

WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

BRIEFING NOTE – CORPORATE PARENTING RESPONSIBILITIES

Introduction

This briefing note sets out the responsibilities that County Councillors have as corporate parents to inform the County Council discussion on 12 January 2017.

When a child comes into care and becomes a looked after child, the County Council becomes their Corporate Parent. Looking after other people's children is one of the most important things that Councils do and it is the responsibility of all councillors, not just the Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the whole Council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the Council. Every member of the Council has the statutory responsibility to act for, and on behalf of that child in the same way that a good parent would act for and on behalf of their child.

Being a good corporate parent means:

- Accepting responsibility for all children in the Council's care
- Making their needs a priority
- Seeking the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own child
- Listening to the views of children and young people and taking account of them
- Giving young people the support they need as they move into adulthood

What is corporate parenting?

When a child has to enter the care of Worcestershire County Council for whatever reason, the tasks that would normally be the responsibility of their parents become the responsibility of everyone at the council.

This means that we have a legal and moral responsibility to improve the lives of all of those we look after and who leave our care. Just as we would with our own children, we must prioritise their needs and create the right conditions for them to thrive and have happy and fulfilling lives. This is a priority across the whole council and not just for those working in children's services.

Good corporate parenting requires ownership and leadership at the most senior level and this includes elected members. As corporate parents, it is the responsibility of all elected members to be satisfied that there is a joined up, effective and holistic approach to meeting the needs of children looked after and care leavers through policy and planning. This means that when policy is being set or plans are agreed it is important to consider opportunities for improving outcomes for children looked after. The Corporate Parenting Board leads for the Council in fulfilling this

responsibility, but it is also important that each Councillor is aware of the vital role that they can play. This can be through scrutiny, through input at council meetings and through day to day engagement with the local community including schools, health care providers and other organisations in local areas. There is also an interface with District colleagues and wider partners, for example housing.

Why is corporate parenting important?

Children looked after are among the most vulnerable children in our community. They are unable to live at home with their immediate family, for any number of reasons, and they become looked after by Worcestershire County Council. This may be through a voluntary agreement with the child's parents or through a court order. Whatever their journey into care looks like, most children looked after will have experienced some form of neglect, harm or emotional distress in their lives before becoming looked after.

Outcomes for children and young people who are in, or have left care, remain stubbornly worse than for other children and is something for which we must take collective responsibility. They do not do as well at school, are less likely to go on to higher education, more likely to be not in education, employment or training (NEET) and are over-represented in youth offending institutions. There is also a long term impact when children looked after become parents themselves.

- At key stage 2 outcomes for children looked after are below that of their peers in Worcestershire and below national benchmarks. In 2016 only 15% of children looked after achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths.
- At key stage 4 only 15% of children looked after by the council and attending school in Worcestershire achieved 5 A*-C grade GCSEs
- Children looked after are more likely to be excluded from school than their peers

As corporate parents elected members can play a key part in narrowing the gap in outcomes between children looked after and other children in the community. The part you can play as an elected member is to engage with your local school and pre-school providers and to support local foster carers in linking with local community groups.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

The current Corporate Parenting Strategy is due for renewal. This strategy outlines the pledge that the Council makes to children in care and will be considered by the Corporate Parenting Board at its meeting in April 2017. The strategy will be shaped by children in care working with officers to make sure that there is a clear and accountable ambition for our children that the Corporate Parenting Board can oversee.

The Corporate Parenting Board is chaired by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families and consists of County Councillors, District Councillors, and representatives from the children in care councils, health, education, voluntary sector

and Council officers. It is open for all County Councillors to attend as an observer to gain a full understanding of the work that the Board oversees.

What should Councillors do?

As an elected member you can help by playing an active role in your community, by regularly attending meetings of organisations that have involvement with children and who will provide a valuable source of information in helping you to identify the local issues affecting children, and to ask those questions that will give you confidence that local services are supporting their welfare.

All councillors should be aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities. This will be supported through training sessions on the role of a corporate parent, which will also form an element of the induction process for councillors following elections in May 2017. Support from officers and training will enable councillors to undertake their role in the most effective and timely way and develop knowledge in the following areas:

- Have a clear understanding and awareness of the issues for children looked after and care leavers in the authority area and those placed out of area
- Champion the interests of children looked after and care leavers in all they do by ensuring those who are responsible for their welfare and education are held to account.
- Ask questions and constructively challenge outcomes for children looked after and care leavers
- Communicate with children looked after and care leavers through appropriate channels so they have a say in how decisions are made about the services that affect them, so that they can influence those decisions positively.

Consistently ask “*Would this be good enough for my own child?*”