

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Policy and Resources Committee - 9 June 2008

**REPORT ON: Dundee City Council Corporate Parenting
Policy In Respect Of Looked After Children**

REPORT BY: Director of Social Work

REPORT NO: 270 - 2008

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report advises members of the Policy and Resources Committee of the needs of children and young people who are looked after by Dundee City Council. It provides details of an updated policy framework in respect of corporate parenting and outlines the responsibilities of a corporate parent. The report also provides recommendations in respect of money that has been provided by the Scottish Government.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Policy and Resources Committee:

- 2.1 Adopt the updated corporate parenting policy framework which will enhance the decision making and scrutiny of elected members for children and young people who are looked after.
- 2.2 Note the proposed spend of the Scottish Government funding allocated specifically to support and improve councils' activity around raising and sustaining awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities and building capacity across the corporate parent though more effective and better partnership working and commissioning of services.
- 2.3 Encourage each local authority department to consider its role in respect of being a corporate parent.
- 2.4 Delegate responsibility to the Chair of the Strategic Planning group, children's services to ensure that the corporate parenting agenda is owned and progressed, including the development of the role of 'Champions' of looked after children and young people.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Dundee City Council received an allocation of £92,000 from the Scottish Government to support and improve councils' activity around raising and sustaining awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities and building capacity across the corporate parent though more effective and better partnership working and commissioning of services. All activities outlined in this report will be funded from this source.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 Background

Dundee City Council adopted a Corporate Parenting Policy in 2000 (291/2000). Since this time there has been increasing emphasis from the government on the role of the Corporate Parent in respect of children and young people who are looked after. A publication 'Looked after children and young people we can and must do better' was published in January 2007. In October 2007, the Scottish Executive confirmed a one off allocation of £2.5 million to be made available across Scotland to support and improve councils' activity around raising and sustaining awareness of their corporate parent responsibilities. The allocation for Dundee is £92,000.

What happens when children need to be “looked after”?

In some cases children and their families may be in need of the type of support which is provided through compulsory supervision by a social worker. In such cases children are said to be “looked after” at home. In other cases some children and young people may not be able to be looked after safely at home and, for a variety of reasons, they may have to be “looked after” away from home. ***The local authority has specific duties in respect of all children who are looked after.*** In such cases elected members and others are expected to share responsibility for the care of these vulnerable children and young people and to undertake the duties which might be expected of a corporate parent. Locally and nationally there has been a significant increase in the number of looked after children and young people. Statistics in Dundee show:

- An increase of 60% of the numbers of children who were looked after between July 2001 and 31/07/07.
- The projected number of children and young people looked after was exceeded, the number stood at 572.
- Between 31/03/07 (542 children and young people) and 30/09/07 (583 children and young people) the number of children and young people looked after increased by 41, representing an increase of 7.5%.
- The projected number of children and young people looked after by September 2008 is 600 (based on the previous period 2001-2007).

What is corporate parenting?

‘Corporate parenting’ emphasises the collective responsibility of local authorities to achieve good parenting for children in their care. Once a local authority has taken the profound and difficult decision to remove a child, short-term or long-term, from his or her family, it is the duty of the whole local authority to ‘safeguard and promote his or her welfare’. The whole authority includes every other aspect of local authority services.

This definition, used by Dundee City Council since 2000, has been reinforced in 'Looked after children & young people: we can and must do better' (Scottish Executive, 2007). This report emphasises the importance of the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people. It refers to those who are looked after at home as well as children and young people who are looked after away from home.

The corporate parenting policy has been updated in relation to looked after children and young people to reflect the national drive to improve outcomes for this vulnerable group of children and young people. This policy is attached.

The updating of this policy is one of the activities being undertaken to increase the awareness of the role and responsibilities of the corporate parent.

It is proposed that the Scottish Government monies are utilised to:

- deliver a development day, to include young people, elected members, directors, senior managers and other relevant staff and agencies.
- develop an E-learning module for looked after children and young people and the corporate parent.
- publish relevant corporate parenting information for council members and officers.
- and deliver multi agency training in line with the 'Getting It Right for Every Child, (GIRFEC) Change Programme.

Additional Proposals for Funding

In addition approximately £70,000 of the Scottish Government monies will be placed in trust for looked after children and young people. This fund will be used to acknowledge achievements and successes, according to a set criteria, of looked after children and young people. By setting up this fund children and young people will benefit over a longer term period. A trustee board will be set up involving elected members.

Champions

Within a previous report on Improving the Educational Attainment of Looked After Children (Report 170/2007) it was recommend that the role of 'Champion' for looked after children be explored. Given the significant number of children and young people currently looked after in Dundee it is suggested that further considerations needs to be given to developing the role of 'Champion'. It is suggested that this proposed development is remitted to the Strategic Planning Groups for Integrated Children's Services under the lead of the designated officer for Corporate Parenting. The Children's Services Integration Manager is the lead designated officer for Corporate Parenting.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management.

There are no major issues.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), Depute Chief Executive (Finance) and Head of Finance.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Alan G Baird
Director of Social Work

DATE: 29th April 2008

WORKING TOGETHER FOR DUNDEE'S CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL CORPORATE PARENTING

POLICY IN RESPECT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

POLICY STATEMENT

Dundee City Council is committed to "Working Together for Dundee's Children in Need". When carrying out corporate parenting responsibilities the Council will adopt the behaviour of a good parent at all times. It will share collective responsibility for ensuring that children who are looked after are provided with quality experiences and the help they need to maximise their full educational, social and economic potential. It will ensure that work is undertaken in partnership with children, parents and carers and is in the best interest of individual children. The Council will, when carrying out these duties, act as positive advocates for these vulnerable children and will actively challenge instances of less favourable or different treatment.

INTRODUCTION

This document outlines the needs of vulnerable children who are looked after by the local authority. It specifically gives details of the responsibilities of those who act as corporate parents in respect of these children and young people and updates the policy framework, adopted by Dundee City Council in 2000. This updated policy will allow those who have the responsibilities of corporate parents to better carry out their responsibilities, decision-making and scrutiny roles in respect of children and young people in the City who are looked after.

BACKGROUND

For more than fifty years, the aim of the child care system has been to make the lives of children who were 'in care' as normal as possible. For the past twenty years child care policy and practice have focussed on supporting families in the community and reducing the need for children to be looked after away from home. Good assessment and care planning for those children and young people who do have to be looked after both at home and away from home is crucial to ensure they receive the right support. In the past few years the number of children and young people who are looked after has increased significantly both locally and nationally. In Dundee there was a 60% increase in the numbers of children who were looked after between July 2001 and July 2007.

The legislative framework which governs the work with vulnerable children and their families was updated when the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (the Act) was implemented in April 1997. This Act introduced a number of underpinning principles which should govern work with children and their families. These include the importance of working in partnership with parents. The Act recognises the important part parents play in the lives of their children and for the first time in UK legislation. The Act gives a definition of parental responsibilities and the rights parents have to enable them to fulfil these responsibilities. Since the implementation of this legislation there have been a number of publications that augment the role of the corporate parent. In addition the 'Getting it Right For Every Child' agenda drives forward the joint responsibilities of agencies to deliver services for all children and young people (Scottish Executive 2005).

CORPORATE PARENTING

What is corporate parenting?

'Corporate parenting' emphasises the collective responsibility of local authorities to achieve good parenting for children in their care. Once a local authority has taken the profound and difficult decision to remove a child, short-term or long-term, from his or her family, it is the duty of the whole local authority to 'safeguard and promote his or her welfare'. The whole authority includes every other aspect of local authority services.

This definition, used by Dundee City Council since 2000, has been reinforced in 'Looked after children & young people: we can and must do better" (Scottish Executive, 2007). This report emphasises the importance of the formal and local partnerships needed between all local authority departments and services, and associated agencies, who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people. It refers to those who are looked after at home as well as children and young people who are looked after away from home.

In Dundee the range of individuals involved in corporate parenting is diverse and, from the point of view of the child or young person, potentially overwhelming. They include: elected members; parents; senior officers and managers of the Education Authority; Social Work, Leisure and Communities, Planning and Transportation and Housing Departments; head teachers; social workers; social care staff; foster carers; teachers; educational psychologists and education support personnel; fostering/family placement managers, Children's Rights Officer and health services.

The extent of the involvement of these individuals will vary according to the needs and circumstances of the child or young person. The importance of education and, in particular the need to support and improve educational progress, needs to be clearly recognised by everyone involved. It is essential that the actions and efforts of all those involved come together in such a way that corporate parenting translates into 'good parenting', and that children and young people receive as seamless a service as possible. Lack of co-ordination can dramatically affect the outcomes of children who are looked after. The need for this co-ordination is reinforced in the Getting it Right for Every Child agenda (Scottish Executive 2005).

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)

The Scottish Government is committed to policies which help Scotland's children and young people fulfil their potential. Getting It Right For Every Child is a major policy initiative which aims to improve outcomes for all children and young people. Ministers have confirmed that GIRFEC is a key priority which contributes to achieving strategic objectives and national outcomes. GIRFEC is a far reaching programme that will only be achieved through everyone involved in delivering services for children working together to **get it right for every child**. The implementation of the GIRFEC programme of change will enable everyone working with children, young people and families to improve outcomes. Over the coming years the GIRFEC change programme will support and facilitate practitioners to remove obstacles that can block children and young people from getting the best possible start in life and from moving successfully from birth to adulthood. Progress needs to take place on three fronts: culture change, systems change and practice change. This progress needs to happen simultaneously in order that we get it right for every child. Locally a three year plan is being developed to address these three areas.

In line with Corporate Parenting, A Plan for Dundee's Children 2005-2008, identified six change factors. The change factors that relate to 'Getting it Right For Every Child' and corporate parenting are:

- Establish a core, coordinated and inter-professional framework to support the strategic management and leadership of better integrated children's services in Dundee

- Identify and align resources including staff expertise financial and service capacity
- Integrate quality improvement and assurance systems for services delivered between and across agencies.

Why are parents important?

Parents hold together many strands in their children's lives: they care about their safety and their health, their education and their leisure interests, their friendships and their futures. They have continuous knowledge of their children's development. They know about their particular talents and achievements; needs and problems. For children who are looked after, just as for children in settled families outcomes in respect of care, health and education are closely linked. If they have someone who makes sure that they have regular health checks, have immunisations when appropriate and generally looks after their well-being, then they are likely to have better overall health as they grow up.

Parents play an extremely important role in the education of their children. If they are settled and supported they have a greater chance of taking advantage of the educational opportunities on offer. The serious underachievement of children who are without continuous parental support is testimony to this. Committed parents take an active interest in their children's educational progress, attend parents' evenings and sports days; they expect to be consulted and involved if their child has special educational needs. Parental partnership and good home-school links are equally vital for looked after children.

What happens when children need to be "looked after"?

In some cases children and their families may be in need of the type of support which is provided through compulsory supervision by a social worker. In such cases children are said to be "looked after" at home. In other cases some children and young people may not be able to be looked after safely at home and, for a variety of reasons, they may have to be "looked after" away from home. ***The local authority has specific duties in respect of all children who are looked after.*** In such cases elected members and others are expected to share responsibility for the care of these vulnerable children and young people and to undertake the duties which might be expected of a corporate parent.

Why are children looked after away from home?

Children and young people can be looked at home and away from home for a variety of reasons. Many will have been affected by distressing and damaging experiences, including physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Some will be looked after because of the mental or physical illness or death of a parent or because families are unable to provide adequate care for them. The majority of looked after children come from families who experience hardship and are separated from them because of some form of family upheaval or breakdown. Research indicates that in many cases where children need to be looked after mental health, alcohol or drug misuse are features of family problems. Statistics and performance information bear this out.

Some looked after children and young people require more specialist or in depth help than can be offered by preventative and/or universal services. These children and young people include those:

- who have been or are at risk of being abused (including physical, sexual and emotional abuse) or who have been, or are at risk of being neglected;
- who have been, or who are being, or who may require to be looked after by the local authority;
- who are at risk of becoming involved, or who are involved in offending behaviour;
- who may be adversely affected by serious family difficulties, including domestic violence;
- whose moral development may be adversely affected;

- who have been adopted or are in the process of being adopted;
- who misuse drugs/alcohol or substances;
- whose educational development is suffering and who may be excluded from schools;
- who have significant emotional, social or behavioural problems

What does it feel like to be looked after away from home?

Very few children and young people want to become looked after and accommodated even though they may understand that they cannot live with their family. Despite the legal requirement to ascertain their wishes and feelings, children and young people often feel that they are not involved in the major decisions which are taken about their lives. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, states that young people's have a right to express their views and Article 20 imparts special rights to those children who are not looked after by their families.

Uncertainty about the immediate and long term future is a major worry for the child or young person. Although some children and young people may feel safer and well cared for in foster care or residential care, they all have to cope with significant losses – of family, friends, and in some cases familiar neighbourhoods. For some, the most acute sense of separation is from brothers and sisters who may have remained with their birth family or siblings that have been placed in separate placements. They have a lot of changes to cope with: new carers, new surroundings and new ways of doing things, and perhaps no-one who is familiar to them.

Many children experience numerous and sometimes unplanned moves of home. Each move may also mean a change of school. A confident and competent adult would need considerable personal resources and robust support networks to cope with what children who are looked after too often experience.

What are the barriers to successful outcomes for children and young people?

National research findings of young people's accounts of their care experiences throw a very harsh light on some of the services designed to meet their needs. For them the biggest barrier to succeeding remains one of public and professional attitudes. Some key factors which act as barriers to success have been identified in research, practice and inspection processes. These may include the low expectations of the adults involved, the many moves of placement often experienced by the children and young people and uncoordinated care planning. In practice these mean:

- **Low expectations of the adults involved**
 - Those responsible for the day-to-day care of children who are looked after do not place sufficient value on education;
 - Schools and carers do not act quickly and sensitively enough to help pupils who are looked after catch up when their education is disrupted;
 - Schools and carers display lower expectations of children who are looked after, which can contribute to under achievement and failure; and
 - Pupils who are looked after are over-represented amongst pupils excluded from school;
- **Many moves of placement**
 - Children experience numerous, and often unplanned, moves of home;
 - They experience unnecessary moves of school or are out of school for prolonged periods;
 - Making and sustaining relationships with peers can be particularly difficult due to a lack of continuity of care and schooling;
 - Lack of continuity in care providers and teachers mean that looked after children cannot rely upon familiar adults who they trust to advocate for their needs; and

- Low self-esteem and perhaps a justifiable mistrust of adults can act as a barrier to enjoyment of schooling and educational success
- **Uncoordinated care planning**
 - The special education needs of some children who are looked after may not be identified or addressed;
 - Social Work and Education Departments, individual schools, and health professionals do not gather and share information that would help them to plan most effectively; and
 - Frequent change of staff that can hinder achieving continuity in care.

Making Education a Priority

Education matters to all children and young people, including those in the care of local authorities. It is their entitlement. School is an important part of everyday life for them: somewhere to develop self confidence and skills, to receive praise and encouragement, to learn about and build relationships, and to achieve.

Valuing and supporting the education of children in public care is the single most important contribution a corporate parent can make to their lives, because it is about investing in and caring about their future, and recognising that education is their passport to better chances in life. In Dundee there is a project specifically to improve the educational outcomes for looked after children and young people. This project is currently funded by the Scottish Government and will cease as at the end of June 2008.

Common Themes

The common themes identified in 'Looked After Children and Young People: **we can** and must do better' publication are:

- Learning Environments need flexibility in order to provide not only effective academic support, but also opportunities for personal and social support
- Self-worth and self esteem are integral to the learning process
- Exclusion and transition are critical and potentially cross-road points in the lives of looked after children and young people; there is the strong potential that additional support will be required at these times, both as a preventative measure and also in response to their occurrence, and
- Raising awareness of the educational needs of looked after children and young people amongst school, parents, foster carers and residential workers is essential.

Inclusion – changing attitudes

Working within available resources, corporate parents need to ensure that children who are looked after have equal access to service provision and to opportunities. They need to make sure that the needs of individual children are sensitively and promptly assessed and met so that they can take advantage of those opportunities.

Children who are looked after report many instances of different treatment and 'exclusion', bullying and name calling and intrusive questioning about their home circumstances.

Corporate parents need to be confident that local policies act in the best interest of children who are looked after and do not single them out or discriminate against them in any way because they do not live at home with their birth families. Where a parental advocate is needed to access any service or support, the local authority as corporate parent, must ensure that all children in their care have an effective champion.

All those involved in corporate parenting are expected to promote achievement and actively challenge instances of less favourable or different treatment.

Achieving continuity and stability

Continuity and stability are known to promote success for children in public care. There is a clear relationship between schooling difficulties and placement breakdown: either may bring about the other. Supporting schooling as a central part of care planning is essential to ensure a successful placement. Repeated changes of school, and of placement, are damaging, not only because of the disruption they cause, but because each change represents another ending. Some young people experience the stress of unwanted family breakdown and go on to experience the termination of placements which they do not want to end. Some find it difficult to relate to new carers or to trust them, and they and their carers do not obtain the support they need in time to prevent another crisis and eventual breakdown.

The overall message many young people receive is that they are not important enough for people to want to make things work for them, and that it is acceptable to break up relationships. As young adults they need the skills to make and sustain relationships and to engage in work. Some will become young parents and for them to be able to provide stability in their lives they need to experience it.

High expectations – raising standards

Research has identified that those involved in corporate parenting have had lower aspirations for, and expectations of children who are looked after in terms of attainment, behaviour and a sense of achievement. This stemmed from well intentioned assumptions that children who have endured traumatic events in their lives simply cannot take advantage of learning opportunities. The danger of according education a low priority in care planning is well documented. Local authorities must have higher expectations in their role of corporate parents. This must translate into consistently high expectations on the part of all those with day-to-day contact with children who are looked after. These high expectations need to translate into action. It is about the mutual high expectations of all those involved in corporate parenting, so that the shared objective of improving the outcomes for children is achieved.

Early intervention – priority action

Early intervention can be preventative. Avoiding delay and taking positive action quickly should be a shared objective of all involved in corporate parenting. The status of a child who is looked after should not mean that he/she is treated less favourably or that assumptions are made about his/her needs or behaviour. It should, however, act as a trigger for priority action by all involved in providing support services.

Children and those associated with them have traditionally been helped through a number of different routes. Agencies over time have developed their own cultures, systems and practices. The *Getting it Right for Every Child* programme aims to remove obstacles which are rooted in the differences in cultures, systems and practice which have emerged through single agency thinking and delivery of services. Early intervention is crucial so that children and young people get the right help when they require it.

Listening to children

Much of what is now known about the impact of care upon life outcomes comes from young people who have experienced the care system. They are the ones who know what it feels like to be looked after away from home. Like other children they also know what interests, engages and motivates them, what undermines their motivation and they have their own opinions on matters affecting their lives.

The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child require those with responsibility for children to ascertain their wishes and feelings. Good parents listen to and communicate with their children. This means that local authorities need to determine how they are to listen and give weight to the views of children and young people to help them plan and deliver services.

EFFECTIVE CO-OPERATION BETWEEN AGENCIES

Policies, structures and people

One of the main implications of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 is the need for local authorities to adopt a strategic planning approach in order to improve the quality of services and use of available resources to meet the needs of children. Although the Social Work Department undertakes a major role in the planning, development and delivery of services, their effectiveness in addressing the needs of vulnerable children and their families also depends on the contributions of other departments and agencies. In order to ensure co-operation, co-ordination and collaboration in the development and delivery of services to children who are looked after, and their families, the integrated children's service planning framework is designed to address these issues. Membership of the various groups that make up the Strategic and implementation groups involve staff from the Education, Social Work, Housing, Leisure and Communities; Support Services and Corporate Planning; Tayside Police; the Children's Reporter and the Chairperson of the Children's Panel as well as representatives from Tayside Health Board, the NHS Trusts and Dundee Local Health Care Co-operative and the voluntary sector.

The Strategic Planning Group ensures that the Council is able to meet its statutory requirement to produce a Children's Services Plan every three years, with annual updates. Equally importantly, the members ensure that the strategic objectives are met by monitoring progress on delivery against intended actions. All this activity, including the development and implementation of strategies, policies and services takes place under a collective commitment to working together for Dundee's Children.

WHAT ELECTED MEMBERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER

The Ministerial forward of 'looked after children **we can** and must do better' states; "by setting out the strategic way forward, resourcing the right initiatives and through improved working by local authorities in their role as corporate parents, we aim to enable our most vulnerable children and young people to achieve their potential and to develop their capacities as more successful learners, confident and resilient individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors".

It is clear that all elected members with decision-taking or scrutiny responsibilities should have information which will tell them about the services provided to children and young people who are looked after by the local authority.

Baseline Data

Looked After children

How many children are looked after by your council?

- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- What type of placement are they in – foster care, residential homes or secure units?
- How many are looked after out with the authority in non-relative placements?
- How much is your council spending on services for children who are looked after away from home?
- Do all your looked after children have an allocated social worker?
- How many placement moves have children had?
- How many attend school regularly and how many are excluded from school?
- What progress are they making and what are their examination results?
- How many children run away or otherwise go missing from residential care and foster care?
- How many children have a record of a special educational need?
- How many children are involved in offending behaviour?
- What action is your authority taking in partnership with other agencies to reduce this?
- How many children attend pre-school provision?
- How many children are adopted?

Care Leavers

- How many young people leave care at the ages of 16, 17 and 18 and where do they go to live?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- How many young people who left care after the age of 16 are still in touch with their social worker, carer or other approved person?
- What sort of progress do young people make after they leave care?
- How much is spent on after care services, including direct financial assistance to care leavers?

What Children and Young people should expect from GIRFEC

What services will do for me

- When I am having problems I should be able to find out easily what help I can get and how to get it.
- I should be able to say what I feel and know that my views are important. I should feel sure that people will do all they can to help me.
- I should know that if I keep doing something that puts me at serious risk, now or in later life, action will be taken. For example, if I keep offending or taking drugs.
- I should be able to find out easily what help I can get.

Planning for help and making sure I get it

- When I am given help I should not have to keep going to meetings or to keep having to tell different people what I have already said.
- If action has to be taken, I should have a written plan showing what everyone hopes to do to help me and what I will do to help myself. I should know when this plan will be reviewed.
- There will be a single record of information about me which those who work with me will see. Wherever possible, who sees what information will be agreed with me.
- I should have only one action plan setting out all the help I need and who is giving me that help.
- If someone has said they will do something in my plan they will have to do it. I will also be expected to do what I have agreed to. Any changes to my plan will have to be agreed.

If I need to go for a Children's Hearing

- I will go to the Children's Hearing system if people feel I need a lot of help and they believe that action has to be taken to make sure I get it. The Hearing will talk with me about the plan and decide what has to happen.
- I should know who to speak to about any aspect of my plan.
- The Children's Reporter will decide if a Children's Hearing is held. A Hearing will be held if I have significant needs and I need to be made to do something to help me.
- If the Panel members on the Hearing feel that I need help right away, they should be able to decide that I get that help. This might happen even if all the papers or plans are not ready for me to discuss. If that is the case they will have to look again at the decision as quickly as they can.
- If I keep doing things that create worries about me, I will have to meet with people, possibly the Hearing, every time this happens. These people may decide on more serious action to help me help myself.
- Hearings should be held at a time that suits me and my family. Where possible this should mean I am not stopped from going to school.
- If I have to go back to the Children's Hearing, at least one of the panel members should be there from my last meeting.