

TITLE OF REPORT: **Proposals for Corporate Parenting Arrangements**

REPORT OF: **Caroline O'Neill, Strategic Director, Children, Adults and Families**

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval for the proposal to implement a Corporate Parenting Board.

Background

2. This report provides an overview of the current corporate parenting approach in Gateshead and highlights some options for consideration to strengthen arrangements, referencing best practice from other high performing authorities.
3. For the purposes of this report the local authorities considered have Corporate Parenting Boards/Panels which is the comparator to Gateshead's Overview and Scrutiny (OSC) Corporate Parenting Sub Committee as Gateshead do not currently have a Corporate Parenting Board/Panel of a similar nature.

Proposal

4. Gateshead does not currently have a stand-alone Corporate Parenting Board. While both the Corporate Parenting OSC Sub-Committee and the Corporate Parenting Partnership Group fulfil some of these responsibilities to a degree, they do not provide the same focus and breadth of engagement of senior representatives at a strategic level, with some important partners absent.
5. Therefore, going forward it is considered that a new collaborative body is established of a similar nature to the Corporate Parenting Boards seen in other high-performing authorities. Representation at such a Board needs to be reflective of the wider council as well as other relevant agencies: Elected Members, Strategic Leads, Operational Leads and representatives from Care Leavers Council should be nominated and consideration needs to be given to the inclusion of and attendance by children and young people.
6. This model will allow for the Corporate Parenting agenda to remain 'live' and be dynamic: most importantly it provides a mechanism to ensure the views of children looked after and young people are acted on. An improved synchronicity of the Corporate Parenting Board and Corporate Parenting Partnership Group would also allow the OSC to hold the partnership group to account via scrutiny of relevant partnership plans / work to deliver each of the seven key corporate parenting principles.

7. Given all of the above, consideration also needs to be given as to whether there is a need to continue with a separate Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee or whether scrutiny of the Council's role as Corporate Parent can be effectively performed by the main scrutiny Committee the Families OSC.
8. Cabinet will be aware that as a result of the Covid -19 pandemic and resource / capacity issues for Council services, meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committees have had to be significantly reduced. As such the Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee has not met for the past twelve months and scrutiny of work relating to Looked After Children and Care Leavers has therefore, of necessity, been carried out by the Families OSC (of which Corporate Parenting OSC is a Sub Committee) from which its councillor membership is drawn.
9. Should the option of establishing a separate Corporate Parenting Board be considered the most appropriate way forward, the intention would be to build on the arrangements put in place over the last year with Families OSC with a view to establishing within its remit clear terms of reference for scrutinising the Board, Partnership Group and delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy/ Delivery Plan, instead of this role being carried out via the current Sub-Committee. Agenda setting could also prioritise work in relation to scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting role at specific meetings to ensure it retains the high level of profile required by the Council and there would be scope to expand the membership / co-opt additional external members as deemed appropriate.

Recommendations

10. Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Endorse the proposal to redesign the current corporate parenting governance structure and introduce a Corporate Parenting Panel/Board with an internal and external partnership membership (details of membership of the Board to be agreed by Cabinet at a future meeting).

and recommend Council to:

- (ii) Agree to dissolve the Corporate Parenting OSC Sub-Committee and for scrutiny of the Council's Corporate Parenting role to be placed specifically within the remit of the Families OSC, with agenda items relating to the Corporate Parenting role prioritised within specific meetings in its work programme.
- (iii) Endorse the proposal to develop a robust relationship between the Board, Overview and Scrutiny and the Corporate Partnership group to pursue continual improvement in the delivery of the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy, including applying the learning from other local authorities.
- (iv) Endorse the proposal that there should be regular mandatory training for all elected members in relation to the Council's Corporate Parenting role.

For the following reasons:

- (i) To ensure that the Council meets its statutory responsibilities.
- (ii) To ensure that the Council has a robust and strong governance arrangement to scrutinise their corporate responsibilities for Looked After Children.

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APPENDIX 1

Policy Context

1. This proposal supports the Council's strategic approach of Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives.

Background

What is Corporate Parenting?

2. Corporate parenting operates at strategic, operational and individual levels. It has three key elements:
 - A statutory duty, detailed in the Children Act 1989 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017, on all parts of a local authority to co-operate in promoting the welfare of children and young people looked after, and a duty on other partners and agencies to co-operate in fulfilling that duty.
 - Co-ordinating the activities of the many different professionals and carers who are involved in a child or young person's life and taking a strategic, child centred approach to the delivery of services.
 - Shifting the emphasis from "corporate" to "parenting", making sure our moral and statutory responsibilities towards children looked after and care leavers are being fulfilled.

Legislative Framework

3. Local authorities must have regard to the seven needs identified in the Children and Social Work Act when exercising their functions in relation to children looked-after and care leavers as set out in the statutory guidance.

What are the Corporate Parenting Principles?

4. The guidance is designed to help consider the kinds of services that may be offered when having regard to the corporate parenting principles. It is not intended to be prescriptive about what must be offered. It is expected, however, that services respond to the individual needs of looked after children and care leavers when they exercise their functions in relation to these children and young people.
5. In order to thrive, children and young people have certain key needs that good parents generally meet. The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:
 - To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people.
 - To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
 - To take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.

- To help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
- To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
- For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
- To prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

(Applying corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers. Statutory guidance for local authorities (February 2018))

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-corporate-parenting-principles-to-looked-after-children-and-care-leavers>

Local Offer for Care Leavers (February 2018)

6. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires each local authority to consult on and publish a local offer for its care leavers. The local offer should provide information about all the services and support that is available to care leavers from the local authority), including information about both their statutory entitlements as well as any discretionary support that a local authority chooses to provide.

Local offer guidance: Guidance for local authorities (February 2017)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-offer-guidance>

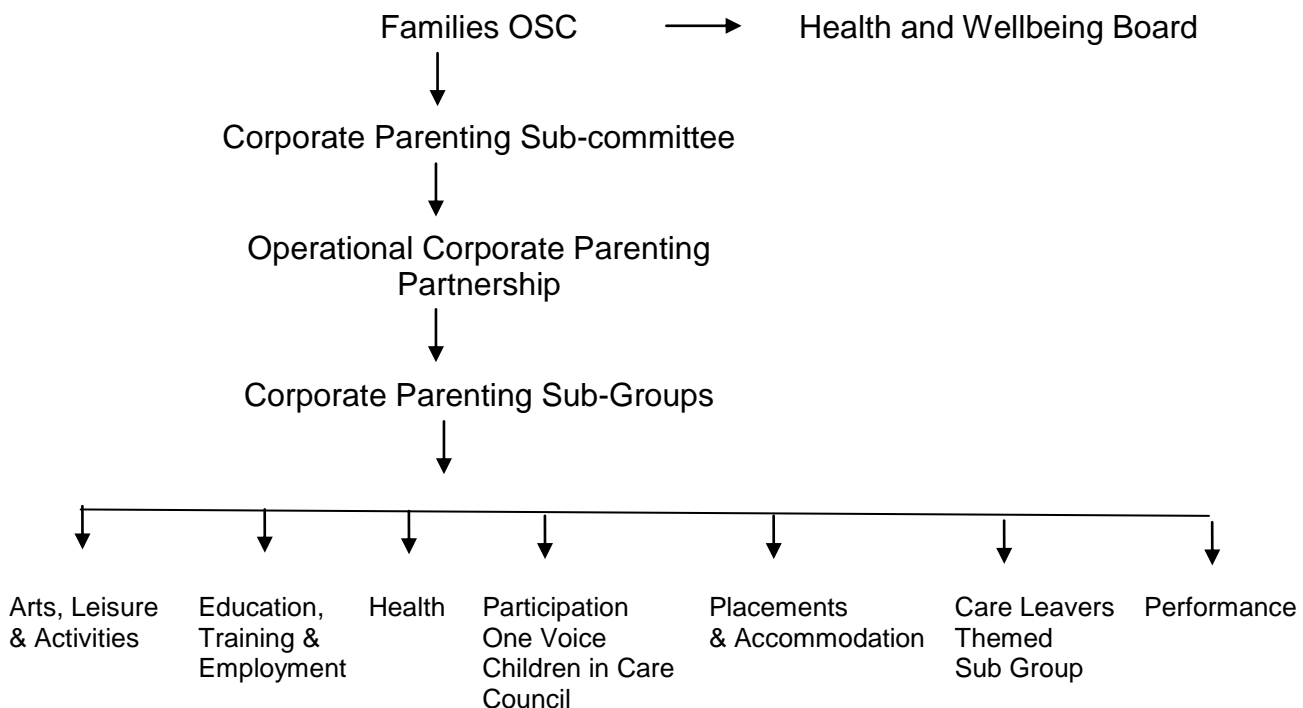
Gateshead's local offer is promoted with all care leavers by their Personal Advisors

[Gateshead's Local Offer for care leavers - Gateshead Council](#)

Current Corporate Parenting Arrangements

7. Practice in Gateshead is driven by our aspirant vision that “Children and families are at the **heart of everything** we do, ensuring all children can **thrive** and reach their **full potential**”. Our children have a right to be healthy, happy, safe and secure and feel loved, valued and respected and our corporate parenting arrangements are a key component to achieving this ambition.

The following is an outline of our current Corporate Parenting structure to meet our priorities and monitor our progress as corporate parents:



Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Sub Committee

8. As with all other executive functions, the Council must make appropriate arrangements for its performance and decision-making in this area to be scrutinised by non-Cabinet members in an overview and scrutiny committee. The Council established a sub-committee of the Families OSC to provide specific focus on the delivery of our corporate parenting role. The Corporate Parenting OSC Sub-Committee is chaired by the Families OSC Chair and has responsibility for scrutiny and oversight of the delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and its delivery plan. The current membership includes elected members, a foster carer, care leaver, school governor, Gateshead Housing Company and representatives from the Voluntary Sector.
9. The role and remit of this Sub-Committee is to receive and consider monitoring reports on children in the Council's care and to keep under review the Council's arrangements for ensuring that the Council fulfils its role as corporate parent.
10. The Council's principles, as set out in our Corporate Parenting Pledge, are to:
 - Safeguard the welfare, health and happiness of all children in care, listen and respond to children and young people's views and wishes.
 - Provide a stable and supportive home with caring consistent relationships.
 - Have high aspirations for each child and young person.
 - Respect and value diversity.
 - Place children and young people within families whenever possible and as close to the local community as possible.
 - Promote contact with family and friends.
 - Respect and promote children and young people's rights.

- Make decisions based on assessments of need.
- Celebrate children and young people's achievements.

Informed by what our looked after children and young people say is important to them, we have identified seven key priorities in the Gateshead's Children and Young People in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2018-2023 which are at the heart of everything we do and how we can be good corporate parents:

- Our Children and Young People are respected and involved
- Our placements are safe and meet the needs of our Children and Young People
- Positive relationships and identity
- Our Children and Young People will be supported to improve their physical and emotional health and wellbeing
- Our Children and Young People are encouraged to reach their educational, employment and training potential
- Our Young People moving into adulthood will be supported to achieve their full potential in life
- Improve our role as the Corporate Parent

Corporate Parenting Partnership Group

11. The Corporate Parenting Partnership Group (MALAP) is an officer group chaired by the Deputy Strategic Director, Children's Social Care. This group oversees all aspects of our work in relation to our statutory and aspirational work with children in care and care leavers.
12. Membership includes Head of Service for Youth Justice, Children's Rights Officer, Safeguarding leads for Health, Virtual School Head, Service Manager for Looked After Children, data performance lead, commissioning service representative and lead officer for culture and leisure.

The group are responsible for progressing the corporate parenting operational plan.

Roles and Responsibilities

13. All councillors and council officers share corporate parenting responsibility and cannot abdicate this responsibility, but this does not mean that everyone has the same role. Clearly the elected members who attend Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee, or who are involved with thematic scrutiny of children's services, will have a greater role day-to-day than those who, for example, are responsible for environmental or planning decisions. Even the Planning Committee, however, will be making decisions that affect children looked after and care leavers.
14. A key principle for corporate parents is to ensure that children looked after, and care leavers are considered within decision making across the Council.
15. Similarly, officers will have differing roles, for example, to ensure that there is a range of high quality housing options available for young people when they leave care, ensure there are employment opportunities and make sure children looked after and young people are supported to live a healthy lifestyle.

16. Responsibility extends beyond local authority services: in reality, the range of potential partners in meeting the needs of looked after children is as wide as the number of agencies and organisations within the area. Elected members and Council staff may have multiple roles within the borough, such as school governors; the duty to be an effective corporate parent is paramount and must consider and promote the welfare of children looked after and care-leavers throughout these various activities. This is what a reasonable parent would do.

How Corporate Parenting Works in other Local Authorities

17. For the purpose of this report several local authority Corporate Parenting Board arrangements have been considered and learning captured which it is considered would be beneficial to children and young people in Gateshead. The local authorities are of varying geographical sizes, rated either good or outstanding by Ofsted and with different level of deprivation and social care need.

The identified learning is as follows:

Membership of the Corporate Parenting Board

18. Whilst the membership of Corporate Parenting Boards in all Local Authorities considered, was variable, there was consistency in the representation of strategic officers from a cross section of the wider partnership including police, health, education and public health, and the children in care councils.
19. What was apparent was the strength of working relationships between the local authority corporate parenting board members and the Chief Executive. It was deemed essential to local mechanisms working proactively and recognised as a risk if they were to operate in parallel rather than collaboratively.
20. The membership and representation at the Boards was facilitated by the status given to them in the wider council context and the mechanism for delegating and sharing recommendations and actions with other relevant Council and partnership bodies: e.g. Overview and Scrutiny committee groups and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

Agenda setting, roles and responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Board

21. The identification of activities, proposals and work undertaken, which needs to be sighted by those who have corporate parenting responsibilities is also critical to ensuring that corporate parents are well informed and held to account.
22. In all authorities reviewed, those at Assistant and/or Director level for Children Social Care were fully integrated into the Corporate Parenting Boards and often had lead responsibility for agenda setting and forward planning. Agenda flexibility was evident in most local authorities, allowing for additional topics to be heard in a timely way and the Board to influence activity and planning.
23. Furthermore, the relationship between the Board and the corporate parenting partnership groups (MALAPs) were strong, these models were maintained through formalised links and routine updates into the Corporate Parenting Board.

24. As part of the agenda setting activity, local authorities encouraged members of the Corporate Parenting Board to be given the lead for certain areas in relation to Looked After Children and Care leavers, for example, improving educational outcomes, strengthening support for care leavers etc.
25. As part of the forward planning, authorities also incorporated opportunities for young people and care leavers to taking responsibility for chairing the Board, and setting the agenda, subject to the approval of the corporate parenting elected member chair. All Corporate Parenting Boards included young people sitting on the board and had strong links with their Children in Care Councils, in Gateshead our Children in Care Council equivalent is the One Voice Group.
26. All members of the Corporate Parenting Boards were routinely offered training and information about their corporate responsibility as parents. The training was often mandatory and a requirement as part of the board membership enlisting.

Consultation

27. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People has been consulted.

Alternative Options

28. The alternative option would be to remain with the current OSC arrangements for the governance of corporate parenting arrangements.

Implications of Recommended Option

29. **Resources:**
 - a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that there are no direct financial implications arising from this report.
 - b) **Human Resources Implications** – There are no human resources implications.
 - c) **Property Implications** - There are no property Implications.
30. **Risk Management Implication** - There are no risk management implications.
31. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - The local authority had a duty as Corporate Parent to treat all looked after children, including care leavers, equally and to commit to give looked after children and care leavers the best opportunities they can have in life.
32. **Crime and Disorder Implications** –There are no crime and disorder implications.
33. **Health Implications** – This proposal will strengthen the corporate parenting governance arrangements and oversight of the health offer to all looked after children and care leavers
34. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** - There are no climate emergency and sustainability implications.

- 35. **Human Rights Implications** - There are no human rights implications.
- 36. **Ward Implications** - There are no area and ward implications.