

Corporate Parenting Forum Annual Report

April 2014 – May 2015



Foreword

Looking after other people's children is probably the most important thing councils do, and the responsibility is shared by the Council as a whole.

Children and young people who are looked after by the local authority have a unique place in society. They have a special relationship with the state due to the fact that they have been taken into care.

For most children, parents hold together the main strands of their lives, and maintain the knowledge of their child's history, circumstances and development. Good parents keep abreast of their child's progress and tailor their support and advocacy according to their own aspirations for the child, and their understanding of his or her needs. As children grow and develop, good parents listen to their views and encourage their aspirations.

Children and young people who are looked after are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people in our community. The children and young people who enter the looked after children system have experienced backgrounds where their families have been unable to provide the care and support they need and keep them safe. Some of these young people will have difficulties, but they will also possess potential and harbour aspirations for the future.

The outcomes for children and young people that are in, or have left care, remain stubbornly worse than for other children. These children and young people do not do so well at school, are less likely to go onto higher education, more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and are overrepresented in youth offending institutions. In Swansea, as Corporate

Parents, we must not accept this as inevitable, but strive to close this gap as far as we possibly can. We must have high ambitions for our children in care, listen to them, help them raise their aspirations and encourage others to open up more opportunities for them so they can realise their full potential. Basically do the kinds of things parents would do for their own children and ensure our parenting is more human than corporate. Our expectations for our 'looked after' children should not be any lower than those we might have for the children in our own families. Children looked after should be cared about and not just cared for.

As chair of the CPF my thanks go to my fellow elected members for their continued support and the officers who work on a day to day basis to improve the lives of children within our care. The views of children and young people whose quality of care is overseen by the CPF have been sought and they told us that they want Corporate Parents to be 'do-ers', who should;

- Listen and consult
- Always question the services to make sure they are as strong as possible,
- Be aware of issues affecting Looked After Children, and make others aware, so as to make things better,
- Make sure there is fair treatment,
- Involve Looked After Children in decisions which affect them
- Ask questions at school Governors meeting to make sure Looked After people are doing well.

This last year has seen much organisational and reviewing activity. The CPF strategy is being reviewed and a participation and engagement framework is under development. Both these documents will inform the future work plan, and young people will be

central to this activity. Participation by young people in council consultation processes is not merely about fulfilling our statutory responsibilities, it is also about ensuring that young people shape and receive the services they deserve.

Councillor Jane Harris
Adult and Vulnerable people Cabinet Portfolio

Contents

Page no:

5	Introduction
6	Develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy
7	Improve the Profile of Corporate Parenting
7	Improve communications between the Council and Looked after Children
10	Ensure that Corporate Parenting Training is mandatory for all Councillors
10	Additional Reports and Presentations
10	Priorities going forward 2014/15

Introduction

Corporate Parenting is 'the collective responsibility across services and across local authorities to safeguard and promote the life chances of Looked after Children.'

Children and young people, who are looked after by their local authority, rather than their parents, are amongst the most vulnerable groups in our society. As corporate parents, it is our responsibility to keep them safe, make sure their experiences in care and as they make their transition to independence are positive, and improve their on-going life chances. We must approach this parenting role with as much passion and commitment as any family would, and ensure that each of our looked after children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Every elected member of Swansea City and County Council has a legal responsibility under the Children Act 2004, to be satisfied that there is;

- Effective policy in place
- Mechanisms to support the participation of Looked After Children
- Good scrutiny to inform improvement

Lead members are responsible for;

- Overseeing partnerships and plans
- Promoting cooperation between authority and partners
- Leading Improvements in corporate parenting
- Promoting policy innovation and implementation
- Ensuring that Looked After Children are seen as a priority by the authority and planning partnerships

Context

The Corporate Parenting Forum comprises cross party membership of Councillors and a range of officers and partners drawn from across the Authority. It meets bi monthly and directs the work of the Authority in relation to its Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

This report details the progress of the Council's Corporate Parenting Forum. It picks up and reports on actions for improvement identified in the 2013 / 2014 Annual Report which was presented to full council 4th November 2014, as well as Key recommendations from Inspections. A copy of the Corporate Parenting Work Plan 2014/15 can be found at appendix 1.

Key recommendations from the Corporate Parenting Forum Annual Report 13/14

1. Develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy for the Council, including preventative intervention.
2. Improve the profile of Corporate Parenting
3. Improve communications between the Council and Looked After Children
4. Ensure that Corporate Parenting Training is mandatory for all Councillors

Develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy

This has been a key priority for the Forum, as it was also a recommendation made by the CSSIW Inspection report into the Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children and Care Leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours in the City and County of Swansea (August 2014).

The City and County of Swansea Corporate Parenting Strategy 2015 - 2017 brings together the range of activity within Swansea at all stages of the care journey, including a clear focus on supporting families to stay together, wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so, and minimising the need for children to become looked after. It describes how we will develop our current arrangements to improve the lives of the children and young people in our care. The aim is to build on the work already undertaken in Swansea to develop a 'whole system' approach to supporting looked after children and keeping families together.

The Strategy describes what will change in relation to our work with looked after children, and children on the edge of care. It is an action plan for the future rather than an attempt to cover every detail of our current services and support.

It will need to be consulted upon with our looked after children, partners, stakeholders and parents.

The strategy sets out the underlying principles of working together to support children and young people who are looked after or leaving care. It is divided into the following eight objectives

1. To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to be looked after by ensuring a focus on early intervention and prevention.
2. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care to make sure that children who need to, come into care at the right time.
3. To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements to support all children to have positive experiences in care, whatever their needs and for them to be cared for in family placements within Swansea as long as this is consistent with their needs.
4. To ensure all looked after children and care leavers get a good education, whether this is in mainstream, specialist schools or in alternative arrangements, colleges or university
5. To ensure the health needs of looked after children and care leavers are provided for, that their health needs are understood through a good quality health assessment and plan.
6. To ensure that looked after children and care leavers get access to cultural and leisure opportunities

7. To give children clearly planned journeys through care which enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.
8. To enable Looked after children and care leavers to participate fully in decision making and service design

The document is structured around delivering these eight objectives with each section describing what we will do in that area and concluding with a summary and action plan.

Improve the Profile of Corporate Parenting

This recommendation was also made by the CSSIW Inspection report into the Safeguarding and Care Planning of Looked After Children and Care Leavers who exhibit vulnerable or risky behaviours in the City and County of Swansea (August 2014).

In order to address this issue the Terms of Reference have been reviewed and revised.

The Membership of the Forum has been reviewed and revised in order to fully reflect the importance, priority and diversity of the corporate parenting role and to oversee and drive through change via the proposed Corporate Parenting Strategy. Membership will now be at Director and Head of service level, with the changes being implemented via the multiagency strategy groups which will report regularly on progress. The Cabinet Member for Services for Children and Young People (Deputy Leader) has joined the Forum.

In addition to this, a number of events were held to improve communication between the Council and children and young people who are looked after, and to raise awareness of the challenges that they face

Improve communications between the Council and Looked after Children

As a Council, we are committed to listening to children and young people about their experiences of the services that they receive and the issues important to them; and to work with them to deliver improvements that reflect their views.

Article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child states that "Every Child or young person has the right to express his or her views on all matters that affect them and their views should be given due weight in accordance to their age and maturity."

The full participation, involvement and contribution of children and young people looked after and leaving care aged between 0 to 25 years is crucial. A number of key events with young people took place during this year. These included

The Corporate Parenting Challenge, 5th August 2014

This involved seven Corporate Parenting Forum members, including two councillors and fifteen young people. The aim of the session was for young people to identify the priorities that they felt should be included in the Corporate Parenting Forum work plan. It was the first time that Looked After Children had been supported to do this. The Challenge event built on previous work done by Looked After Children and young people as part of the Children's Commissioning Consortium Cymru evaluation of their time in care. It used a signs of safety approach - "what is going well?" (strengths), "what needs to change?" (worries) and "how can we do this?" (goals)

The themes and key points from the session were –

- We want more opportunities to come together for peer support and have our voice heard in decisions that affect us
- Give me an honest reason why I am looked after
- We want to be ready to leave care when it's the right time and to have the right skills to do it successfully
- We want to have the right information at the right time to be able to make an informed decisions

Child and Family Services Permanence review

Young people were consulted on their view of the Looked After Children's teams, the Family and Friends team and the Leaving Care Team. These were fed into the review and recommendations and later incorporated into the service specification for the re tendering exercise for the 16+ work.

Looked After Young Peoples presentation to full council 4th November 2014

The presentation to council in 2014 focused on young people as commissioners of services; how services could be improved and made more innovative and relevant by involving young people in the review and/or design of services. It outlined the risks involved in making assumptions about what is important to young people. A DVD entitled 'Young People do Dragons Den' was produced and narrated by Evan Davies. The young people felt that this was an interesting and innovative way of getting their ideas over to children's services. This succinctly raised awareness of the groups understanding of the commissioning cycle and how this process worked. Council were impressed and the offer was made for the group to return in a year to present on a matter of their choosing.

#IAMME – May 2015

After a very successful six years of holding Looked After Children and Young People Celebrations and Achievement Awards, the audience, young people and staff felt that it was time for a change.

An initial consultation with a sample group of award winners, previous performers and steering group came up with some ideas which were developed further during a

full weekend of workshops and turned into ' #iamme' - a theatre company led by young people.

The Objectives were:

1. To raise a positive profile of Looked After young people;
2. To get Looked After Young People's voices heard;
3. To show that Looked After young people have fun, make new friends and are able to share their personal experiences of foster care;
4. To assist Looked After young people celebrate their successes.

The Aims:

1. To create a film based on the objectives above;
2. To premier a film formed on the basis of a celebratory event to be held at the Brangwyn Hall on 06/05/15;
3. A celebration which involves 3 key aspects, an event, food and performance;
4. To encourage young people to be involved in all aspects of the event;
5. To ensure that all children and young people who are Looked After by Swansea, from the age of 5 years, and including their guests will have the opportunity to attend a celebratory event and film premiere;
6. That each of these children and young people will receive a copy of the film; and
7. Each CCS Directorate will also receive a copy of film.

Young People involved –

In total, 25 children and young people aged between 7 and 21 years who are Looked After by the City and County of Swansea designed, developed, performed and help to evaluate the #IAMME film and event. Fourteen members of this group had never been involved in any similar event and have now stated their commitment to having their voices heard in the future.

Audience Attendance – 225

The event included Friends/Family, Councillors, Public sector organisations, Social Workers and Child and Family Management

The continuation and expansion of this work is very much at the heart of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, which will build upon and formalise progress made to date. As part of this strategic approach, Child and Family Services has developed a draft Participation and Engagement Framework for Looked After Children and Care Leavers. It details the expected levels of engagement with young people on an individual and strategic planning level. It will make a real and measurable difference to the way that children and young people are encouraged and supported to contribute to their own individual care plans and reviews, as well as how we can set up regular opportunities to communicate and engage with children young people and care leavers to shape and provide future services.

Ensure that Corporate Parenting Training is mandatory

for all Councillors

Progress has been slow in relation to establishing Corporate Parenting training as mandatory. Discussion has been on going with Democratic Services. A report addressing this issue will be discussed at the Democratic Services Committee on 15th December 2015 and on for further discussion at Council 28th December. A training programme will be attached to the report, however given the high demand from Officers for Councillors to receive training and the limited time period available (1 session per month), the programme will not capture everything. It is intended to address this shortfall by allowing Heads of Service to liaise with the Democratic Services Team in order to find suitable additional slots to deliver specific training outside of the formal programme.

Additional Reports and Presentations

In addition to the key priorities, a number of reports and presentations in relation to a range of topics including Advocacy Services, the academic performance of Looked After Children, Child and Family Services Performance updates, Safeguarding and Leaving Care have been reported and discussed at the Corporate Parenting Forum. For further information, a full copy of the work plan 14/15 is included in appendix 1.

Priorities going forward 2014/15

Formally adopt the revised Terms of reference and include it in the Councils Constitution

Fully implement the changes to the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure the correct seniority to drive through the changes identified in the Corporate Parenting Strategy

Finalise and consult upon the City and County of Swansea Corporate Parenting Strategy 2015/2017 with our looked after children, partners, stakeholders and parents.

Implement the Corporate Parenting Strategy under the direction of the newly constituted Corporate Parenting Board

Adopt the Participation and engagement framework in Child and Family Services

Deliver a half day conference in February 2016, entitled 'If this were my child' to continue the efforts to

- Raise the profile of the work of the Corporate Parenting Forum,
- Inform elected members, officers and partners about their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Raise awareness about the challenges facing looked after children and care leavers.

- Develop and deliver a full training programme for all Corporate Parents using the approach developed for Corporate Safeguarding
- Use performance information presented to Corporate Parenting Forum to monitor that we are improving outcomes for looked after children in Swansea.

Date issued 24/11/2015

Review date - tbc

Meeting	Reports and	Purpose
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Meeting	Reports and Presentations.	Purpose
9th June 2014	Corporate Parenting Forum Annual Report Draft.	For discussion.
	Terms of Reference	For agreement 2014 - 2015
	Child and Family Services Performance Report	To provide the Forum with a full report of activity across the Child and Family Service to end March 2014
	Strategy Development Workshop, led by Chair	4 themes were discussed in workshop format; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and Employment • Emotional Health and Wellbeing • Skills and Opportunities for Independent Living • Positive Early Intervention.
	Reply from ABMU on Advocacy	Provide Health Board advice on how advocacy services are being provided locally.
4th August 2014	Advocacy Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure elected members are well informed of the statutory responsibility they have to provide Advocacy.
	Provision of Additional Information	<p>This included;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map of placements comparing location in 2010, and 2014 • Wellbeing 'windscreen', showing the links between, Child and Family Services, and the Early Intervention and Prevention service. • Response to Data request from Forum, in the form of a Data Audit.
	Annual Report	For Sign off.
	Words and Pictures Presentation.	Providing information to the Forum about how the service is working directly with children and young people, and listening to their views and taking them into account.

	Presentations.	
5th August 2014	Corporate Parenting Challenge. (held, Down to Earth Merton, Gower)	To enable looked after young people and Corporate Parents to meet and exchange views in young people friendly environment. The focus for this session was setting work plan, and the Permanence Review.
29th Sept	Education and Attainment	To update the Forum on end of academic year results for Looked after young people.
	Child and Family Services Performance Report	To provide the Forum with a report of activity by Child and Family Services on Looked after children to end August 2014
	Lost After Care Update	To provide an update progress on Lost After Care (previously reported 2013)
	Corporate Parenting Training	Discussion Paper to explore options on Annual Training programme for Councillors on Corporate Parenting
	Feedback from Corporate Parenting Challenge, (Merton)	Feedback under headings such as Independent Living Skills, Being Myself, Learning, Taking Part and Looking Good, Belonging, Staying Safe.
	Developing a Corporate Parenting Strategy	Discussion paper on developing a strategy from National Children's Bureau
4th Nov 2014	Special Council Meeting for LAC, and Presentation of Corporate Parenting Annual Report at Full Council.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising the positive profile of young people who are looked after, • getting their voices heard • explaining and promoting the work they are doing both in developing skills for independent living and making services better for young people in care. • updating Council on the activities of the Corporate Parenting Forum.
24th Nov 2014	Safeguarding, Mike Holding, Principal Officer	Strategy paper for discussion.
19th January 2015	Independence and Skills	Presentation to inform the CPF about the review of the current independent living programme for children and young people in Swansea
6th May 2015	Annual LAC Achievement Awards	Recognise achievements of LAC in Swansea