



CORPORATE PARENTING

BOARD MEETING: 30 APRIL 2009

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a summary of current activity relating to corporate parenting following the successful seminar held in Shortlees Community Centre on 10 February 2009 and to set out key actions for the Community Planning Board to take forward.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In December 2007, the Council's Extended Corporate Management Team acknowledged the need to maximise efforts to secure better outcomes for our looked after children and young people, and specifically, to recruit local foster carers, re-provision our children's homes, ensure care plans all have educational objectives, provide support to care leavers and encourage the wider corporate family of Community Planning Partners to play their part.
- 2.2 Thereafter, in January 2008, the Council's Cabinet considered and approved a report on the award of additional funding for looked after children and young people. This also highlighted the importance of the Council's role as corporate parent and set out a number of outcomes facilitated by the additional funding, including:
- enhanced educational provision at Montgomery Place and Kilmaurs;
 - finalisation of the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy;
 - training seminars for elected members and officers;
 - support for looked after children in relation to attendance, exclusion and educational attainment; and
 - support for housing transitions for looked after young people.
- 2.3 The Council's approach to corporate parenting has been further strengthened as a result of Cabinet's approval of policy and procedures for looked after children and young people in June 2008.
- 2.4 In September 2008, the Council held the first of a series of corporate parenting seminars which was attended by the Extended Corporate Management Team and other key officers from the Council. As a result of that Seminar, a detailed Action Plan was developed and subsequently approved by the Council's Corporate Management Team in November 2008.
- 2.5 Also in September 2008, the Scottish Government launched "These are our Bairns: Guidance for Community Planning Partnerships on How to be a Good Corporate Parent".

- 2.6 This guidance was developed by the Working Group established by the Scottish Government and chaired by the Council's Chief Executive, Fiona Lees, as a tool for local authorities and Community Planning Partners to ensure that looked after children and young people and care leavers have as positive an experience of growing up as possible, with every effort made to address their specific needs.
- 2.7 Shortly thereafter, in October 2008, the Council's Cabinet considered and approved the East Ayrshire Children and Young People's Services Plan for 2008-2011. That Plan sets out a number of specific actions regarding looked after and accommodated children and young people which were welcomed by elected members. At the same meeting, Cabinet also considered a report on the social work services budget sustainability strategy which included proposals for taking forward work in relation to children's home provision. Members recognised that the role of corporate parent extended beyond residential provision and agreed to the suggestion that a seminar for all elected members, similar to that organised for the extended management team, would further strengthen their understanding and awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities.
- 2.8 This seminar for elected members took place on 28 January 2009 and was followed by the Community Planning Corporate Parenting Seminar on 10 February 2009.

3. ACTION PLAN

- 3.1 Each of the Seminars benefited from interactive workshop discussions and contributions from looked after and accommodated children and young people, along with actors who played out the role of looked after and accommodated children and young people.
- 3.2 The workshop discussions from the first Chief Officer seminar generated a number of key action points that were developed into the Action Plan that was approved by the Council's Corporate Management Team. This has been further developed to reflect the main issues arising from the elected member and Community Planning seminars and attempts to identify actions that are deliverable with the purpose of securing real outcomes for children and young people who are either entering, in, or through the care system.
- 3.3 The Action Plan is structured around 4 key themes, namely:

Care planning

- 3.4 Individual care plans require to be in place for every child or young person for whom the Council acts as corporate parent. It was recognised that, for these care plans to be meaningful and effective, they needed to be regularly reviewed and reflect targets for educational attainment, school attendance, wider social integration, health and other elements to support the individual circumstances of each child or young person. Action is being taken to ensure that plans are in place and are being progressed.

Communication and Training

- 3.5 Communication across all parts of the “corporate family” is acknowledged as being essential to achieving the best outcomes for looked after children and young people. This involves everybody involved in supporting children and young people, including parents, families, elected members, statutory agencies and partner organisations.
- 3.6 Although this was identified as a core issue across the full range of activities related to corporate parenting, it was particularly highlighted in relation to the promotion and publicity of specific initiatives. A specific example of where this had most potential to deliver positive outcomes was in relation to the drive to recruit more local foster or respite carers. A recruitment strategy is currently being developed.
- 3.7 The need to ensure that everyone who has a direct or indirect role to play in the care of children and young people should receive training appropriate to their involvement was also identified. This applies to elected members and officers across all Services of the Council, and good progress is being made

Creating opportunities

- 3.8 The ability to create opportunities for looked after and accommodated children and young people also emerged as a key theme. The Council, as the single largest employer in the area, is best placed to provide job opportunities for young people reaching school leaving age. Other partner organisations can equally play a part in developing employment opportunities for young people. As corporate parents to these children, the Council and its partners have a responsibility to encourage their personal development in the “family business” and should do more to create opportunities for them by utilising existing employment frameworks such as Modern Apprenticeship and Skillseeker schemes, and traditional craft apprenticeships.

Operational changes

- 3.9 In order to achieve many of the objectives of the action plan, it was acknowledged that operational changes would also need to be considered. These range from identifying opportunities to reduce the administrative/clerical burdens on key officers from social work and education, to finding ways to reduce bureaucracy to facilitate the inclusion of children in school activities.
- 3.10 Other actions identified in this category relate to potential co-location of social work officers in schools, reviewing the school curriculum to provide opportunities for developing life skills, identifying named “corporate parenting” officers in all departments and partner organisations, and developing early intervention protocols.

4. PROGRESS UPDATE

- 4.1 Significant progress has been made on a number of fronts since approval of the original Action Plan and the more recent seminars.

Establishment of Corporate Parenting Member/Officer Working Group

- 4.2 In recognition of the key role that elected members have in promoting and overseeing corporate parenting activity, the Council recently agreed to establish a Corporate Parenting Member/Officer Working Group. This Group had previously been established to carry out the option appraisal process for identifying a site for a replacement children's house in the Kilmarnock area and will be tasked to monitor the implementation of the action plan.

New Children's House, Kilmarnock

- 4.3 On 3 November 2009, the Council's Governance and Scrutiny Committee upheld a decision of Cabinet to locate a replacement children's house at the site of the former St Joseph's Academy at Grassyards Road, Kilmarnock. This site had been identified following a full option appraisal process carried out by the Member/Officer Working Group referred to above. The new house will be a six-bedded, single-storey facility for 12 to 18 year olds and the site includes further development potential for throughcare facilities.
- 4.4 Design work is now underway and a planning application will be submitted in early course. Community consultation will be undertaken through the statutory planning process and there will be regular engagement with local elected members and New Farm Loch Community Council as the project develops.

Training DVD-ROM

- 4.5 Copies of a DVD-ROM related to "We Can and Must Do Better" were recently issued to key council staff and partner organisations. The DVD-ROM contains information relating to the issues faced by looked after children and young people and care leavers, particularly with regard to improving their educational and other life outcomes, and it is designed for both group training and individual learning purposes
- 4.6 The purpose of the DVD-ROM and accompanying training is for all staff to learn more about the world of the looked after child and to find practical ways of ensuring we take actions to help improve the educational and all life outcomes for this particular group of children and young people.

Skillseekers

- 4.7 A report is being submitted to the Council's Cabinet in May 2009, setting out the arrangements for the recruitment and selection of 25 Skillseekers within the Council and a specific number of these places will be allocated for looked after and accommodated young people.

5. ISSUES TO BE PROGRESSED BY COMMUNITY PLANNING PARTNERS

5.1 A range of issues and questions were raised at the Community Planning event on corporate parenting on 10 February 2009. The notes from the day have been reviewed and some specific actions have been identified as follows:

- **Awareness raising** – Community Planning Partners can make a contribution by pro-actively and positively raising awareness of the issues for children and young people who are looked after. This could be with employees and with the wider community.
- **Recruitment of foster carers** – Community Planning Partners could play a key role in recruiting foster carers and adoptive parents by engaging staff and the public in an appreciation of what is involved and generating interest, which fostering and adoption staff can then progress.
- **Training/employment** - Community Planning Partners could contribute by providing work placements and experiential opportunities for young people.
- **Personal development opportunities** – Community Planning Partners have a range of contacts and resources available to them. For some children and young people, the opportunity to see how other people live and work could help to open their thinking to new possibilities.
- **Mentoring** – the current action plan makes a commitment to developing a mentoring scheme. Community Planning Partners could maximise opportunities by being partners in the provision of this work.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 It is recommended that the Community Planning Partnership Board:

- i) notes the outcomes from the successful corporate parenting seminars;
- ii) approves the actions set out at section 5;
- iii) agrees that these actions are built into the overarching action plan; and
- iv) requests an update report on progress with implementation of the action plan in 6 months time.

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16 April 2009