

**Children and Young People  
Select Committee**

**Review of Corporate Parenting  
Part 1**



**2 August 2007**

Children and Young People Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
Stockton-on-Tees  
TS18 1LD

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## **SELECT COMMITTEE – MEMBERSHIP**

Councillor Harrington (Chair)  
Councillor Eddy (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Broughton  
Councillor Mrs Cains  
Councillor Coleman  
Councillor Frankland  
Councillor Miss Inman  
Councillor Lewis  
Councillor Sherris

### **Parent Governor Representatives**

Mr P Beach  
Mr Cash

### **Non Voting Co-opted Representatives**

Mr G Davies  
Mr D Campbell  
Mr RG Lupton  
Mr B Percival

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Committee thank the following contributors to this stage of the review.

Julia Morrison, Head of School Effectiveness  
Neil Pocklington, Principal Manager - Childrens Social Care  
Jayne Palmer, Service Manager - Specialist Service  
Councillor Mrs Rigg  
Councillor Mrs Womphrey

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**Original Brief**

**What are the main issues?**

Are we clear about our Corporate Parenting responsibilities and how to implement them?  
Are the health, safety and wellbeing needs of children in care being met effectively?

**The Thematic Select Committee's overall aim/ objectives in doing this work is:**

Assist the development of policies/strategy.  
Assist the preparation and response to the Joint Area Review and Comprehensive Performance Assessment process.

**The possible outputs/outcomes are:**

Improved corporate parenting  
Improved corporate awareness and service delivery for looked after children.  
Improved partnership working arrangements delivering services to looked after children.

**What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?**

Assist the development of a Corporate Parenting Strategy.  
Determine and improve (where appropriate) the partnership arrangements with health service providers.

**Who will the panel be trying to influence as part of their work?**

Children's Trust Board, all councillors, Council departments and partnership agencies.

**What category does the review fall into?**

<b>Policy Review</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Policy Development</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>External Partnership</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>Performance Management</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Holding Executive to Account</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>		





**1.0 Recommendations**

- 1.1 At the beginning of each municipal year, at the first Council meeting, all councillors should publicly sign up to the Council pledge accepting their corporate parenting role.**
- 1.2 Each of the political groups within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council should nominate a corporate parenting champion to be the Lead Member from their group on the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP).**
- 1.3 All reports to Cabinet and Council should contain corporate parenting implications similar to financial, legal and community strategy implications to ensure consideration is given to looked after children's needs.**
- 1.4 At the first governing body meeting of each school year all school governing bodies should sign up to the Council pledge accepting their corporate parenting role.**

## **2.0 Introduction**

- 2.1 At the outset of the Select Committee's review of Corporate Parenting it was made aware of the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy that was being developed and due to be presented at Cabinet prior to the conclusion of the Select Committee's work.
- 2.2 In order to assist the development and adoption of the strategy it was decided to undertake this review in two stages. The first stage therefore deals with issues about the strategy whilst the second stage will report on the findings of partnership working and assist the preparation and response to the Joint Area Review and Comprehensive Performance Assessment process.
- 2.3 It is expected that the second stage of this review will be completed in October 2007.

## **3.0 Background**

- 3.1 Councillors, along with other professionals and agencies within Stockton, are charged with the duty of acting as corporate parents to children/young people who are looked after by a local authority and are either accommodated, in care or remanded/detained.
- 3.2 Looked After Children have historically been significantly disadvantaged by their experiences within the care system. Proportionately, Stockton has fewer Looked After Children per 10,000 than comparator Authorities. This reflects the range of effective strategies that have been developed within the Authority.
- 3.3 Looked After Children are the most vulnerable group within the borough. Statistics show that Stockton's Looked After Children are more likely to come into care at a younger age. The most common reason for children coming into care in Stockton remains neglect, this reflects the national picture. In addition, there are particularly high incidences of domestic violence and drug related issues that contribute to children being brought into care.

## **4.0 Evidence/Findings**

- 4.1 The Committee welcomed the opportunity to provide commentary for the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy as part of the Committee's policy development role within the scrutiny process.
- 4.2 It was considered especially valuable to take evidence from officers and councillors with experience of corporate parenting as it is currently practiced in Stockton-on-Tees Council. As a result this provided a basis of evaluation on which to examine the proposed strategy and this report and its recommendations should be read on the basis of providing constructive criticism.
- 4.3 Paragraphs 3.1-3.3 of this report provide background for which the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy is intended to address. The Committee heard evidence of good practice including:

- Continuing to build on the number of foster carers
  - Young people in care have more direct involvement of their care
  - Supported lodging is particularly successful and has been determined as a good example to other local authorities
  - The involvement of young people in determining care involves the ability to interview staff
  - The department now employs a young person formerly in care and it is intended to develop this aspect of employment policy
- 4.4 The Committee commends the department and partner agencies in the initiatives that have been developed and looks forward to the strategy assisting the development of more good practice.
- 4.5 It was of particular interest to take evidence from Councillors Mary Womphrey and Maureen Rigg as previous members of the Corporate Parenting Group. They were able to give the Committee Members (and fellow councillors) an indication of the importance that corporate parenting is for everyone connected to Stockton-on-Tees Council.
- 4.6 Both councillors stated that although involvement with looked after children, even at a distance, can be very rewarding the ad hoc arrangements that existed prior to the planned introduction did not always provide a feeling of achievement.
- 4.7 The Corporate Parenting Statement states that "...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." The councillors believe that the strategy for increased joint agency work will improve the outcomes for looked after children.
- 4.8 The Committee supports the previously expressed view and the Corporate Parenting Statement. The Committee would, however, like to strengthen the support given by the Council's elected members and employees.
- 4.9 The strategy states that "...as elected members and employees within the borough [we] 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 ...."
- 4.10 The Committee believe that the following recommendations should be adopted to provide councillors and officers with a constant reminder of the needs of looked after children in Stockton Borough.
- 4.11 **At the beginning of each municipal year, at the first Council meeting, all councillors should publicly sign up to the Council pledge accepting their corporate parenting role.**
- 4.12 **Each of the political groups within Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council should nominate a corporate parenting champion to be the Lead**

**Member from their group on the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP).**

- 4.13 **All reports to Cabinet and Council should contain corporate parenting implications similar to financial, legal and community strategy implications to ensure consideration is given to looked after children's needs.**
- 4.14 The Committee was interested to learn about the establishment of a virtual school to improve the educational achievement of children and young people in public care. 'Virtual School' is a term that is growing in use nationally to describe a broad range of approaches to education which are not necessarily confined to traditional classrooms and schools. The replication of a school organisation but at arms length bringing together a multi agency approach to support the educational needs of young people shows the innovative ways in which organisations are now working.
- 4.15 With a Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) acting as the virtual school's governing body this would benefit from councillor involvement as many already take on a school governor role in schools in the borough. The Committee therefore believe that the MALAP should have political group representation as outlined at paragraph 4.12.
- 4.16 The experience of the Select Committee Members as school governors suggested to the Committee that the borough's schools should also make public their duty of care to looked after children. The Committee therefore recommend that **at the first governing body meeting of each school year all school governing bodies should sign up to the Council pledge accepting their corporate parenting role.**
- 4.17 The development of the Guardian Angels scheme which partners councillors with senior managers of the Council to act as a 'pushy parent' ensuring everything is done in the interests of their child is supported in all but name. It was mentioned to the Committee that at the last meeting of the former Corporate Parenting Group concern was raised with the term 'guardian angel'. The Committee believe that the views and ideas of young people should be sought to provide an appropriate alternative name for this scheme.
- 4.18 As previously stated the Committee welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the draft strategy. It was noted that the key priorities (para 15.1, pg 13) and action plan (Appendix A – Action Plan, pgs 16-17) were still to be developed at the time the Committee took evidence. The Committee therefore look forward to receiving updates as it continues to review corporate parenting within the borough and subsequently when it monitors the outcome of recommendations made.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

- 5.1 The Committee supports the implementation of a Corporate Parenting Strategy believing that it begins to address the important aspects contained in Every Child Matters: Change for Children (2003) and The Children Act (2004) as well as the development of an approach to meet the needs of some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the borough.

- 5.2 The Committee looks forward to continuing to work with the Children, Education and Social Care (CESC) department and engaging with the Council's partner agencies as it undertakes the second stage of this review.