

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting2nd August 2007

1. Title of Item/Report

Corporate Parenting Strategy

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report that proposed a series of actions which should improve the quality of corporate parenting and impact positively on outcomes for looked after children and young people in Stockton.

Cabinet noted that the principle of corporate parenting had been first encapsulated in the "Quality Protects" programme. The Quality Protects Programme was about improving the well-being and life chances of those children who were looked after by local authorities. As part of that programme, the Secretary of State for Health announced that:

"One of the aims of the Quality Protects programme is to assist councils to adopt a truly corporate outcome oriented approach to parenting children who are looked after by them and supporting the parenting of other children in need."

The roles of Council's Executive and Scrutiny functions were stipulated in the Department for Education and Skills publication, "If This Were My Child" in October 2003. (A Councillor's Guide to Being a Good Corporate Parent").

The White Paper 'Care Matters : Time for Change' 2007 highlighted the need to improve the role of the corporate parent by expecting every local authority to set out its pledge to children in care, to make clear that the DCS and lead member for Children's Services should be responsible for leading improvements in Corporate parenting and by introducing an annual stocktake of the outcomes for children in care.

The role of the corporate parent was to seek for children in public care the outcomes that every good parent would want for their own children. Once a child was in care, all Members and Officers of the council, as their corporate parents, needed to be concerned about that child as if they were their own. This concern should encompass their education, their health and welfare, what they do in their leisure time and holidays, how

they celebrate their culture and how they receive praise and encouragement for their achievements. This concern also extended to providing appropriate support once young people had left care to enable them to achieve independence in the community. This continued support should include looked after children's educational support post 16 years old.

Corporate parenting was a whole authority enterprise. It was not directed solely at those services targeted at children, but required all services across the Council to work together corporately and with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for their looked after children and care leavers.

Stockton's corporate parenting strategy had been developed at a time of unprecedented partnership activity with regard to responding to the needs of children, young people and their families. Meeting the needs of looked after children, as a particularly vulnerable group, was key to ensuring that the Council (Members & Officers) and its partners could respond effectively to their needs. It would also support meeting two of the Council's corporate priorities, Promoting Achievement and Tackling Disadvantage.

This strategy outlined how Stockton Borough Council and partners would meet and address its corporate parenting responsibilities and improve the outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. The strategy would be reviewed annually in August.

The Corporate Parenting Strategy used the "Every Child Matters" outcomes framework as a vehicle for identifying what needed to be done and the progress the Council and its partners were making in improving the life chances and outcomes for looked after children. These outcomes would enable organisations and stakeholders to reflect on the actions and work necessary to bring about improvements in the lives of all children in the context of that Framework.

It was explained that the strategy built on the Council's corporate parenting pledge. The pledge outlined and formed an undertaking and commitment from the Council to the principles of corporate parenting.

"Every good parent knows that children require a safe and secure environment in which to thrive. We protect and support our children against the perils and risks of life. We are ambitious for them; we want them to reach their potential. We celebrate and share in their achievements. A child who is cared for by the Local Authority has the right to expect everything from a corporate parent that would be expected from a good parent.

As a Local Authority:

- we accept the responsibilities and challenges of being corporate parents;
- we are committed to providing efficient, effective and caring quality services;
- we will creatively meet the needs of children and young people in public care and enable them to achieve their full potential.

We as elected members and employees within the borough being corporate parents, will take responsibility for working collaboratively to support children and young people in public care and care leavers to ensure we enable them to reach their potential emotionally, educationally, physically, psychologically and socially.

Above all, as Corporate Parents we will preface all our thinking, planning, actions and decisions with:

“If this were my child I would”

Members noted that the strategy outlined the Council's shared understanding of corporate parenting and clarified the ways in which Officers and Councillors would work together to discharge their corporate parenting duties, aligned to the 5 outcomes of the Every Child Matters Framework.

The strategy included key areas for development and an overview of action plans collated from across the range of services and partners providing services for Looked After Children (LAC). The plans informed a monitoring schedule which formed the basis of one of the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) group's workstreams. It was proposed that MALAP report this monitoring through to the Children's Trust Board as a standing agenda item.

It was explained that two groups met to discharge a monitoring role in respect of provision of services for LAC. The MALAP, whose membership was predominantly Council Officers, colleagues from partner agencies and recently two self nominated Councillors. In addition an informal Corporate Parenting group, open to all Councillors, met. It was proposed to join these groups together, and increase the accountability of the MALAP, by revising membership to include Senior Officers and by requiring Councillors to join as names with an expectation to report back to Party colleagues. Terms of reference had been prepared for a

re-formed MALAP and an Advisory Group of children and young people was being developed to work alongside this group to shape decision making and service design.

The Children Act 2004 gave local authorities the duty to make arrangements for local co-operation, which would include integrated planning, commissioning and delivery of children's services. From 2006 local areas had been required to use Children's Trust arrangements to deliver integrated Children's Services.

The development of a Corporate Parenting approach to meeting the needs of some of our most vulnerable children and young people sat well within this vision of service development and delivery.

Members commended the Strategy, Statement and Action Plan and supported their approval. During discussion reference was made to the MALAP proposed Terms of Reference and monitoring of attendance. It was agreed that where this related to Members non attendance should be reported to the Leader and appropriate group Leader.

Members agreed that a recommendation in this report, relating to inclusion of a Corporate Parenting Implications paragraph in future Council reports should be amended to reflect discussion held during consideration of the Select Committee report on Corporate Parenting.

RECOMMENDED to Council that

1. the Corporate Parenting Strategy and Corporate Parenting Statement be ratified with the aim of implementation as Council policy in Autumn.
2. the proposal to include the MALAP in the list of groups requiring named Councillor membership be approved.

RESOLVED that

3. the proposal that MALAP report to Children's Trust Board as a standing agenda item and subsequently to Cabinet be approved.
4. all reports to Cabinet and Council, appertaining to Children and Young People issues, and any other appropriate reports, should contain corporate parenting implications presented in a similar way to financial, legal and community safety implications, to ensure consideration is given

to looked after children's needs.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The principle of corporate parenting was first encapsulated in the "Quality Protects" programme. The Quality Protects Programme was about improving the well-being and life chances of those children who were looked after by local authorities. As part of that programme, the Secretary of State for Health announced that:

"One of the aims of the Quality Protects programme is to assist councils to adopt a truly corporate outcome oriented approach to parenting children who are looked after by them and supporting the parenting of other children in need."

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Corporate parenting is a whole authority enterprise. It is not directed solely at those services targeted at children, but requires all services across the Council to work together corporately and with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for their looked after children and care leavers.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not Applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

For decision 4 only, by no later than Midnight on Friday 10th August 2007

Proper Officer
06 July 2007