

**JOINT EDUCATION & YOUTH AND SOCIAL & HEALTH CARE OVERVIEW &
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

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| Date of Meeting | Thursday 24 th March, 2016 |
| Report Subject | Corporate Parenting |
| Cabinet Member | Cabinet Member for Social Services and Cabinet Member for Education |
| Report Author | Chief Officer (Social Services) |
| Type of Report | Strategic |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Corporate Parenting is the term used to describe the collective responsibility of the Council towards looked after children and care leavers. Corporate Parenting is founded on the principle that we have the same aspirations, and provide the same kind of care, that any good parent would provide for their own children. This report provides an overview of the Council's effectiveness as a Corporate Parent and explores:

1. how well we engage with looked after children and listen to their voice
2. the health and wellbeing of children in care
3. how stable and secure are the lives of our looked after children whilst they are in our care
4. the support we provide to young people leaving care

The report provides a particular focus on the expectations of Corporate Parenting within the framework of the Social Services and Well-Being Act (the Act). The report identifies the need to refresh our existing Corporate Parenting Strategy within the context of the Act and the Council's Improvement Plan priorities for 2016/17.

A separate report is being presented to the Scrutiny Committee on the educational attainment of children in care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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| 1 | Members scrutinise the Council's effectiveness as a Corporate Parent and endorse the development of a revised Corporate Parenting Strategy. |
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REPORT DETAILS

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| 1.00 | EXPLAINING CORPORATE PARENTING |
| 1.01 | Children in the care of a local authority are often referred to as Looked After Children (LAC). They are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. No child or young person is the same, they enter the care system for a variety of reasons and at different points in their lives. These can range from family breakdown, abuse or neglect, to voluntary arrangements to support children and young people's welfare whilst work is undertaken to rebuild relationships or parenting capacity. |
| 1.02 | As a Corporate Parent our role is to offer 'authoritative parenting' which recognises that children and young people want to be listened to, to be loved, to be supported, to be helped, to be respected, to be safe and often, to be given boundaries. This report provides an overview evaluation of how effective we are at Corporate Parenting within the context of the Social Services and Well-Being Act which comes into force on 6 April 2016. |
| 1.03 | <p>The report also draws on the findings of the CSSIW Inspection for Children's Services in 2015 and CSSIW's annual performance evaluation of Flintshire County Council's Social Services for 2014-15 which identified that:</p> <p>"Life chances for looked after children require sustained commitment and determination if they are to improve. Whilst recent outcomes have been good, there are indications that corporate parenting is not as effective as it could be. A significant number of placements are not in the immediate area, school placements are not as stable as they were and health assessments are not routinely undertaken. The council needs to review how to address these issues in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for current looked after children."</p> <p>This report provides positive evidence of improvement in health assessments and outlines work to respond to the issue of placements not in the immediate area.</p> |
| 1.04 | <u>LAC POPULATION</u> |
| 1.04.1 | Over the last 7 years the number of LAC has increased in Flintshire |

| Number of LAC as at 31 March | | | | | | | |
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| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
| Flintshire | 193 | 196 | 194 | 181 | 208 | 219 | 224 |
| <p>On the 31 December 2015 there were 204 children and young people looked after.</p> | | | | | | | |
| 1.04.2 | <p>The overall increase in the number of LAC is consistent with the national picture across Wales. It is important to note that whilst our LAC numbers have increased they remain below the Welsh average. The latest available data for comparative purposes is information produced by Stats Wales which provides information about the LAC population on the 31 March 2015. An overview of comparative data is set out in Appendix 1.</p> | | | | | | |
| 1.04.3 | <p>In summary this data shows that:</p> <p>We have a lower rate of looked after children compared to the rest of Wales</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a rate of 69 in Flintshire compared to a rate of 89 in Wales <p>This is relevant as the Minister for Health and Social Services wants to see the Welsh rate of LAC reduce to the rate in England.</p> | | | | | | |
| 1.04.4 | <p>The rate for Flintshire is the 3rd lowest in North Wales</p> <p>we are closer to the rate of 60 in England than to the rate of 89 in Wales.</p> | | | | | | |
| 1.04.5 | <p>More children are looked after in Flintshire due to abuse or neglect</p> <p>72% compared to an average of 61% in England (Welsh data not available).</p> | | | | | | |
| 1.04.6 | <p>More children in Flintshire were looked after under care orders</p> <p>76% compared to an average of 69% in Wales.</p> | | | | | | |
| 1.04.7 | <p>Fewer children were accommodated in Flintshire under Section 20 of the Children Act (voluntary arrangements)</p> <p>14% compared to 19% in Wales and 29% in England.</p> | | | | | | |
| 1.04.8 | <p>The Minister for Health and Social Services has indicated that he wants to see a concerted effort to appropriately reduce the number of LAC in Wales. Alongside this message the judiciary are clear that they want to see timely permanence planning with voluntary S20 placements being used as a short term arrangement (less than 3 months). Flintshire is well placed to respond to both of these agendas with clear evidence of local working to appropriately reduce our looked after population whilst at the same time making timely decisions to accommodate children and young</p> | | | | | | |

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| | people through court processes. |
| 1.05 | <u>HOW WELL DO WE ENGAGE WITH LAC AND LISTEN TO THEIR VOICE?</u> |
| 1.05.1 | Having a strong voice and real control is central to the new Act as this optimises everyone's opportunity to achieve well-being and an appropriate level of independence. The voice of the child is at the heart of what we do, and we need to continuously ensure that we listen to, hear, and act on what children and young people are telling us. |
| 1.05.2 | We have a well-established Participation Forum that provides an important opportunity for looked-after children to meet together to share experiences and speak out with a group voice about their care and aspirations. |
| 1.05.3 | Over the past 12 months the Participation Forum has grown from strength to strength. The group has actively engaged in various activities; from meeting with the Children's Commissioner for Wales to discuss the future of her role, creating a DVD for Foster Carers to have a better understanding of what being in care is like, to rapping about online safety and reviewing social services documents to make them more child friendly. Elected Members have also been regularly attending and contributing to the Children's Services Forum meetings. Importantly members have shared their thoughts and feelings about their educational experiences which has contributed to a new Welsh Government Strategy document 'Raising the ambitions and educational attainment of children who are looked after in Wales'. |
| 1.05.4 | <p>The Pride of Flintshire Awards is a big focus point for the Forum, the revamped less formal format for the awards was warmly welcomed for the 2015 event. The members of the Forum make a lot of key decisions from which trophies to award to the winners of the awards, through to which songs to play at the disco.</p> <p>Some quotes from group members about being involved in participation:</p> <p>'It's about changing the perception of people in care' 'Everyone is treated equally' 'We contribute to events and services within FCC involving children in care' 'Raising issues that are important' 'Help to improve people's lives' 'It helps to boost your confidence'</p> |
| 1.05.5 | The Participation Group is supported by a Participation Officer who works hard to ensure creative and innovative approaches to engaging looked after children. The Officer meets regularly with LAC and Flintshire's commitment to fund this important role reflects the importance we place on engaging with, and listening to the voice of young people. The Participation Group plays a central role in feeding the views, experiences, concerns and suggestions of LAC into the Children's Forum. |

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| 1.05.6 | As part of the CSSIW inspection of Children's Services in 2015 a recommendation was made that "The Children's Forum should continue to focus on ensuring ambitious outcomes for looked after children and young people are achieved, and support improved mechanisms to gain the views of service users". In response work is being undertaken to support young people to have a greater role in the Children's Forum both in terms of the focus of the work program and their engagement at the meeting. |
| 1.05.7 | Positively recent issues raised by young people through the Children's Forum have helped shape priority actions that are now contained in the Council's draft Improvement plan for 2016/17. Plans for delivering the actions will be developed through the Children's Forum with progress reported and scrutinised at the Forum. |
| 1.05.8 | <p>One of the underlying principles of the new Act is that everyone has a right to be heard as an individual and advocacy has an important role to play assisting people with expressing their views and making informed choices. We have entered into a Regional arrangement for advocacy for children and young people. The services is provided across North Wales by Tros Gynnal Plant. The Service began in April 2015 following an open tendering process. Between April and December 2015 Tros Gynnal Plant have supported 35 children and young people in Flintshire. Feedback includes:</p> <p>"Thank you for today, you helped me do good." "Thanks for believing me." "I am quite happy thank you!"</p> |
| 1.05.9 | Under the 1989 Children Act, authorities are required to appoint "Independent Visitors" for children and young people in their care who have had little or no contact with their parents for more than a year. The volunteers are expected to make friends with children, visiting them regularly and helping them participate in decisions about their future. |
| 1.05.10 | The Independent Visitor service for North Wales is also run by Tros Gynnal Plant who operate a volunteer Independent Visitor scheme. This differs to the Independent Visitor service previously received which employed Independent Visitors. Unfortunately this difference impacted significantly upon the continuity of Independent Visitor matches when the service transferred to Tros Gynnal Plant as none of the staff employed as Independent Visitors via the previous provider were willing to transfer to Tros Gynnal Plant's volunteer model. |
| 1.05.11 | Tros Gynnal Plant are in the process recruiting independent visitors but the process is lengthy and we have met with them to seek alternative approaches to ensure that there are sufficient independent visitors for Flintshire LAC. In the meantime we have prioritised the children who need an Independent Visitor. It is also important to note that all of our LAC have an allocated social worker each of whom is in regular contact with the child/young person to ensure their needs are being appropriately met and cases reviewed. All the LAC have access to an advocate if they need it as well as an allocated Independent Reviewing Officer. |

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| 1.05.12 | Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) employed by Flintshire oversee the child's care plan, monitor the case and challenge the local authority if the plan is not meeting the child's needs or is not being implemented effectively. The IRO must communicate directly with each child they are responsible for to establish the child's wishes and feelings and ensure that these are taken into account. |
| 1.05.13 | The Act strengthens the role of the IRO to enable them to have more effective oversight of the child's case and ensure the plan meets their needs and is understood by the child. The CSSIW inspection of Children's Services in 2015 concluded that "Looked after children reviews seen were well managed and independent reviewing officers (IRO) had the skills and experience to deliver against the expectations of the service". |
| 1.05.14 | <u>Future priorities</u> Our aim is to continue to develop our approach to engagement and to deepen our understanding of the experience of looked after children. To do this we will: |
| 1.05.15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign our assessment tools to ensure that children's wishes and feelings are central to our assessment processes. The new assessment will be in place by June 2016 |
| 1.05.16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through our case file audits we will check to ensure that the analysis flowing from the assessment is child focused. We will report our findings in February 2017 as part of our quality assurance report (quarter 3) |
| 1.05.17 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will develop the format of our assessments and care plans so they are user friendly and easy to understand should looked after children want a copy. This will be in place by October 2016 |
| 1.05.18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By June 2016 we will send a questionnaire to a sample of LAC to help understand their experiences and the outcomes that are being achieved. We will pilot the questionnaire with the Participation Forum |
| 1.05.19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will co-produce the forward work programme for the Children's Services Forum with the Participation Group |
| 1.05.20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an engagement strategy to expand the way we seek the views of LAC to inform service development and how we evaluate performance. This will be in place by October 2016 |
| 1.06 | <u>THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN CARE</u> |
| 1.06.1 | Under the Social Services and Well-Being Act the term 'well-being' means people are healthy, feel good about their life, are safe and protected, and can learn new things. For children well-being also means being able to grow up happily and being looked after well. |
| 1.06.2 | We know that looked after children share many of the same health risks |

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| | and problems as their peers, but they frequently enter care with poorer health due to the impact of poverty, abuse and neglect. National research also suggests that looked after children are more likely to have mental health problems. |
| 1.06.3 | <p>The last 12 months have seen some important improvements in the way the health and well-being of LAC is supported. Notably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • following a period of vacancy there is a designated nurse for looked after children • 75% of LAC children's health assessments took place on time between April and December 2015. This is an improvement from 2014/15 where 55% were completed on time • all looked after children have been registered with a GP within 10 working days of coming into care or moving placement |
| 1.06.4 | This performance improvement is positive and evidences that we are working with BCU to resolve CSSIW's concern that health assessments for LAC were not routinely undertaken in 2014/15. |
| 1.06.5 | Whilst there is good progress we recognise that there is more to be done. Positively looked-after children are a priority group for getting access to therapeutic and psychological services including Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). There is a dedicated CAMHS Practitioner who works directly with children and young people. In addition, training and consultation is offered to parents, foster carers and professionals. However, the reality is that waiting times for CAMHS are still too long. |
| 1.06.6 | We have had very promising discussions with CAMHS about how we can ensure LAC can have timely access to therapeutic and psychological services. The service are in the process of redesigning their operating model with a view to better targeting resources and reducing waiting times. The aim is to enhance the provision over the following 12 months to ensure improved outcomes for the emotional and wellbeing of looked after children. |
| 1.06.7 | Promoting the well-being of a looked after child includes the duty to promote their educational achievement. Education stability is key, and all involved with supporting looked after children should encourage and believe in high aspirations and be committed to helping the child to achieve the highest educational outcomes and ambitions comparable to all children. In line with this aspiration a separate report on the educational attainment of LAC has been developed which should be read in conjunction with this report. |
| 1.07 | <u>HOW STABLE AND SECURE ARE THE LIVES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN IN OUR CARE</u> |
| 1.07.1 | Where it is necessary to look after a child, the new Act seeks to achieve greater stability for children by increasing the choice of placements locally, supporting continuation of important relationships and school life, and finding the right permanency solution sooner. |

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| 1.07.2 | Achieving 'permanence' is a key consideration from the time a child becomes looked after, and the Act is clear that care and support plans should include a long term plan for the child's upbringing and how this is to be achieved. Last year's CSSIW inspection was positive about our planning processes for children entering the care process and that all children had a care plan. However, the inspectors found that "the quality of the plan was not consistently forward looking, outcome focused and did not reflect the council's ambition for looked after children." |
| 1.07.3 | As part of our preparations for the new Act a comprehensive training plan has been developed for our staff which includes specific training on i) 'Assessing and Meeting the Needs of Children' and ii) 'LAC and Accommodated Children'. Once this phase of training is complete, a series of action learning sets will be organised to embed the principles and details of the Act into practice, and to highlight areas where existing procedures may need changing in response to new expectations. |
| 1.07.4 | With any plan for permanence finding an appropriate, stable and supportive placement is crucial to supporting LAC to thrive in care. When children and young people enter care there can be a risk of losing regular contact not only with family members but also with friends and other significant people in their lives. |
| 1.07.5 | Careful consideration is given to the appropriateness of placements whether that be through kinship care, fostering, Special Guardianship arrangements or residential care. The quality of the care is central. Whilst our ambition is to support children and young people locally it is not good enough to place a child in a placement within the local authority boundary, if their needs cannot be met, the child is unhappy there, if the placement facilitates unhealthy relationships with people who exert inappropriate influence and behaviours, or if there is an appropriate family member who can appropriate support the child and meeting their needs as part of the extended family network. |
| 1.07.6 | In Flintshire we are fortunate that we have a good fostering service that attracts carers from neighbouring authorities who prefer to foster for Flintshire. We currently have 16 children and young people supported by Flintshire foster carers who live outside Flintshire. We also have 13 children and young people who a living with a relative outside the Flintshire boundary. The decision to make placements outside Flintshire is not taken lightly and we work closely with Education to ensure that school and college links can be maintained. As part of an independent review of social services we will requesting that a specific focus is given to our out of county placement arrangements to see whether there can be any learning applied to help us maximise local stable placements whilst at the same time reducing reliance on independent foster agencies. This work will help to inform a refreshed placement strategy. |
| 1.08 | <u>THE SUPPORT WE PROVIDE TO YOUNG PEOPLR LEAVING CARE</u> |
| 1.08.1 | In Flintshire we have a total of 53 carer leavers up to the age of 25. All of our care leavers have an allocated Personal Advisor (PA) to keep in touch and offer support and advice. We have good performance for keeping in touch with care leavers and are achieving 100% compliance |

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| | <p>with a national performance indicator that measures the percentage of formerly looked after children that we are in contact with when they reach the age of 19.</p> |
| 1.08.2 | <p><u>Support Planning</u></p> <p>For many young people leaving care can be a daunting prospect as they move to independence at an earlier age than many of their peers. Preparation and planning for greater independence is integral to care and support planning throughout the child's looked after period. From the age of 16, a pathway plan should be prepared setting out the young person's aspirations and personal goals, as well as actions for all involved to enable a successful transition to adulthood. Positively a pathway plan has been developed for all the young people who have had a plan due this year.</p> <p>A range of support programmes have been developed for the year that will be run by PA's which include 'Cook and Eat', 'Internet Safety', 'Safety in the Home', and 'Sexual Health'. 3 of the PA's, and some social workers, are trained in advising the young people about safe sex.</p> <p>Following feedback from some care leavers our intention is to undertake work with young people to look at the responsibilities placed in the Act on enhancing the well-being and personal resilience of LAC to ensure they are equipped for independent living and the responsibilities this brings. This includes ensuring that care leavers are clear on the financial support that can be offered by the local authority to help support further education. This will help ensure that care leavers understand their entitlements as well as the limitations within the financial climate that we operate.</p> |
| 1.08.3 | <p><u>Accommodation</u></p> <p>Flintshire cares leavers are treated as priority cases for the allocation of local accommodation. There is close working between Social Services and Housing to plan the provision of accommodation for Care Leavers.</p> <p>50 of the care leavers are in appropriate accommodation which means they are living with parents, have their own tenancy, or are in supported lodgings. There are 3 young people included in this cohort of 50 that are in hospital detained under the Mental Health Act.</p> |
| 1.08.4 | <p>3 young people are in unsuitable accommodation of whom:</p> <p>1 person is in B&B accommodation and has presented homeless as they wish to live with their partner as opposed to remaining with their previous foster parents. Housing and their PA are working together to try and obtain suitable accommodation</p> <p>1 person is in a Guesthouse and is being supported by a neighbouring authority in the area of their choice. The young person will be housed through the local authority housing allocation process.</p> |

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| | <p>1 person is sofa surfing. This person chose to give up their tenancy and move. They then decided to return to Flintshire. They were supported financially to do this and are being supported with meetings with Housing. Hostel accommodation has been offered but this has been refused.</p> |
| 1.08.5 | <p><u>Employment, Education and Training</u></p> <p>Of the 53 young people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 young people work full time • 6 young people are on training courses • 17 young people attend college • 3 young people attend University • 1 young person detained in hospital studying for GCSE's • 1 young person detained in hospital • 2 young people claiming ESA so declared unfit for work/college • 3 young people have childcare responsibilities • 9 are Not in Employment, Education or Training |
| 1.08.6 | <p><u>When I Am Ready</u></p> <p>The new Act creates a new duty for local authorities for young people in foster care who wish to continue living with their foster parents beyond the age of 18. The scheme is called When I Am Ready. The scheme is particularly valuable to provide stability during the transition to adulthood and to enable young people to remain in care as they complete further education and training.</p> <p>The 6 North Wales Local Authorities have been working together to develop the new policies, fee structure, and communication and training materials to implement the scheme. The Scheme offers a real opportunity to extend foster care and through discussions with foster cares and young people we know that at least 3 young people plan to take advantage of this scheme in 2016/17 with an additional 2 young people/foster carers considering the scheme.</p> |
| 1.08.7 | <p><u>Next Steps</u></p> <p>Our proposal is to work with young people and Corporate Parents across the Council, including Elected Members, to refresh our Corporate Parenting Strategy. The refreshed strategy will be developed within the context of the Act and our Improvement Plan priorities for 2016/17.</p> |

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| 2.00 | RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS |
| 2.01 | <p>Corporate Parenting is a core responsibility of everyone. Delivering the commitments contained within the report are within existing human and financial resources.</p> |

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| 3.00 | CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT |
| 3.01 | The draws on feedback from children and young people provided to the Participation Officer at the Participation Forum and to Tros Gynnal Plant. |

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| 4.00 | RISK MANAGEMENT |
| 4.01 | There are no specific risks arising from this report. |

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| 5.00 | APPENDICES |
| 5.01 | Appendix 1: Comparison of Looked After Children Population at 31 March 2015 |

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| 6.00 | LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS |
| 6.01 | None. Contact Office: Craig Macleod, Senior Manager; Children and Workforce Telephone: 01352 701313 E-mail: craig.macleod@flintshire.gov.uk |

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| 7.00 | GLOSSARY OF TERMS |
| 7.01 | <u>Care Leaver</u> Any adult who spent time in care as a child (i.e. under the age of 18). This care would have been approved by the state through a court order or on a voluntary basis. Such care could be in foster care, residential care (mainly children's homes) or other arrangements outside the immediate or extended family. The care could have been provided directly by the state (mainly through local authority social services departments) or by voluntary or private sector organisations. It also includes a wide range of accommodation. For example, it would include secure units, approved schools, industrial schools and other institutions that have a more punitive element than mainstream foster or residential care. |
| 7.02 | <u>Neglect</u> Neglect means a failure to meet a person's basic physical, emotional, social or psychological needs, which is likely to result in an impairment of the person's well-being (for example, an impairment of the person's health). |

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| 7.03 | <p><u>Permanence</u></p> <p>Achieving ‘permanence’ will be a key consideration from the time a child becomes looked after, and the Part 6 care and support plan should set out from the outset how this is to be achieved. Permanence includes emotional permanence (attachment), physical permanence (stability), and legal permanence (who has parental responsibility for the child). Together these give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity).</p> |
| 7.04 | <p><u>Well-Being</u></p> <p>Reference to well-being in the Act means the well-being of an individual who needs care and support or carer who needs support in relation to any of the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical and mental health and emotional well-being • Protection from abuse and neglect • Education, training and recreation • Domestic, family and personal relationships • Contribution made to society • Securing rights and entitlements • Social and economic well-being • Suitability of living accommodation <p>In relation to a child, “well-being” also includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • physical, intellectual, emotional social and behavioral development “welfare” as that word is interpreted for the purposes of the Children Act 1989. |