

CABINET MEETING – 23 MARCH 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY SHEET – PART I

Title of Report:

Corporate Parenting Review

Author(s):

Director of Children's Services

Purpose of Report:

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of an external review into the Council's corporate parenting arrangements and to propose a number of changes to the Council's approach.

Description of Decision:

To recommend Council to

- (a) Revise the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board as set out in section 6 of this report, with effect from Annual Council 2021 and
- (b) Subject to (a) above, note and endorse the recommendations of the external review as set out in section 5 of the Report of K Simmons, attached as an Appendix to this report

Alternative options to be considered and recommended to be rejected:

Continuation with the current approach to Corporate Parenting would not meet the requirements of the continuing improvement journey for children, young people and their families in Sunderland.

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

To ensure we meet our obligations for Corporate Parenting for all our cared for children.

Impacts analysed;

Equality Privacy Sustainability Crime and Disorder

Is the Decision consistent with the Council's co-operative values? Yes

Is this a "Key Decision" as defined in the Constitution? Yes

Is it included in the 28-day Notice of Decisions? Yes

CORPORATE PARENTING REVIEW**Report of the Director of Children's Services****1. Purpose of the Report**

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2. Description of Decision (Recommendations)**2.1 To recommend Council to**

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3. Introduction/Background

- 3.1 Corporate parenting is the term used to describe the overarching responsibilities the Local Authority holds for cared for and care experienced children. These responsibilities are and should be expressed both strategically and operationally and should also be clear in the way that the Corporate Parenting Board operates. The Board is a committee of Council and the effectiveness of that Board is used as the litmus test of corporate parenting commitment, from Officers, Elected Members and partners. The Board's leadership is tested as part of the full inspection of Children's Services and as a result informs the overall graded judgement Ofsted make of leadership and management.
- 3.2 Elected Members, Officers for the Council and Together for Children have a mandated responsibility to ensure our cared for children's education, welfare and best interests are paramount. Corporate Parents should treat every child and young person who is cared for as if they are our own (the 'would it be good enough for my child' test) and put their needs at the top of the corporate agenda.
- 3.3 Recognising the importance of having a high functioning Board, that can clearly evidence this ambition, the Chief Executive of the Council and TfC Board Chair agreed to initiate an independent review of the Board by Karen Simmons, who is a former Assistant Director for Safeguarding at Newcastle City Council's Children's Services Department. Ms Simmons has extensive experience of Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting and is currently working for Together for Children as the Fostering Panel Independent Chair.

- 3.4 That review is now complete and Ms Simmons' report is attached as an Appendix to this report.

4. Current Position

- 4.1 In proposing a refreshed model for the Board, the aim is to develop a framework for corporate parenting which is agreed and fully adopted by the City Council and its elected members, Together for Children, partner agencies and cared for children. The intended outcome is to reinforce governance arrangements regarding corporate parenting to evidence that the Corporate Parenting Board is providing effective scrutiny of strategic plans and that as a result the quality of services demonstrates that it is making a difference to the lives of cared for children.
- 4.2 The review has considered how the Corporate Parenting Board currently operates through attendance at a Board meeting, a review of the reports and presentations to the Board and Board minutes. The review has looked at the conduct of other Corporate Parenting Boards across the country which have been identified as examples of good practice.

5. Outcome of the Review

- 5.1 In the best performing Councils, effective corporate parenting is a result of a shared vision, strong leadership, accountability through clear governance arrangements and challenge. As with Sunderland City Council, the majority of Councils have established Corporate Parenting Boards which include elected members and are attended by senior officers, to provide a strategic view of how cared for children and care experienced young people experience services.
- 5.2 This review has considered a range of corporate parenting arrangements across the country and in particular those Councils where their corporate parenting arrangements have been cited as good practice examples or rated highly by Ofsted. Analysis of the better performing Councils indicates that they have the following features in common:

Strategic Ownership | In a number of Councils, where their corporate parenting arrangements were seen as effective, they had a clearly articulated vision which was ambitious about the outcomes they wished to achieve for their children.

Champions | There were examples where elected members, senior officers in the Council and partner agencies proactively championed the needs of cared for children by promoting them as being everyone's business.

Involvement of Cared for Children | The experiences of cared for care experienced young people are an important measure about how well the Council is delivering on its corporate parenting responsibilities.

Structure of Meeting | Largely due to the involvement of cared for children, several Councils had modified the conduct of the Board meeting away from formal reports to presentations.

Involvement of Partners | The attendance of partner agencies is a uniform feature of Corporate Parenting Boards.

Accountability | In all Councils, the Corporate Parenting Board acts as an advisory rather than a decision-making committee. A number of Corporate Parenting Boards provide regular reports to Scrutiny Committee so that there is transparency about the work of the Board and to bring issues regarding corporate parenting into the Council's decision-making structures.

6. Proposals

- 6.1 The recommendations from the review are set out in section 5 of Ms Simmons' report, to which members are referred.
- 6.2 Members will note that it is recommended that the composition of the Board should remain non-partisan and appointed in accordance with political balance principles. While it is for the political groups which have seats on the Board to nominate whichever members they choose for appointment, it is suggested that those appointed should preferably have an interest in children's issues and relevant life or professional experience relevant to the focus of the Board.
- 6.3 It is proposed that the Board remains an advisory committee of the Council, and that it comprises 7 elected members (Lead Member for Children's Services plus 6 other members), appointed in accordance with the political proportionality of the Council, and that the Lead Member for Children's Services will chair the Board. Named substitutes may be appointed for each elected member. In addition, Together for Children may nominate one of its non-executive directors for appointment as a non-voting co-opted member of the Corporate Parenting Board. As co-opted members should be aged 18 or over, it is recommended that rather than co-opt members of the Change Council to the Corporate Parenting Board, the Chair, Vice Chair and one other member of the Change Council have a "standing invitation" to attend meetings of the Board. Additional representatives of the Change Council and other partner organisations may of course be invited to attend and participate in meetings as appropriate.
- 6.4 It is also recommended that each elected member on the Board has responsibility for leading a theme, for example, Cared for Children's Mental Health as identified by the Corporate Parenting work plan and that all elected members (and officers) should undertake regular training on Corporate Parenting to ensure they understand their Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

7. Reasons for the Decision

- 7.1 It is considered that the proposals will contribute to securing optimum arrangements and outcomes for all cared for and care experienced children and young people.

8. Alternative Options

- 8.1 Continuation with the current approach to Corporate Parenting would not meet the requirements of the continuing improvement journey for children, young people and their families in Sunderland.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the report.

10. Legal Implications

- 10.1 The Assistant Director of Law and Governance has been consulted and her comments incorporated in the report.

11. Background Papers

Link to background paper >> [Corporate Parenting Review Document](#)