporate Parenting Plan. Lambeth Council was found to be the most impressive with bi-monthly meetings with both formal, good engagement from members of the Panel and strong consultation arrangements in place. Representation was balanced between Members and Officers including Housing, Cultural Services and Children's Services officers, Foster Carers, and Children in Care including Care Leavers. The Corporate Parenting Strategy was delivered through 19 cross cutting Officer led projects/activities.
14. The key issues identified for development from the review work are as follows;

- **Frequency and Timings of Meetings.**

The current timing of the meeting precludes the attendance of school age children in care.

- **Corporate Parenting Panel Representation**

The Panel has strong Member support and leadership, which is a key strength. Officers attend to present reports to the Panel. However, Officers who represent key services affecting the lives of children in care do not participate in the overall work of the Panel. The attendance of some additional Officers in key roles, as suggested in the recommendations, would strengthen the influence of the Panel as Corporate Parents on the work of the whole Council.

- **Report Arrangements**

Currently, reports are mainly formal written documents which are addressed by the Panel in the style of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Panel has found the engagement of young people and others in less formal discussion informative and challenging and this aspect of the work of the Panel could be developed further. Themed Panels could be developed to engage Officers and Members in focused discussions and action in key areas of Corporate Parenting activity such as Health, Youth Services, Education and Post 16 Training.

- **Key Deliverables**

The highly successful 'Children in Care Awards' evening approach could be extended to further events and activities to give the Corporate Parenting Panel the opportunity to extend awareness of its work.

GOVERNANCE AND CONSULTATION

15. This report is for the consideration and decision of the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

None

Location of papers: N/A