

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE

9 NOVEMBER 2009

AGENDA ITEM 5

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

On 30 September 2009, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee considered a report requesting a Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Panel. A copy of that report is attached at Annex A.

Members will note from Section 2 of the report that the preferred format for such a Panel is a committee comprising Executive and non-executive Members as well as co-opted members, with the committee reporting direct to Council. Neither a Cabinet or Scrutiny Panel fulfils that role and, whilst the Scrutiny Panel has been formed as an interim measure, it is proposed to establish an advisory committee under Section 102(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 for this purpose.

The proposed terms of reference of such a committee and its composition are contained in Annex B.

RECOMMENDED THAT

The committee approve the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Committee with the composition and terms of reference contained in Annex B and recommend the same to full Council.

Christine Wray
Assistant Director of Law & Administration
November 2009

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

30 September 2009

Request for a Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Panel

1. Introduction

1.1 In Gloucestershire we currently have around 485 looked after children representing a significant increase (around 25%) since April 2008. The council's performance compares favourably relative to many other authorities against Key Performance Indicators and there are some achievements that we should be proud of in relation to our current work. However, outcomes for the majority of our looked after children still fall short of their peers and this gap continues to widen. The recent increase in numbers makes the task of narrowing the gap ever more challenging and emphasises the need to ensure a robust framework is in place to deliver better outcomes.

1.2 The council as a whole is the corporate parent to our looked after children and young people and therefore all councillors and officers have a responsibility to support the Cabinet Member Children and Young People and the Director of Children's Services in discharging their accountability in relation to looked after children and care leavers. Essentially councillors and officers should ask themselves whether the standard of care provided would be good enough for their own children and if not ensure that something is done about it.

1.3 "Care Matters: Time to deliver for Children in Care" has reinforced the message that all council's, and particularly elected members carry responsibility for ensuring good outcomes for children looked after by their authority.

2. Why we need a panel

2.1 Effective corporate parenting is dependent on leadership and governance arrangements being clear. Failure to have clear arrangements in place could jeopardise the achievement of positive outcomes for our looked after children and care leavers.

2.2 New inspection arrangements in place from April 2009 place greater emphasis on outcomes for children in care and the council will need to demonstrate that it is effective in meeting the needs of looked after children.

2.3 Unlike many other authorities we do not have a corporate parenting panel in place. In order to support this work, the Cabinet Member Children and Young People would like to set up a Corporate Parenting Panel which has committee status and stands alone, separate from both Cabinet and Scrutiny, reporting directly to council. However the council's constitution does not allow for this. This has been confirmed by the Monitoring Officer.

2.4 Discussions have taken place as to the merits and demerits of commissioning either a standing Cabinet or Scrutiny Panel. The Cabinet Member does not wish this panel to be aligned to the administration, which excludes a cabinet panel, nor does

Constitution Committee 9 November 2009 Annex A

he wish any member of council to be excluded, as all members are corporate parents, and this excludes a scrutiny panel.

2.5 However it is imperative that we get something in place quickly. We, of course, need to demonstrate good governance arrangements to any inspection team that may arrive (unannounced). More importantly we need to demonstrate to our looked after children and care leavers that we take their care seriously, that we want to narrow the gap between their outcomes and that of their peers, and that we want the same for them as for our own children. In short, that we care for them and want the best for them.

2.6 Therefore it is suggested that in the interim a scrutiny panel is commissioned to begin the work whilst the constitutional arrangements are addressed. It is hoped that changes to the constitution will be received by council on 18 November 2009. The Cabinet Member is supportive of this approach.

2.7 It is expected that the membership of this panel will be proportional as per the constitution. As well as members and officers the panel would also include in its membership looked after children and care leaver representatives, and foster carer representatives. These co-opted members are important in ensuring that the voice(s) of our looked after children is heard and listened to.

2.8 Once the 'stand alone' committee has been established the membership of the panel will be reviewed to determine the inclusion of partner organisations.

Draft terms of reference are attached at annex 1 for information.

3. Recommendations

3.1 OSMC are therefore asked to commission this panel so that this important work can begin.

3.2 It is recommended that the panel is commissioned for 6 months. This time period is suggested in case the constitutional changes are not ready in time for the 18 November 2009 meeting of council.

Andrea Clarke
Senior Scrutiny Adviser
September 2009

**Gloucestershire County Council
Corporate Parenting Panel
Draft Terms of Reference**

Purpose:

1. To ensure the County Council and partner agencies have a joint commitment to achieving improved outcomes.
2. To agree and oversee implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy to drive improved outcomes and narrow the gap.

Work Programme:

3. Scrutinise and monitor outcomes for looked after children and care leavers, including data relating to:
 - LAC performance indicators
 - The care population – admissions and discharges
 - Placements
 - Adoption
 - Staff and foster carer recruitment and retention
 - Accommodation for care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seekers and any other specific groups
 - Fostering Annual Report and Adoption Bi-annual Report
4. Reports on Educational issues affecting looked after children and care leavers, including:
 - Key Stage attainment
 - GCSE and A-Level attainment
 - Other qualifications
 - Comparative data with statistical neighbours
 - Any barriers to improvement
 - Attendance – including exclusions
 - Types of provision
 - Data on progression to Further Education and Higher Education
 - Data relating 16 year olds and care leavers not in employment, education and training
5. Ensuring that the Corporate Parenting agenda is integrated in key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council.
6. Ensuring systems are in place to monitor the quality of our work in relation to looked after children, including the monitoring of complaints from looked after children and their representatives.

Constitution Committee 9 November 2009 Annex A

7. Raise awareness by promoting the role of Members as Corporate Parents.
8. Undertake meetings with looked after children, care leavers, foster carers and front-line staff.
9. Ensuring systems are in place that ensure participation of children and young people in the development of services that affect them.

CORPORATE PARENTING COMMITTEE

The role of the Corporate Parenting Committee is to ensure the County Council and its partner agencies have a joint commitment to

- a) achieving improved outcomes;
- b) agreeing and overseeing implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy to drive improved outcomes; and
- c) narrowing the achievement gap experienced by looked after children.

The Committee is an advisory committee of the County Council and may advise the Council, Cabinet, a Cabinet Member or a Council Committee on matters relating to the Council's looked after children.

Table : The duties of the Corporate Parenting Committee

1.	<p>Scrutinise and monitor outcomes for looked-after children and care leavers, including data relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAC performance indicators; • The care population; admissions and discharges; • Placements; • Adoption; • Staff and foster carer recruitment and retention; • Accommodation for care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seekers and any other specific groups; • Fostering Annual Report and Adoption Bi-annual Report.
2.	<p>Reports on educational issues affecting looked-after children and care leavers, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Stage attainment; • GCSE and A-Level attainment; • Other qualifications; • Comparative data with statistical neighbours; • Any barriers to improvement; • Attendance; including exclusions; • Types of provision; • Data on progression to Further Education and Higher Education; • Data relating to 16 year olds and care leavers not in employment, education and training.
3.	<p>Ensuring that the Corporate Parenting agenda is integrated in key plans, policies and strategies throughout the Council.</p>
4.	<p>Ensuring systems are in place to monitor the quality of the Council's work in relation to looked-after children, including the monitoring of complaints from looked-after children and their representatives.</p>
5.	<p>Raise awareness by promoting the role of Members as Corporate Parents.</p>
6.	<p>Undertake meetings with looked-after children, care leavers, foster carers and front-line staff.</p>

ANNEX B

7.	Make sure systems are in place which ensure participation of children and young people in the development of services that affect them.
----	---

Membership of the Corporate Parenting Committee

9 County Councillors

Up to six co-opted members, who may include, inter alia, looked-after children, foster carers, care leavers and who may be voting Members.

The committee will be politically balanced.

The Chair will be appointed by full Council.