

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Panel

DATE: 15th April 2015

CONTACT: Kitty Ferris (Assistant Director, Children, Young People and Families)

For all enquiries: (01753) 690901

WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR SCRUTINY**

CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL: ANNUAL REPORT 2014

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report informs Education and Children's Services Scrutiny of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel over 2014 and the progress in implementing the Corporate Parenting Strategy (attached as Appendix 1 to this report).
- 1.2 The report aims to strengthen the roles and responsibilities of corporate parents in improving outcomes for children and young people

2. Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action

That the Panel:

- 2.1 Scrutinise the activities of the Corporate Parenting Panel and assures itself that improving outcomes for looked after children and care leavers is being prioritised by the Council.
- 2.2 That Scrutiny Panel identify any areas of corporate parenting activity that they would wish Corporate Parenting Panel to prioritise for scrutiny in the next municipal year.

3. Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

- 3.1 Improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers contribute to the Wellbeing Strategy priorities:
 - **Health and Well-Being**
 - **Safer Communities**
 - **Economy and Skills**
 - **Regeneration and employment**
 - **Housing**

4. Other Implications

a) Financial

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no human rights or legal implications arising from this report.

c) Equalities Impact Assessment

An equalities impact assessment is not required in relation to this report.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 Looked After Children and Care Leavers are amongst the most vulnerable children and young people in Slough and are children for whom the Council has a particular responsibility as Corporate Parents
- 5.2 The Children Act 1989 and the Leaving Care Act 2000 place clear statutory duties upon the Council to safeguard vulnerable children and promote their wellbeing. This includes achieving good or better outcomes for looked after children and care leavers and providing continued financial and other support to young people who have left care up to the age of 25.
- 5.3 Underpinning corporate parenting there are a wide range of national policies, guidance and regulations. The Ofsted Inspection Framework for children's services includes consideration of services for children in care and care leavers.
- 5.4 In February 2014, Ofsted published its report into its inspection of Slough's children's services, finding that services for looked after children and care leavers were inadequate and adoption performance required improvement.
- 5.5 Ofsted identified as an immediate and priority action: 'Ensure that the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent makes the aspirations and attainment of children in care and the needs and experiences of care leavers, their highest priority. Ensure that this priority is reflected in all partnership agreements, strategies and plans and acted upon as a matter of urgency'.
- 5.6 To support the implementation of this requirement, a Slough Corporate Parenting Strategy was developed and presented to Corporate Parenting Panel at its meeting in March 2014. The Strategy was welcomed by Panel members who also endorsed the principles and objectives set out in the strategy

6 Slough Corporate Parenting Strategy

- 6.1 The Strategy introduced a number of key principles which have guided the development of the Corporate Parenting Panel since their endorsement. The principles are as follows:
- Children and young people, their wishes and feelings, their needs and their safety are at the centre of everything we do. We will always listen to what they

tell us and ensure that they are involved in the decisions that are made about them

- The needs of looked after children are best met if all areas within the council work collectively and in a coordinated way with key partner agencies.
- Wherever possible, we should work collectively to help children and young people be cared for within their own families and provide help at an early point to make this possible
- If parents are unable to care for their children safely, then we will see if there are other people in their family network who could care for them and if there are, we will help them to do this.
- Most looked after children thrive best if they are cared for in foster families who live in Slough or nearby. Some will thrive better if they live in children's homes or other more specialist settings. We will match the placement to the needs of the child.
- Maintaining relationships, continuity of practitioners and stability of placement are key to helping children reach their potential
- Continuity of school placement, attending school regularly, attending a good school and being helped appropriately to succeed at school underpin looked after children reaching their potential
- In order to reach their potential, looked after children must have their physical and emotional health needs met

6.2. The Strategy also set out a number of objectives which the Corporate Parenting panel are committed to achieving over the 2 years of the strategy.

- Elected members have a clear understanding of their corporate parenting role and responsibilities and the needs and circumstances of looked after children and care leavers in Slough
- Corporate parenting responsibilities are reflected in all aspects of the work of the council, its policies and decisions
- All Directorates will reflect the council's corporate parenting responsibilities in their plans and identify key actions which will help them deliver improved outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. This will include raising employee awareness; HR policies that support employees to become foster or adoptive parents; employment and work experience opportunities; policies and service delivery that promotes access to services for looked after children, care leavers and their carers; working collaboratively with children's services to improve outcomes and deliver care plans.

- To ensure good outcomes through effective multi-agency partnership working which is led by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership through the priorities and actions set out in the Children and Young People's Plan
- Improve communication and engagement between looked after children and care leavers, officers and elected members and ensure participation and inclusion so that young people are influential and have a say in decisions that affect their lives
- Monitor and scrutinise progress in meeting the commitments set out in the Pledge

7 Work of the Corporate Parenting Panel in 2014.

- 7.1 The Panel has been chaired by Councillor Mann who is the Lead Member for Children and has met 6 times over the course of 2014.
- 7.2 A key proposal within the Strategy was that membership of the Panel would include two representatives from the Slough Children in Care Council to represent the views of looked after children and care leavers. Following the endorsement of this proposal by Panel, consultation took place with the Children in Care Council and preparation work was undertaken by the Participation and Engagement Officer and the Head of Service (Child Protection and Looked After Children). As part of the preparation, presentations by looked after children were made to the Corporate Parenting Panel at its meetings in July and September. This was in addition to regular updates to Corporate Parenting Panel on the work of the Children in Care Council. The inclusion of representatives of the Children in Care Council as full members of the Corporate Parenting Panel took place at the meeting of the Panel in March 2015.
- 7.3. A further key proposal was that the Panel should receive reports from services; partners and other bodies with responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers. As a consequence over the course of 2014 the Panel has received reports from the Virtual School, the Looked After Children Health Team (Berkshire Health Care Foundation Trust) who attended Panel on two occasions and receives regular reports from the Family Placement Service on fostering and adoption.
- 7.4 The Panel has also received regular progress reports on the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Transformation Programme (established following the 2013 Ofsted Inspection to ensure that progress was made in improving outcomes for looked after children and care leavers). The Transformation Board includes cross-Council representation to ensure that all Council services prioritise Looked After Children and Care Leavers. This has formed a key part of the Panel work programme. The Panel have endorsed the pilot (which has just begun) for the 'Team around You' approach which is designed to place the child at the centre of care planning and brings together those practitioners that have a key role in

transforming outcomes. The pilot will inform the future design of services for looked after children and young people on the edge of care.

- 7.5 The Panel also receives regular performance reports on key performance indicators for looked after children. A commentary on December 2014 performance for key indicators is attached as Appendix 2.
- 7.6 Some key developments over the course of 2014 which have been monitored by the Corporate Parenting Panel include a revised pledge for children in care, a care leavers charter, the development of a web-site for looked after children and an information guide for care leavers (published in March 2015), a Foster Carer survey and a 'Sufficiency Strategy' for looked after children
- 7.7 At its final meeting of 2014 (November), the Corporate Parenting Panel resolved to move to quarterly meetings in 2015 (in line with the Corporate Parenting Strategy) and a new work plan for the 2015/16 municipal year is being developed, in line with the strategy.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel has approved a Corporate Parenting Strategy for Slough in 2014 and has revised its programme in line with this strategy

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Slough Corporate Parenting Strategy

Appendix 2 – Performance Commentary