

30 October 2007

**CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE IN WILTSHIRE**

Executive Summary

Improving the outcomes for children in care is a key priority of the central government agenda. The recently published White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change' refers to the role of the 'Corporate Parent'; the 'care experience'; delivery of a first class education; promotion of health and well-being and the transition to adulthood as key themes.

The aim to produce and publish a Corporate Parenting Policy in Wiltshire is therefore very timely and provides an underpinning policy framework to enable the Council to take forward the expectations of the White Paper.

The Corporate Parenting Group has been considering the development of a Policy since November 2006. A draft policy was produced in May 2007 and has been considered by a range of Member and Officer groups. The current draft reflects this and has taken account of work on corporate parenting nationally.

Proposal

That Cabinet supports and endorses the production of a Corporate Parenting Policy and recommends the policy's adoption by Council.

Reasons For Proposals

Legislation and guidance following on from the Children Act 1989 emphasises the Local Authority's role as 'Corporate Parent' to children and young people in care. This duty is further reinforced in the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change' (June 2007). The existence of a Wiltshire policy statement serves to support the Council's commitment to this duty of care.

CAROLYN GODFREY
Director, Department for Children & Education

CABINET
30 October 2007

**COPORATE PARENTING POLICY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE IN WILTSHIRE**

Purpose of Report

1. To present Cabinet Members with the proposed Corporate Parenting Policy for Looked After Children and Young People (LACYF) in Wiltshire.

Background

2. In the Autumn of 2006 the Government published a Green Paper for consultation 'Care Matters: Transforming the lives of Children & Young People in Care'. This document set out the case for improving the outcomes for children in care and included a range of proposals to this end. Key themes centred on the role of the Corporate Parent; better placements and placement choice; a 'first class' education; a happy and fulfilled childhood outside school and transition to adult life. Wiltshire responded to the consultation and participated in a regional consultation event organised by Government Office.
3. Since November 2006 the Corporate Parenting Group has been considering the role of 'corporate parent' and the approach which should be adopted in fulfilling the Council's responsibilities to looked after children and young people in Wiltshire. Initially this resulted in the development of terms of reference and working arrangements. Further consideration of the issues resulted in the production of a draft Corporate Parenting Policy in May 2007.
4. Activity to support this task has included a seminar to consider the roles and responsibilities of Elected Members (February 2007); detailed consideration of the issues at the March and May 2007 meetings of the Corporate Parenting Group; attendance by the Lead Member for Children & Families and officers at a national conference on Corporate Parenting (April 2007) and the development of a draft policy document (May 2007).
5. Subsequently there has been consultation with a number of groups within the Council. These included the Looked After Children & Young People Forum; the Corporate Leadership Team; an awareness raising presentation by the Lead Member for Children & Families to full Council on 10 July and consideration by the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

6. The Policy document, as written, provides a framework for approaching the corporate parenting task. It seeks to highlight:
 - the role of Members and their responsibilities
 - the need for effective strategy and leadership
 - the need to ensure a focus on this vulnerable group
7. In June 2007 the Government published the White Paper 'Care Matters : Time for Change'. This sets out the Government's intentions towards improving outcomes for children in care based on the responses to the original Green Paper. The main themes remain consistent and will form a basis for taking forward Wiltshire's aspirations as corporate parents. An outline of the White Paper requirements was considered by the Corporate Parenting Group in September. It is considered that the Corporate Parenting Policy as it stands provides an underpinning policy document which is complemented by the themes in the White Paper.
8. A detailed implementation plan is due to be published and will set out detailed plans for implementing the White Paper and timescales for achieving this. Additional resources will be made available to Local Authorities in the period 2008-2011. Confirmation of the allocation for Wiltshire is still awaited at the time of writing this report.

Proposal

9. Cabinet is requested to endorse the policy document and to recommend the policy's adoption by Council in November.

CAROLYN GODFREY

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CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY

RAISING THE LIFE CHANCES OF

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

**WILTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND EDUCATION**

OCTOBER 2007

RAISING THE LIFE CHANCES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A vital aspect to improving outcomes for children and young people looked after by Wiltshire County Council is to develop Councillors' roles and responsibilities as corporate parents.
- 1.2 Effective strategy and leadership are necessary in order to establish the priority being given by the Council and the quality of planning, resources and support being brought to focus on this vulnerable group of children and young people.
- 1.3 This policy will help to enable and support councillors to meet their responsibilities as corporate parents efficiently, effectively and energetically by providing information on the issues for looked after children and young people and to focus on what really matters for them.
- 1.4 The fundamental aim is to ensure that councillors have an understanding about children and young people in care, and that young people know about councillors' responsibilities and can hold them to account. However the most important activity is a consistent detailed focus on the children and young people themselves.

2. Policy Intentions

- 2.1 This policy draws on good practice from other Councils and various publications. It is intended to:
 - (a) Provide a clear framework to support the Council's commitment to promote better outcomes for looked after children and young people consistent with the aspiration of 'Care Matters – Time for Change' (White Paper published June 2007)

(b) Raise the profile of Members' corporate parenting responsibilities

(c) Provide a platform for future policy development through consultation

(d) Underpin the actions to be taken by Members and each Council Directorate in fulfilling the responsibilities of a good corporate parent and contributing to the improvement agenda for looked after children and young people.

(e) Secure commitment to the development of a robust corporate parenting approach in Wiltshire.

3. Children and Young People Looked After

3.1 Children and young people who are looked after are those children and young people who, because of their circumstances, are cared for by the local authority. They are in care because they may have been abused and/or neglected and some are at high risk of:

- Poor health

- Low educational attainment

- Getting into trouble

- Homelessness

- Teenage pregnancy

- Dependency on:
 - drugs
 - alcohol
 - tobacco

3.2 The Council has high aspirations to improve outcomes and to support achievement. As a group, looked after children and young people have a normal range of distribution of abilities, and with the right experiences and environments being made available, their life chances can be significantly improved.

3.3 Corporate parenting measures will be considered as part of statutory inspections of children's services, in particular through the Annual Performance Assessment and as part of each Joint Area Review. All statutory inspection of children's services will include an examination of how well the groups are served and how this is reflected in the five Every Child Matters outcomes and what their subjective experience of services has been.

3.4 *Every Child Matters - Change for Children* sets out the five outcomes that are most important for children and young people:

- **Be Healthy**

- **Stay Safe**

- **Enjoy and Achieve**

- **Make a Positive Contribution, and**

- **Achieve Economic Well-Being**

3.5 These are universal ambitions for every child and young person, whatever their background or circumstances but it is acknowledged that there are significant challenges for those in care.

4. Coordination and creating accountability

4.1 The Council has a legal obligation to be a corporate parent to those children and young people who the authority is looking after and those who have left care. (The legal background to corporate parenting is described in Appendix A).

4.2 Corporate parenting emphasises the collective responsibility of local authorities to achieve good parenting and in broad terms, the whole Council is expected to do what any good parent would do to promote their children's educational aspirations, ensure their child's health and safety and support their achievements in life.

4.3 Lead responsibility for implementing the Children Act, 2004 rests with the Department for Children & Education of Wiltshire County Council and at a corporate level with all Councillors of the County Council. Other Council Directorates have an obligation to support corporate parenting. External partner agencies such as Health Trusts, District Councils and the children's voluntary sector can also play an important role.

4.4 These various services need to be coordinated and focused on providing care and services that support and encourage children and young people that the Council looks after. Responsibility for this coordination rests at a corporate level with Councillors who will hold senior staff accountable for the implementation of corporate parenting strategies and engage directly with children and young people and their carers. This policy sets how this role can be fulfilled.

4.5 Depending on the legal status the corporate parent may share the parenting role with their child or young person's birth parents. Parents usually retain or share the legal responsibility, even when the Council is looking after the child or young person.

4.6 The corporate parent also works with the child or young person's carers (foster carers/residential workers in children's homes) and with the responsible staff in the Department for Children and Education (the child or young person's social worker or leaving care worker).

CORPORATE PARENTING GROUP

The Corporate Parenting Group will consist of elected members who will oversee the performance and quality of services for children in care, on behalf of all Councillors acting as corporate parents. Membership of the group will not exceed 12 with tasks delegated to sub-groups of the group where agreed.

The group will identify what needs to change to achieve better outcomes based on Wiltshire Children's and Young People's Plan and the Local Area Agreement.

Officers will support the work of the Group.

Listening to and consulting with children looked after and care leavers will be a key strand of activity. The Corporate Parenting Group will be assisted by the Children's Rights Service (Voice), in the task of engaging with children and young people.

The Corporate Parenting Group will meet bi-monthly. It will identify key areas across the Council's services where it wishes to see an improvement in the outcomes for children and young people looked after and will make proposals for improvement.

The Corporate Parenting Group will make proposals to the Cabinet Member for Children & Families.

CORPORATE PARENTING GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

To secure member involvement and commitment throughout the Council to deliver better outcomes for children and young people looked after.

To ensure that corporate parenting is a key mechanism by which members and officers can ensure that for children and young people in its care, Wiltshire County 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.

This will be achieved by the Corporate Parenting Group:

- Undertaking regular monitoring of the outcomes associated with these priorities.
- Making a commitment to prioritising the needs of looked after children and young people and their carers.
- Providing clear strategic and political direction in relation to corporate parenting.
- Showing ambition and aspirations for all looked after children and care leavers.
- Ensuring that all councillors and Wiltshire County Council Departments are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents proactively. This may involve, for example, the Corporate Parenting Group organising specific education and training events for all members to ensure they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to be corporate parents.
- Receiving 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.
- Investigating on behalf of all councillors ways in which the role of corporate parenting can be improved, using examples from other local authorities.

- Listening to the views of children, young people and their carers to involve them in the assessment and development of services.
- Engaging with children and young people who are looked after or have left care by inviting them to act as advisers to the Group.
- Meeting with Government inspectors where appropriate for their input into inspections such as the Children's Joint Area Review (JAR), Annual Performance Assessment (APA), fostering/ adoption and children's homes.
- Participating as members of the adoption and fostering panel.
- To champion the provision of Council based work experience placements and apprenticeships for looked after young people.
- Agreeing a work plan, reviewing progress, membership of the Group and attainment of its role and terms of reference and reporting annually on progress and activity to the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

APPENDIX A

CORPORATE PARENTING - LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE

Children and young people can be cared for either by voluntary agreement with their parent(s) or after court proceedings where there is concern that if they do not live away from their families they may be significantly harmed, their health and development may be damaged or they have a disability. This can be from any age from birth to 18. If they were in care at or after their 16th birthday (care leavers) the local authority retains a responsibility for them as a good parent until they reach their 25th birthday.

Section 22 of the Children Act, 1989 provides the basis for the Council's role as Corporate Parent to children and young people in its care. It requires the whole Council to safeguard and promote their welfare. Section 27 of the same Act puts a responsibility on the Council to request other authorities or agencies to assist them in that task. With effect from 1 July 2005 the new duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of looked after children came into force. Section 52 of the Children Act, 2004 extends section 22(3) of the Children Act, 1989 so that local authorities must give particular attention to the educational implications of any decisions about the welfare of looked after children. This duty is supported by extensive statutory and good practice guidance.

The legal duty is development in various guidance and advice for example:

- *“Quality Protects: Transforming Children’s Services – The Role & Responsibilities of Councillors” Letter from Frank Dobson to all Councillors, 21 September 1998*
- *The Education of Children and Young People in Public Care, DfES/DH 2000.*

- *Show Me How I Matter, A guide to the education of looked after Children for overview and scrutiny committees to use* LGA/I&DeA, 2005.
- *If This Were My Child ... A councillor's Guide to being a good Parent*, LGiU/DfES, 2003.

'*If This Were My Child*' outlines the responsibilities of councillors as Corporate Parents. Amongst its messages it stresses the need for robust structures to oversee corporate parenting across the whole council.

"If this were My Child states':

- The councillors have a clear responsibility to ensure that the services being provided to children in their care are of the highest quality.
- The councillors have no greater responsibility than when they act as corporate parent.
- That the role of councillors is crucial not just in drawing up policies, but in setting standards and seeing that they are met.
- Councillors should be involved in the setting of a vision and strategic objectives for looked after children and young people.

APPENDIX B

Key Terms

1. “Children in the Council’s Care” (often referred to as ‘looked after children)

Children in the care of the council through a care order made by a court or voluntary agreement with their parent/s. They may be looked after in a children’s home, by foster carers, or other family members.

2. “Children in need”

A wider group of children who need the help of services to achieve a reasonable standard of health or development. This group includes children with disabilities, looked after children and children on the child protection register.

3. “Children at risk of harm”

These are children about whom there are concerns that they are or may be at risk of suffering harm through abuse or neglect. The council will maintain a child protection register of the names of children who are the subject of a child protection plan because of continuing concerns about their safety. This will closely monitor their safety and developmental progress.

APPENDIX C

THE GOVERNMENT'S EXPECTATIONS OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AS CORPORATE PARENT

The Government expects Children's Services Authorities to:-

- (a) provide care, a home, access to health, education and other public services to which all children are entitled according to their needs
- (b) provide a mixture of care and firmness to support the child's development, and be the tolerant, dependable and available partner in the adult/child relationship even in the face of disagreements
- (c) protect and educate the child against the perils and risks of life, by encouraging constructive and appropriate friendships, and discouraging destructive and harmful relationship
- (d) celebrate and share their children's achievements, supporting them when they are down
- (e) recognise and respect their growth and independence, being tolerant and supportive if they make mistakes
- (f) provide consistent support and be available to provide advice and practical help when needed.
- (g) advocate their cause and trouble-shoot on their behalf when necessary
- (h) be ambitious for them and encourage and support their efforts to get on and reach their potential, whether through education, training or employment
- (i) provide occasional financial support, remember birthdays and Christmas or annual celebrations within the individual's child's religion or culture
- (j) encourage and enable appropriate contact with family members - parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and brothers and sisters.
- (k) help them to feel part of the local community through contact with neighbours and local groups
- (l) be proactive, not passive, when there are known or suspect serious difficulties

Drawn from the "Quality Protects: Transforming Children's Services – The Role & Responsibilities of Councillors" Letter from Frank Dobson to all Councillors, 21 September 1998

NB: The Children Act 2004 placed an additional duty on local authorities (as corporate parents) to promote the educational achievement of children in care.