

## ASSEMBLY

30 November 2016

<b>Title:</b> Barking and Dagenham Member Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2015/16	
<b>Report of Councillor Channer, Chair of the Member Corporate Parenting Group</b>	
<b>Open Report</b>	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> No
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<b>Accountable Director:</b> Ann Graham, Operational Director, Care and Support	
<b>Accountable Strategic Director:</b> Anne Bristow, Strategic Director, Service Development and Improvement	
<b>Summary:</b>  All Members are corporate parents to our children and young people in care and care leavers. The Member Corporate Parenting Group has a responsibility to closely scrutinize the work undertaken by officers and partner agencies to support young people looked after and care leavers to achieve best outcomes.  This report concerns the work of the Member Corporate Parenting Group from April 2015 to March 2016.  I am pleased to be able to present this report to Assembly as it shows the achievements of the previous year, as well as setting out the challenges faced in the coming year. The report provides a summary of the progress that has been made in relation to the 'promise' made to children looked after and the 'pledge' to care leavers by the MCPG as part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.  The full annual report is at Appendix A for information.	
<b>Recommendation(s)</b>  The Assembly is asked to note the 2015/16 Annual Report of the Member Corporate Parenting Group and in particular:  <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) The improvements and challenges contained within the report; and</li><li>2) The areas identified as priorities for 2016/17.</li></ol>	
<b>Reason(s)</b> The Leader, Chief Executive, Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Service have statutory roles to protect children who are looked after as set out in statutory guidance. All Members and senior officers should act as Corporate Parents to our looked after children and care leavers. This report is part of assuring their roles.	

## **1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1. Children in care are those who have been removed from the care of their parents in accordance with Children Act legislation the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. Care leavers are those who are no longer looked after and for the purposes of this report are those aged between 16 and 21 and beyond in some instances, for example, those who continue in education.
- 1.2. Children who are in care and young people who are leaving care are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our community. It is essential that this group of children and young people are provided with the right services and support to address their needs and help them to achieve positive outcomes.
- 1.3. The Member Corporate Parenting Group (MCPG), is made up of Elected Members, agency representatives, looked after children and young people and officers of the Council. The children and young people are themselves representative of Skittlz, our Children in Care Council, a group that acts as the 'voice' of children looked after.
- 1.4. The MCPG aspires for children in the care and care leavers of the Borough and has set out a series of 'Promises' for younger children and a 'Pledge' for care leavers, as part of fulfilling its roles and responsibilities. These promises and pledges to children in care and care leavers have been made to children and young people as part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Corporate Parenting Strategy and Action Plan has been refreshed and agreed with Members in June 2015. This updated strategy sets out the collective responsibilities of the Council and its partners to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are looked after in public care.
- 1.5. I am pleased to be able to present to you the Member Corporate Parenting Annual Report. I ask that you endorse the achievements and progress made, and note the challenges that we still face, and support our ambition for meeting these challenges.

## **2. Member Corporate Parenting Annual Report – Key Points**

- 2.1. This report concerns the work of the Corporate Parenting Group of Elected Members and partner agencies from April 2015 to March 2016 about the 'promises' and 'pledges' made to children in care and care leavers aimed at improving outcomes for them.
- 2.2. In 2015/16, progress has continued to further strengthen the Corporate Parenting arrangements to ensure strong elected member representation including the Lead Member, through the Members' Corporate Parenting Group and the performance information used to inform this group has been expanded considerably, enabling detailed discussion in strengths and areas in need of improvement.
- 2.3. The Corporate Parenting Group has met regularly throughout the year and our Rights and Participation Team have continued to attend and support the Borough's Children in Care Council (Skittlz) at the MCPG meetings.
- 2.4. The Corporate Parenting Group has received detailed reports from the Looked After Children's Health Service, the Virtual School and Children's Social Care services about a range of issues and performance during the year. Following the June 2014 elections, a training session was delivered to 20 Council Members regarding the work of the Children in Care Council (Skittlz) to raise awareness. The session was very

well received and attendees reported that they felt their knowledge and understanding of Skittlz, looked after children and their corporate parenting role had increased.

- 2.5. There has been a reduction in the total number of children looked after in care though rates remain relatively higher than we would like, and the demographic profile of the Borough highlights that the number of children is increasing by 2-3% each year. The reduction in the total number of looked after children is therefore a positive trend when considered in this context. Services continue to give close attention to support to families to avoid children coming in to care when safe and appropriate and to consider alternative options.
- 2.6. The number of children placed in residential care has fallen from 45 to 35 over the course of the year as appropriate arrangements have been put in place for moving on in their care plans, with more children and young people placed in family settings and more young people living in semi-independent placements as part of plans to move towards leaving care and adulthood.
- 2.7. The number of children adopted has gone down, though it is still the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest amongst London boroughs, and the number of children being made the subject of Special Guardianship Orders has increased.
- 2.8. A good, and increased, level of performance has been achieved in a number of areas of practice which are important for children looked after in care including reviews on time ensuring that plans are checked and adjusted; Personal Education Plans are in place; health assessments and dental checks undertaken; and visits to children who have been in care longer than one year.
- 2.9. Work will continue to further reduce the number of children who are looked after in care, though this however has to be seen in the context of the borough's population, levels of needs and demand for services.
- 2.10. Achieving adoption with the necessary order through the courts and an adoptive placement within the timescales will continue to present challenges when taking into account the profile of the children whose plan is for adoption and some children being 'hard to place'.
- 2.11. The number of young people who are in employment, education and training is both an achievement and a challenge. It is an achievement when making comparisons with national and statistical comparative performance but still means that there are a significant number of young people who are not in employment, education or training and is therefore an area for continued attention.
- 2.12. Sourcing and sustaining accommodation for young people 18+ also remains continued challenge due to the lack of social housing stock available for care leavers.
- 2.13. The 2016/17 Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines the key priorities for the coming year, with key areas of focus being user engagement, a focus on achieving long-term placement stability (including improving Adoption performance) and increasing the number of young people engaged in education, training and employment.

### **3. Financial Implications**

Implications completed by: Jonathan Bunt, Strategic Director of Finance and Investment

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications as this is an information report.

### **4. Legal Implications**

Implications completed by: Fiona Taylor, Director of Law & Governance

- 4.1 There are no direct legal implications as this is an information report.

### **5. Other Implications**

- 5.1. **Staffing Issues** - There are no specific staffing issues contained within this report.
- 5.2. **Customer Impact** - The report highlights the areas of service improvement, as well as the areas where performance continues to be addressed.
- 5.3. **Safeguarding Children** - Services are determined to continually improve but such aspirations are an ever-increasing challenge within a local context of growing demand and fiscal austerity.

**Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:** None

#### **List of Appendices:**

Appendix A – Barking and Dagenham Corporate Parenting Annual Report (2015/16)