

Wiltshire Council

Annual Council

17 May 2011

Annual Report of the Corporate Parenting Panel

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report forms the annual update to Council from the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Panel comprises 12 Members as nominated by Group Leaders:

Councillors Jane Burton, Paul Darby, Andrew Davis, Lionel Grundy, Russell Hawker, Jon Hubbard, Alan Macrae, Laura Mayes, Helen Osborn, Sheila Parker (Chairman), Pip Ridout and Bridget Wayman (Vice Chairman).

Sheila Parker is the Portfolio Holder for Vulnerable Children and Lionel Grundy is the Cabinet Member for Children's Services.

- 2.2 The new Wiltshire Council commenced on 1 April 2009 and the CPP was reappointed after the Council elections in June 2009. The Panel met on 8 September 2009 and have continued to meet a minimum of 5 times a year. Some of the meetings have been held at non Council venues and at times later in the day to enable the involvement of young people.
- 2.3 The Lead Officer (since 14 October 2010) is Karen Reid (Virtual School Headteacher) and prior to that it was Lin Hitchman (Head of Children in Care).
- 2.4 The meetings are regularly attended by the following Officers:
- Jackie Chipping (Children in Care Policy Officer), Sharon Davies (Service Director, Children and Families Social Care and Integrated Youth Service), Damian Haasjes (Voluntary Sector Youth Development Co-Ordinator), Lin Hitchman (Head of Children in Care), Karen Reid (Virtual School Headteacher) and Liza Ware (Children's Rights Officer). Other Officers attend to present particular report, e.g. Reducing Offending Behaviour.

- 2.5 All Councillors are CRB checked and the majority of members on the CPP have now completed the 2 day specialist Total Respect training which is co-facilitated by both adult and young trainers. The young trainers are all care experienced and have all completed the Open College Network (OCN) accredited 'Train the Trainers' course. The course aims to raise awareness of the issues faced by children and young people in care and to promote their involvement in all aspects of social care.
- 2.6 For all other Councillors in their role as Corporate Parents, a condensed one day version of the Total Respect training will be held on 2 June 2011. This is a very important training session and all Councillors are urged to attend.
- 2.7 Panel members have attended briefing sessions given by Officers on the legislation in relation to children in care. Further sessions will be run in the future.
- 2.8 Each member of the Panel has their own copy of a 'Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice' which is a handbook for Councillors published by the National Children's Bureau.
- 2.9 All Panel members are invited to attend events involving Looked After Children and Young People, which take place throughout the year. These include the Annual Achievement Awards (see paragraph 3.1, BBQ's and the Christmas party).
- 2.10 There is a consistently high level of attendance and engagement by Councillors at the CPP meetings with a strong commitment to improving the services Wiltshire Council provides for its Looked After Children and Young People.

3. Key Improvements and Achievements in the Past 18 months

- 3.1 A number of Panel members attended the Looked After Children Achievement Awards held in October 2010. This annual event celebrates the achievements and successes of Looked After Children and Young People. All nominees are recognised with an Achievement Award and 10 additional Special Awards are given for outstanding achievement.
- 3.2 The awards are based on the Every Child Matters outcomes, as detailed below:
- Being Healthy – i.e. physical, mental and emotional health, sexual health and making healthy lifestyle choices.
 - Stay Safe – i.e. coping/resolving bullying problems, avoiding harmful situations etc.

- Enjoy and Achieve – i.e. starting a new school positively, coping with transitions, having good attendance, increased participation, progress in academic achievement, good results in exams, etc.
 - Make a Positive Contribution – i.e. engaging in decision making, helping others, positive behaviour in and out of school, developing good relationships, successfully dealing with change, etc.
 - Achieve Economic Wellbeing – i.e. engaging in further education, employment or training, showing readiness for employment, coping with independent/supported living, etc.
- 3.3 Panel members are now involved in regular visits to Wiltshire Council's Children's Home, Canon's House. These visits are part of the monthly monitoring undertaken by The Children in Care Policy Officer, Jackie Chipping. A Panel member accompanies Jackie and reports back to the Panel.
- 3.4 The Chairman of CPP attends the Children in Care Council on a regular basis to seek the views of young people.
- 3.5 The current format for Panel meetings is to receive formal reports from Officers covering the whole range of issues and aspects of the Care system. Performance data, service provision, plans for improvement and feedback from young people are the means by which Panel members are able to advise on further developments and improvements. Topics include: education and those not in education, employment or training; health; placements; adoption; fostering; the Ofsted process and the transition to adult services.
- 3.6 A clear process for planning full Panel meetings is now in place, which involves the Chairman of CPP, Service Director and Lead Officer in ensuring that Officers' reports are checked and signed off, the agenda is confirmed with all relevant parties and pre-brief sessions highlight any particular items for celebration and or challenge at the Panel meetings.
- 3.7 Both the Adoption and Fostering Ofsted inspections of August 2010 judged these services to be Good overall with Enjoying and Achieving receiving an Outstanding judgement in each one.
- 3.8 Canon's House received an Outstanding judgement in the Ofsted inspection of February 2011, the seventh in a row.
- 3.9 The CPP members have been fully supportive of the major restructure of Children and Families Social Care Section which has been implemented over the past eighteen months. With the new structure now embedded, there is evidence of improved performance in areas such as the number of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation and those in education, employment and training. There are now dedicated teams, practitioners and Heads of Service to ensure that the young people receive the best possible service when they leave care which is a direct result of the restructure and a significant development.

4. Challenges and Solutions

- 4.1 The Children in Care Council whilst in its infancy, was highlighting issues for children and young people in care. However, this was in isolation and with no clear route to the CPP. Councillors were feeling remote from the young people for whom they are corporate parents and the Panel's view of service provision was not reflected in the young people's Pledge. As Councillors each attended the full Total Respect programme, they increasingly reported that the training 'brought home' the issues and challenges that children and young people in care face on a daily basis. They then reflected on their roles and responsibilities and there was a consensus that Councillors wanted to involve young people more directly in the work of the Panel.
- 4.2 The Pledge is the commitment of the CPP to the Looked After Children and Young People and was drawn up through a consultation event with the Young People of the Children in Care Council. They requested that the CPP make this a Promise, therefore it is renamed as such in our documentation. (See Appendix 1 – The Promise).
- 4.3 A workshop event was held in September 2010 in a venue outside of County Hall and a number of young people attended and led part of the programme in discussion of issues and action planning. This was a successful integration of Councillors, Officers and representatives of the Children in Care Council.
- 4.4 A second workshop, held in October 2010 highlighted in an even more pronounced way, that the Panel members wished to be more actively and directly involved with the young people in making the Promise a reality in practice. It was agreed to set up a Working Group to come up with a format to enable the Panel to work more closely with the Young People.
- 4.5 The Working Group reported back to the Panel with a proposal for a new format for future meetings. The recommendations of the Working Group also clarified roles and responsibilities of Councillors and the Panel as a whole.
- 4.6 These proposals were unanimously agreed by the Panel and the new format will start in June 2011.
- 4.7 The Working Group explored:
 - The best way in which the Panel meetings could be run to incorporate and reflect the views of Looked After Children and Young People;
 - Clarifying the roles and responsibilities for Councillors as Corporate Parents; and

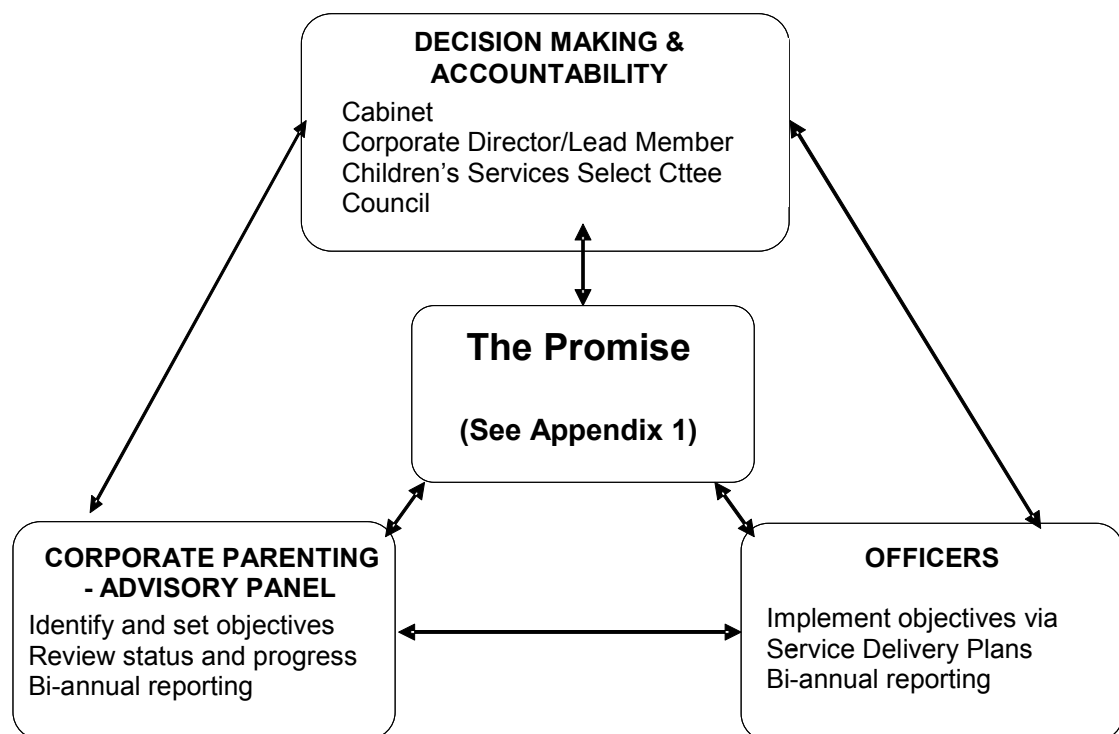
- Increasing the range of ways in which Councillors could be more proactively involved.

4.8 The Working Group comprised Councillors Jon Hubbard, Alan Macrae and Sheila Parker and Karen Reid (Virtual School Headteacher), Jackie Chipping (Children in Care Policy Officer) and Liza Ware (Children’s Rights Officer). Young people representatives were invited to attend but were not able to.

4.9 The Working Group met on 3 occasions and considered the young people’s involvement, the style of the existing meetings, the makeup of the Panel and governance issues by understanding fully the issues highlighted within the Promise.

4.10 Ian Gibbons (Solicitor to the Council) confirmed to the Group that the Panel is an Advisory panel and not a Committee of the Council. The Panel can therefore make recommendations but has no decision making powers. The Corporate Director for Children’s Services is the lead decision maker.

4.11 The Working Group recommended that the new model (shown below) should have the Promise at its centre in order that in representing Wiltshire Council as a body of corporate parents, the Panel ensures that young people are influencing improvements in service provision.



4.12 The following are key points to note about the new format:

- The core membership will remain as 12 Councillors with additional key Officers of the Council becoming Panel members too;

- There will be 5 meetings of the Panel per year, as now;
- Future Panel meetings will have two parts, the first part being formal to consider governance issues, formal reports and performance data, etc. The second part will be less formal and take a specific issue to be explored through a facilitated workshop with group discussions.
- Two Young People representatives of the Children in Care Council are to be invited to attend the workshops and will become co-opted members of the Panel. As these young people will be consistent members of the Panel they will represent the broad views of children and young people. It will however be possible for other young people to join any workshop should there be a topic of particular interest for them.
- Each workshop will focus on a specific topic, highlighted in the Promise. Discussions will take place at the workshop and Panel members will take on a variety of tasks to research before the next Panel meeting.
- These research workshops will be open to all Councillors and relevant Councillors and Officers may be asked to attend to participate in the discussion to increase understanding of the issues, the wider implications and ultimately, to improve service provision for Looked After Children and Young People.
- Timing of meetings will be planned to enable attendance at the workshops of young people who are coming from school or college and perhaps travelling from across the County. Therefore the meetings will generally be in the afternoons, with the workshop taking place after refreshments. Councillors will opt to remain for the workshop or leave after the formal meeting. It is hoped that as many as possible participate in the workshops on each occasion.
- Meeting locations will perhaps be outside of County Hall in order that they are conducive to working with young people, have break-out areas for group tasks and where there are facilities for refreshments.

5. Further Developments

- 5.1 It is the aim of the CPP to ensure that all Councillors are aware of their responsibility as corporate parents to Wiltshire's Looked After Children and Young People. In order to fulfil their role, Councillors should participate in the Total Respect training programme, which has been condensed for this purpose, to one day. (See Appendix 2 – Extract from the Council's Constitution – Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors in relation to Corporate Parenting).

- 5.2 It is expected that Councillors, particularly portfolio holders, attend the workshops relevant to their area of responsibility, in order that they are directly involved in the discussions about issues affecting Looked After Children and Young People and can be part of the solutions and improvements.
- 5.3 The Panel is about to undertake preparation for the Ofsted Announced Safeguarding and Looked After Children inspection for which the Department of Children and Education will receive about 10 days' notice. A focus group will be fully briefed and up to date with all aspects of children in care.

In conclusion:

- 5.4 The CPP in Wiltshire is changing and we are looking forward to our new way of working. We will be more proactive in finding out if policy is indeed best practice; we will be engaging more directly with Young People; we will be more involved, as Councillors, Officers and Young People in ensuring that we hold true to our Promise and we will celebrate our successes as well as challenge anything less than excellence.

6. Main Considerations for the Council

- 6.1 The Council is asked to note the work of the CPP to date and to become involved in the new style of meetings in their role as Corporate Parents.

7. Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8. Equalities Impact of the Proposal

- 8.1 The proposals seek to bring Councillors and Officers to work together to ensure that our Looked After Children receive the best services possible and have a voice within the Council.

9. Risk Assessment

- 9.1 Panel Members are required to have a CRB check undertaken every 3 years and Risk Assessments will be drawn up for when visits are made to vulnerable children and when Councillors attend Officer Team Meetings, etc.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1 Expenses for young people participating in the CPP will be paid for from the Children in Care budget.

11. Legal Implications

- 11.1 Ian Gibbons (Solicitor to the Council) has confirmed that the Panel is an Advisory panel and not a Committee of the Council; it can therefore make recommendations but not decisions. Carolyn Godfrey, the Corporate Director for Children's Services is the lead decision maker.

12. Proposal

- 12.1 To receive and note the Annual Report and ratify the improvements required to strengthen Corporate Parenting in Wiltshire.

Sharon Davies (Service Director, Children and Families Social Care and Integrated Youth Service)

Report Author: Karen Reid (Virtual School Headteacher)

Date of report: 3 May 2011

Background Papers

None

Appendices

Appendix 1: The Promise

Appendix 2: Extract from Part 12 of the Council's Constitution – Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors in relation to Corporate Parenting

The Promise

We Promise:

Being in Care

- A choice of when to move on from care.
- To try not to separate brother and sisters (however, if this is not possible, try to ensure brother's and sister's placements are close together and allow contact).
- To allow looked after children and young people to be involved in the choice of their placement from the start.
- To find a place where you feel comfortable and 'at home' and can stay until the end of your time in care.

Listening to Looked After Children and Young People

- To listen to your views and act on them.
- To provide a social worker you can rely on who keeps to meetings, gives clear information, is honest and responds when needed.
- Make looked after children and young people aware of their rights and to train others in the rights of looked after children and young people.
- To ensure that young people are involved in the creation and regular review of all care plans.

Support

- Better help getting into school whatever has happened.
- To provide support so looked after children and young people can see their family (i.e. transport)
- To use reliable transport for young people.
- To organise group activities for young people in care and those leaving care.
- That if bullying arises for any looked after child or young person it will be dealt with quickly and efficiently.
- To support young people in care to find training, education or a job that suits them when they leave school.

Extract from Part 12 of the Constitution – Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors

6. Principal roles

6.5 To fulfil your responsibilities as a “corporate parent” for children and young people in the care of the local authority

- by having an understanding of the profile and needs of the children in the care of the local authority
- by being aware of the impact on looked-after children of all council decisions
- by considering whether this would be good enough for your own child
- by ensuring that action is taken to address shortcomings in the service and to improve outcomes for looked-after children.
- by being aware of the work and aims of the corporate parenting panel and, if nominated by your group leader, attend meetings of the corporate parenting panel as a committee member

6.6 The council has established a Corporate Parenting Panel, whose role is to secure councillor involvement and commitment throughout the council to deliver better outcomes for children and young people who are looked after. The terms of reference now follow:

Part 12.1 – Role and Function of the Corporate Parenting Panel

Composition

The Corporate Parenting Panel will comprise up to 12 elected councillors nominated by group leaders

Role and Function

To secure councillor involvement and commitment throughout the council to deliver better outcomes for children and young people who are looked after.

To ensure that corporate parenting is a key mechanism by which councillors and officers can ensure that for children and young people in its care, Wiltshire Council is providing:

- warm, welcoming and safe accommodation
- high quality care, nurturing supportive and meaningful relationships that encourage the growth of self-esteem, confidence and resilience, enabling young people to cope with change and difficult times
- the highest standard of education for all and consistent with the needs and abilities of the child
- opportunities and encouragement for self-development and keeping fit and healthy

- encouragement to take up hobbies, acquiring life skills and being a good citizen
- assistance with transition from care to looking after themselves, including the provision of suitable accommodation
- placement stability that will avoid disruption and maintain continuity of care, education placements and relationships.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will:

- undertake regular monitoring of the outcomes associated with these priorities
- make a commitment to prioritising the needs of looked-after children and young people and their carers
- receive reports from the Children in Care Council and act on their views
- provide clear strategic and political direction in relation to corporate parenting
- show ambition and aspirations for all looked-after children and care leavers
- ensure that all councillors and Wiltshire Council departments are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents proactively. This may involve, for example, the Corporate Parenting Panel organising specific education and training events for all members to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to be corporate parents
- receive regular/annual reports on the level and quality of services to looked-after children and care leavers
- promote achievement and acknowledge the aspirations of children and young people looked after by supporting celebration events
- investigate on behalf of all councillors ways in which the role of corporate parenting can be improved, using examples from other local authorities
- listen to the views of children, young people and their carers to involve them in the assessment and development of services
- engage with children and young people who are looked after, or have left care, by inviting them to act as advisers to the Panel
- meet with government inspectors, where appropriate, for their input into inspections
- anticipate as members of the adoption and fostering panel
- champion the provision of council-based work experience placements and apprenticeships for looked after young people
- agree a work plan, review progress, membership of the panel and attainment of its role and terms of reference and report to the Cabinet and Children's Services Select Committee as appropriate, and in any case to the Full Council annually.