

**TITLE OF REPORT:** Review of revised membership arrangements of the Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**REPORT OF:** Alison Elliott, Strategic Director – Care, Wellbeing and Learning

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report seeks the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's views on the effectiveness of the revised arrangements for non-voting members of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee.

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### **POLICY CONTEXT**

1. Elected members of the Council have an overall responsibility for ensuring that looked after children and young people in their care are healthy, safe and achieving their potential, both while they are in care and when they leave care. The role of the Corporate Parent is to ensure all services that the Council provides contribute towards achieving positive outcomes for looked after children and young people.
2. Guidance on the Corporate Parenting Role of the Local Authority – Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 sets out the duty of a local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children and young people who are looked after. This duty is exercised through the role of the 'corporate parent' to children who are looked after, emphasising the collective responsibility of a local authority to be a good parent. This responsibility is intentionally placed upon the authority as a whole, rather than a specific service and recognises the key role that schools, council services and partners have to play.
3. The importance of the Council's responsibility for children looked after has continued to be emphasised in successive government initiatives, with specific emphasis being placed on life chances and on educational achievement. In October 2003 the DfES, together with the Local Government Information Unit, published "If this were my child... a Councillor's guide to being a Corporate Parent."
4. The Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Gateshead maintains a comprehensive overview of the progress of children who are looked after and for care leavers, scrutinising the quality, effectiveness and performance of the services that support them.

## **Background**

5. On 23 October 2014, the Families OSC reviewed the membership arrangements for the Corporate Parenting Sub OSC and considered examples of best practice in other local authorities across the UK with a view to further strengthening the scrutiny challenge and leadership of the corporate parenting role.
6. The OSC identified that it would strengthen the robustness of those arrangements, if the number of non- voting members on the Sub -Committee with knowledge and experience of services provided to Looked After young people and care leavers was increased. The OSC therefore recommended to Cabinet that the non – voting membership be extended to include a representative of the Foster Care Association, a Care Leaver, a school governor, a representative of the Gateshead Housing Company and a representative from the third sector.
7. In light of the OSC's recommendations, Cabinet agreed to increase the non-voting members appointed to the Corporate Parenting Sub OSC on 16 December 2014 and noted that the Families OSC would review the effectiveness of the revised arrangements in twelve months' time.

## **REVIEW OF REVISED ARRANGEMENTS FOR NON – VOTING MEMBERS**

8. Since the decision to increase the non-voting membership of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee, the OSC has had the benefit of representation from a representative of the Foster Care Association, a school governor, and a representative of the Gateshead Housing Company. The addition of non-voting members has enhanced the level / range of scrutiny provided by the Committee as a result of their in depth knowledge on certain areas and strengthened the robust challenge within the committee. It has added additional value and focus upon how services are delivered to continuously improve services in order to promote positive experiences for looked after children.
9. There have, however, been challenges in seeking a third sector representative due to the need to avoid potential conflicts of interest and in gaining increased involvement from care leavers in the scrutiny arrangements. However, recently a third sector representative was identified and invited to become a member of the Sub Committee as of January 2016.
10. It has been challenging to identify a young person who had the time to undertake this important role as a non-voting member of the committee. The Looked After Service did identify a young person who was interested in contributing to the committee and had time in his week to attend. However an unforeseen situation has arisen recently for this young person which will prevent him from undertaking this opportunity. The service is continuing to seek to identify a young person and is discussing the role with young people.
11. As a result of these challenges, it has not been possible to fully implement the proposals to increase the non-voting membership and whilst benefits have clearly been derived from having the views of those non – voting members who have been appointed, these have been more limited due to the lack of additional representation from a care leaver and a representative from the third sector.

## **NEXT STEPS**

12. The Chair of the Sub Committee has also suggested that it would be useful to recommend to Cabinet that the non- voting membership be extended further to include a co-opted member from the Families OSC to increase continuity and cement links between the Sub-Committee and the parent Committee.
13. It is proposed to formalise the arrangements for all the non- voting members by setting a specific term of office which will commence from January 2016 and be for a period of 3 years from that date.
14. This will allow the non – voting members appointed sufficient time to build up a level of knowledge and expertise to enable them to effectively contribute to the work of the Sub Committee whilst at the same time providing future opportunities for other external representatives to provide input into the Sub Committee.
15. It is also proposed that, as work is still ongoing to fully implement the original recommendations, that a further review of the effectiveness of these arrangements be carried out in 12 months' time.
16. The Looked After service will continue to discuss the role with young people and offer full support to enable them to attend as a non-voting member. This activity will be regularly monitored and feedback will be given to Debra Patterson, Service Director, Social Work Children and Families.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 10 The Committee is asked to
  - give its views in relation to the arrangements for non-voting members
  - agree the next steps outlined at paragraphs 12 to 15
  - agree to a further review of these arrangements in 12 months' time

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