

ASSEMBLY

4 December 2013

Title:	Progress of Members' Corporate Parenting Group	
Report of the	Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor White, and Chair of the Members' Corporate Parenting Group, Councillor Letchford	
Open Report		For Information
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Summary:	<p>This report, which was presented to the Children's Services Select Committee on 13 November 2014, provides an update on the Corporate Parenting arrangements in Barking and Dagenham; particularly in relation to progress and outcomes of the Members' Corporate Parenting Group. In addition, the report aims to strengthen the role and responsibilities of corporate parents. Excellent Corporate Parenting requires ownership and leadership at a senior level, including elected members.</p>	
Recommendation(s)	<p>The Assembly is recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) To note the roles and responsibilities of all councillors as corporate parents to looked after children and care leavers.(ii) To note progress being achieved by the Members' Corporate Parenting Group(iii) To invite all councillors to identify those areas falling within their remit, and that of other councillors, to be reviewed in order to support the work of the Members' Corporate Parenting Group.(iv) To endorse the pledge promises to looked after children and young people and invite all councillors to sign accordingly.	
Reason(s)	<p>Being an excellent Corporate Parent is in keeping with the Council's policy commitment to 'Better Health and Wellbeing' and the Council's priority to ensure every child is valued so they can succeed.</p>	

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The primary purpose of the Members Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG) is to enable elected members, officers and partners to fulfil their legal responsibilities to the borough's looked after children and care leavers aged from 0-25 in accordance with proposals set out in Care Matters: Time for Change (DfES 2007). The MCPG maintains a comprehensive overview of the progress of children who are looked after and for care leavers, scrutinising the quality, effectiveness and performance of the services that support them.
- 1.2 Central to the role of the MCPG is the exercising of its responsibility and accountability for the well-being and future prospects of looked after children and care leavers and ensuring that this vulnerable group have opportunities to shape and influence the services which they receive.
- 1.3 The role of 'Corporate Parent' is a collective responsibility of the Council, therefore all Councillors need to have a basic level of responsibility for Children in Care.

2. Addressing our Corporate Parenting responsibilities

- 2.1 The responsibility of local authorities to exercise their responsibilities was first set out in September 1998 when Frank Dobson (then Secretary of State to Health) wrote to all councillors in England and Wales about the role and responsibilities of councillors in relation to looked after children. The essence of that letter was that the council has a legal and moral duty to provide the support to looked after children that any good reasonable parent would give their child.
- 2.2 Since that time Barking and Dagenham has exercised its Corporate Parenting responsibilities in a variety of ways. The inspection of safeguarding and looked after children services undertaken by Ofsted in June 2012 found that Corporate Parenting arrangements were not well embedded and recommended that *'Corporate Parenting arrangements are strengthened to ensure that they properly reflect the Council's responsibilities to children looked after'*. We have now further strengthened the Corporate Parenting arrangements to ensure strong elected member representation including the Lead Member, through the Members' Corporate Parenting Group. The key principle objectives of the group are set out in the terms of reference which were most recently reviewed in August 2013 (**Appendix 1**). In summary the key principal objectives are:
 - 2.2.1 To maintain a clear strategic overview of the statutory services available for children and young people ensuring that all parties take collective responsibility for promoting and ensuring positive outcomes.
 - 2.2.2 To monitor change and drive forward improvement through regular scrutiny and the Child in Care (CIC) outcomes data.
 - 2.2.3 To promote the meaning and understanding of Corporate Parenting and advocate for practical expressions across all services, among Councillors, officers, partner agencies and amongst children and young people in care.

2.2.4 The work of the MPCG is governed by the Corporate Parenting Strategy (April 2011-2014) which was updated in the April 2013 Annual Report (**Appendix 2**).

3. Improving outcomes

- 3.1 The MPCG scrutinises a range of outcome data at every meeting which includes information regarding health and education outcomes as well as a range of data about outcomes for young people leaving care.
- 3.2 Councillors have raised concern in relation to the timeliness of health assessments. As a result Children's Services and Health worked in partnership to address this. Health Assessments are now a standing item on the Corporate Parenting agenda. Progress re timeliness and quality are discussed at every meeting and officers are required to report on progress and performance challenges.
- 3.3. It has been agreed that all looked after children attending school in LBBD will have a Streetbase and Splash card (see paragraph 4.4). We have worked with the team to raise awareness of these cards and incorporate use of them into health assessments. Children receive 2000 points for their health assessment which can be exchanged for rewards or Argos vouchers. We are now looking into the possibility of extending this to our LAC who are placed out of area and/or are not attending an LBBD school.
- 3.4 Young people reported they had to repeat information to professionals regarding their health. MPCG commissioned the creation of the Health Passport which is now in print and being distributed to all young people aged 15 and above.
- 3.5 In relation to educational outcomes we continue to have concerns about our high numbers of young people who are not in employment education or training (NEET) and have a dedicated NEET post as part of the Learn 2 Live team.
- 3.6 Personal education plan(PEP) completion continues to be scrutinised and is supported by the Virtual Headteacher and his staff. PEPs have been updated to ensure that they record how effectively the Pupil Premium has been allocated to support the young person in school and to evaluate how effective that support has been. To support children at the earliest age a new PEP has been introduced for the Early Years Foundation Stage for children in Reception.
- 3.7 The educational attainment of our LA children and young people continues to be one of our greatest challenges. The Pupil Premium which is currently £900 has been used by schools to offer additional tuition. In April 2014 the Pupil Premium will rise substantially to £1800. When looking at the data it is important to note that often year groups are quite small, sometimes no more than twenty. For 2012/13 performance at Key Stages 2, 59% achieved an L4 in reading, 64% in writing and 82% in mathematics. As a result of sometimes low starting points it is valuable to look at the progress children make between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. In reading 82% made at least two levels of progress between KS1 and KS2, 82% in writing and 86% in mathematics. These figures indicate that we are closing the gap between the performance of looked after children and all children.

- 3.8 Performance at Key Stage 4 was low. Out of the 27 students, only 2 [7.4%] achieved 5 A* - C with English and maths, both taught in borough schools. This was an extremely vulnerable year group and it had been very challenging to keep many of the students in full time education. 16 young people were educated in mainstream secondary schools, 8 within Barking and Dagenham. While 30% had a statement of educational need only 6 students had achieved an L4 in English and maths at KS2. Many of these young students had high rates of fixed term exclusions, incidences of absconding and poor attendance. As with the KS2 outcomes the cohort will be based on those who have been in care from April 12013 to 31 March 2014.
- 3.9 Key Stage 4 performance was very good in 2011 and our five highest performers have now achieved post-16 results which have enabled them to study degree courses at Sheffield, Greenwich and Anglia Ruskin Universities.
- 3.10 We currently support 95 young people in further education and 32 in attending university. The report that young people at university receive includes:
- 3.10.1 A leaving care accommodation bursary of £500. This is paid from the leaving care service to assist in the payment of a rent deposit for accommodation or vacation accommodation.
- 3.10.2 Graduation equipment payment of up to £150 for graduation ceremony costs including the hiring of the gown and photos of the graduation event.
- 3.10.3 Higher Education Bursary. This is a government incentive to assist all care leavers to go onto higher education. The payment is a total of £2000 and is paid over the duration of the course.
- 3.10.4 Student Loan/Bursary. We support young people in ensuring they make appropriate student loan and bursary applications to ensure they receive the maximum amount, which normally totals £9000.00.

4. Listening to the voices of children and young people

- 4.1 Best practice recommends that the Council seek the views of looked after children and young people in order to find out what issues concern them. Prior to Assembly, Members will have the opportunity to meet with Skittlz, which is the long standing and well established Children in Care Council in Barking and Dagenham, with different age groups of young people who meet regularly with both officers and elected members. This will give the young people the opportunity to share with Members their experiences of being looked after in the Borough. Assembly will be informed of the key points raised.
- 4.1.1 Skittlz meetings take place every 1-3 weeks and two member of Skittlz regularly attend MCPG.
- 4.1.2 The Pledge has been developed by Skittlz and has been sent out to all young people in care in Barking and Dagenham.

- 4.13 Skittlz attend the Participation Champions Meetings with a range of officers every two months.
- 4.1.4 Skittlz members attended the 'Listen Up Event' which gave young people a chance to share regional projects and celebrate their achievements improving the care system across England and Wales.
- 4.1.5 Skittlz members attended the BAD Youth Forum's full forum meeting at Barking Town Hall.
- 4.1.6 A Skittlz member attended the AMPLIFY residential as our representative on the Children's Commissioner's Advisory Panel.
- 4.1.7 Skittlz members have been working on their presentation for a pre-Assembly meeting on 4 December for Council Members.
- 4.1.8 Skittlz members have worked on essential placement details that all CIC should know about the Carers they are staying with.
- 4.1.9 A Care leaver has recently attended a Children's Trust meeting to deliver a presentation on her care experiences.
- 4.1.10 A Care Leaver attended a multi disciplinary conference in Waltham Forest themed on the voice of the child and spoke about his experiences and how being engaged in our service has improved outcomes for him.
- 4.2 Attendance of young people at MCPG has been key to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are able to influence service provision and development. To facilitate this, members of *Skittlz* are always invited to attend and are supported by the Participation Officer in order to ensure they feel confident in making a full contribution to the discussion.
- 4.3 Young people have raised a range of issues with MCPG ,and wherever possible solutions have been sought, often in partnership with other council departments and agencies.
- 4.4 Young people said they had insufficient access to Leisure Services - MCPG asked a range of senior managers with responsibility for Corporate Parenting to attend. Work was undertaken with Public Health to ensure grants supported healthy Leisure activities and also arranged for looked after children (LAC) to have access to Splash cards and Streetbase cards.
- 4.5 Young people said their schools sometimes labelled them or treated them differently. The Corporate Director of Children's Services wrote to all schools emphasising the importance of ensuring LAC were not being labelled and that schools ensured the same high expectations of LAC and that individual cases and support needs were addressed.
- 4.6 The issue of the disproportionately negative impact on the income support and benefits for young care leavers when taking up apprenticeships was raised by Learn 2 Live and has been taken up in writing by the Corporate Director of Children's Services with the Department of Work and Pensions.

- 4.7 The Health Passport (see paragraph 3.4) was devised in collaboration with Skittlz group feedback and funded through corporate parenting resources.
- 4.8 Young people raised issues in relation to how they experienced the services they received from their social workers and Skittlz worked with officers to address these through the development of the Pledge: Promises to our Children in Care (**Appendix 3**) which has five key commitments:
- 4.8.1. Make sure you get best care
 - 4.8.2 Look after you and treat you well
 - 4.8.3 Help you to be healthy
 - 4.8.4 Best education
 - 4.8.5 To be successful
- 4.9 This Pledge was agreed by MCPG in April 2013. We now need to analyse the impact this has had and to develop a Pledge appropriate to the specific needs of our care leavers.
- 4.10 We have also recognised the need to ensure we are engaging with looked after children and young people who are either not engaged with Skittlz or who are placed outside the borough. To address this we have:
- 4.10.1 Held two 'Out of Borough' days (Essex and Colchester), further days planned.
 - 4.10.2 Run several 7-11 and 12-16 LAC Youth Group consultation activities including involvement in Takeover Day, the Who Cares? Trust survey, Amplify consultation and annual residential trips, which the children and young people have helped to plan.
 - 4.10.3 Developed Careweb.tv and youth4Us microsites that actively seek the views of young people;
 - 4.10.4 Undertaken development of electronic review consultation forms for LAC through Careweb.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Corporate Parenting arrangements in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham have undergone significant improvement in recent years. Elected members and officers meet regularly with young people and service changes are made as a consequence of these meetings. Outcomes data in relation to looked after children and young people and care leavers are routinely scrutinised and robustly challenged. There remains however much to be done to further improve the outcomes and life chances for children in our care and this requires a whole council approach and ownership.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Implications completed by Patricia Harvey, Group Manager, Children's Services Finance
- 6.2 The Corporate Parenting budget is included within the total Children's Social Care budget and is funded from within the general fund.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 Implications completed by: Lindsey Marks Principal Solicitor for Children's Safeguarding.
- 7.2 The role of the MCPG in discharging the Local Authority's legal responsibilities to the borough's looked after children and care leavers will become even more pertinent following the enactment of the Children and Families Bill 2013 in this current parliamentary year [As at 23.10.2013, the Bill had reached the House of Lords Committee stage and 2 more stages remain]. Central to the Bill is the improvement of life chances for all looked after children through a) promotion of educational achievement of children looked after by local authorities; and b) the reformation of the family justice public care proceedings system tackling delays and setting these within a 26 weeks timeframe.
- 7.3. Care Matters: Time for Change clarified that health, housing and education services 'should help social services look after children in care'. The Bill extends the scope and rigour of corporate parenting which the Local Authority shall be asked to undertake and inevitably shall involve officers involved in the above agencies.

8. Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

- 8.1 Care Matters: Time for Change
- 8.2 The Inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in London Borough of Barking and Dagenham: Ofsted July 2012

9. List of appendices:

- 9.1 Appendix 1: Terms of Reference for Members Corporate Parenting Group
- 9.2 Appendix 2: Corporate Parenting Strategy (2011-2013) April 2013 Annual Report
- 9.3. Appendix 3: Promises to our Children in Care