

**TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL**

**CORPORATE PARENTING SCRUTINY MONITORING GROUP  
ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08**

**REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING  
SCRUTINY MONITORING GROUP**

**1. PURPOSE**

- 1.1 To provide a summary of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Monitoring Group (CPSMG) during the municipal year 2007/08, including key issues that members wish to highlight to the Cabinet and the issues which members will be pursuing in future meetings.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That members note the content of this report and endorse its referral on to the Cabinet.**

**3. SUMMARY**

- 3.1 The Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Monitoring Group (CPSMG) is the main mechanism by which scrutiny members monitor the performance of services to children and young people in the care of the Council. The group meets regularly with officers and with children and young people who are in care.
- 3.2 The CPSMG is a sub-group of the Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People and this report seeks to inform members of the Commission on the work of the sub-group over the past year and planned work for the year 2008/09.

**4. PREVIOUS MINUTES**

- 4.1 Notes from Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Monitoring Group meetings 2007/08.

## **5. BACKGROUND**

- 5.1 There are currently around 230 children in care in Telford & Wrekin. The population of children in care fluctuates but in general, the population is increasing year on year. Some of this increase is due to improved early identification of children who need to be placed in care, through the Integrated Children's Service. Also, young people locally, regionally and nationally are remaining in care for longer.
- 5.2 In June 2007, the Department for Education and Skills released the Care Matters: Time for Change White Paper. The measures included in the White Paper aim to reduce the significant and widening gap between the outcomes for children in care, and their peers. A wide range of issues are covered, including education, life outside school, children on the edge of care, the transition into adulthood and others.
- 5.3 The Council – including officers and all elected members – is the corporate parent for children and young people in care up to the age of 21, or 24 if they continue in full time education until that age. The Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy states:  
“In pursuit and delivery of these duties we are encouraged as Councillors and officers to ‘THINK CHILD’, to constantly ask ourselves ‘...would this be good enough for my child?’ ”
- 5.4 A sub-group of the Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People, the Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Monitoring Group (CPSMG) is the main mechanism by which scrutiny members monitor the performance of services to children in care in Telford & Wrekin. This report will inform other members on the work of this group and some of the key issues for children in care, as all members are collectively responsible as corporate parents.
- 5.5 The group meetings 6 times a year with officers and quarterly with children and young people in care. After some poor attendance during the 2006/07 municipal year, CPSMG meetings in 2007/08 have been well attended and members participate positively. As well as 5 elected members, the group includes 2 representatives from the Children & Young People's Strategic Partnership whose experience and contributions are invaluable. The group is supported by officers from the Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting service area, who provide detailed presentations, information and advice to ensure the group fulfils its role effectively.

## **6. ANNUAL REPORT 2007/08**

### **6.1 Work programme 2007/08**

- 6.1.1 The issues covered in meetings with officers during 2007/08 include:
- Regulation 33 visits

- 16+ Team Action Plan
- Education issues for children in care
- Substance Misuse
- Family Placement Panel
- Follow up to scrutiny review of foster care services
- Laming Audit
- Follow up to scrutiny review of care leavers services
- Annual performance report.

6.1.2 The key role of the sub-group is to monitor the performance of services to looked after children. This role is in part fulfilled by a meeting dedicated to an Annual Performance Report which covers all of the performance indicators that relate to children in care.

6.1.3 The annual performance report in September 2007 showed that, overall, performance was good, particularly in:

- Dental and health check ups
- Case reviews held within prescribed timetables (100%)
- Placement stability
- Percentage of care leavers with at least one GCSE grade A\*-G or GNVQ
- Children and young people communicating their views as part of their statutory review.

6.1.4 Poor performance was noted in children missing 25 days or more of school in the previous school year. This may be due to illness, delay in arranging appropriate education after a placement move, refusal to attend school, among other reasons. This is being closely monitored by officers, to identify children and young people who risk falling into this category early and putting measures in place to support them.

6.1.5 The remaining CPSMG meetings are issue based, and include discussion of any performance indicators relevant to the issue. This enables members to look at the wider context and the issues that affect the performance indicators. Where there is an indicator which is of particular concern, this will be monitored at subsequent meetings until members are satisfied that performance has reached an acceptable level. Some key indicators are monitored at each meeting, such as the population of children in care, and the type of placement they are in.

## **6.2 Meetings with young people**

6.2.1 The group meets quarterly with young people. The first meeting of the year involved a number of young people delivering Total Respect training to members. Total Respect training is used across the country and aims to ensure that children and young people's right to participate in decisions affecting them is fully respected in the care system as a whole. The young people delivering the session spoke about what it is

like to be in care, and why it is important that their views are heard and taken into account.

6.2.2 The other issues that have been discussed in meetings with young people during 2007/08 are:

- Independent Reviews
- Contact – with friends, family, and social workers
- Communication – with social workers, feedback from the scrutiny meetings, and communicating important information to children in care
- Supporting children in care to go on to university
- Being in foster care
- What Social Workers are like, and what they should be like
- The experience of school as a child in care.

6.2.3 The meetings with young people are scheduled for shortly before the meetings with officers. As far as possible, agenda items are mirrored so that members can ask questions in the meeting with officers based on the information and views that they have received from the young people. However, the issues discussed at the meetings with young people are to a large extent dictated by the young people who attend, as they will talk most openly about things that are current issues for them.

6.2.4 Previously, the meetings with young people were fairly formal and feedback from the young people who had attended was that although they liked being listened to, they didn't like the style of the meeting. Different styles of meetings have since been tried, including large group discussions, and small groups. Meetings usually start with some refreshments which give a chance for members and young people to talk informally and start to build up a rapport. Officers in the CYP portfolio try to encourage a range of young people to attend so that different issues and different viewpoints are discussed.

6.2.5 The issues raised in the meetings with young people are followed up at a subsequent meeting with officers. A feedback sheet is sent out to all children in care so that they can see what has been talked about and what action will be taken to make improvements, even if they did not attend the meeting. This feedback is a crucial part of the scrutiny process, as it demonstrates that things are changing as a result of young people engaging with the group. Extracts from the most recent *News and Views* newsletter are included at Appendix 1.

6.2.6 One outcome of a meeting with young people is improvement to the Independent Review process. An Independent Review is an annual, individual review for each child involving relevant professionals, the young person and the carer to look at the support being provided to that young person, the current issues they are facing and additional help that they might need. The young people raised concerns about the consultation papers, the number and role of people involved in the

meetings, and the length of the meetings. An action plan has been created in response to this which includes reviewing the paperwork and meeting format (which will be done in consultation with young people), giving children in care more information about the process, and repeating training for social workers. The action plan will be monitored by the CPSMG.

### **6.3 Key issues**

6.3.1 Generally, recommendations arising from the meetings are at an operational level and are actioned by officers following the meetings. Feedback is provided regularly to members on actions that have been taken. Below are a number of key issues that the group feel should be highlighted at member level for consideration.

6.3.2 Raising the positive profile of children in care  
Children and young people are brought into the care of the Council for many different reasons. It is usually because their parents are unable to look after them because of illness or disability, because of abuse or neglect, or because there is no parent to look after them. Very few young people are placed in care because of their own bad behaviour, however, there is a perception among some people that this is the case. The Council as the corporate parent for these children should endeavour to ensure that they are portrayed positively and seek opportunities to do so, for example through stories in the Council magazine and website.

6.3.3 Embedding the role of Corporate Parent within the Council  
It is important that all elected members recognise their responsibilities as corporate parents and CPSMG members were disappointed with the low member attendance at the Total Respect training in July 2007 and some Corporate Parenting training that has been run as part of the Members Information Seminars. To be effective corporate parents, members need to be aware of the issues faced by children and young people in care. More recent member training held in April has been well attended.

There are a number of ways that elected members can carry out their role as corporate parents. Most elected members are also school governors, and school governors have a role in monitoring the achievement of the children in care that attend their school. Members can also be involved in Regulation 33 visits that are made to the Council's two children's home on a regular basis. The pool of members trained to undertake these visits (accompanied by an officer) is small which has prevented a member going on every visit. It is suggested that the Cabinet and Group Leaders should encourage their members to attend Corporate Parenting training, and to be trained to undertake Regulation 33 visits.

#### 6.3.4 Cost of services for children in care

The average weekly expenditure per child is reducing despite an increased population of children in care. However, this figure remains high than both the national average and the Statistical Neighbour Group average. During the meetings, it has been clear that services are taking an early intervention approach to try to reduce negative impacts on children and therefore reduce their need for specialist services at a later date. This approach will also help to reduce costs, but is not a quick method of reducing costs.

#### 6.3.5 Education of children in care

The majority of children in care have experienced such disruption in their lives that their education suffers. Nationally and locally, children in care have a lower educational attainment than their peers, and around 25% of children in care in Telford & Wrekin have a statement of Special Educational Needs compared to 4% of the general population of school aged children. To help narrow the gap between children in care and their peers, all school aged children who have been in care for more than 20 days should have a Personal Education Plan (PEP). The PEP details their strengths, targets for the future, the areas where they need more support, and the specific support that they will be given. Over the last year, the CPSMG has monitored this performance indicator as when it was first discussed, there was only evidence of 45% of PEPs being in place. Officers have pushed to ensure that this figure increased, and the percentage of PEPs in place now stands at 66%. This will continue to be monitored as members would like to see this figure increase further.

A small number of young people in care go on to study at university which is an achievement that we should celebrate. However, meetings with young people have shown that there are others who want to go to university but have real concerns about whether they will have financial support to do so. The Council should support these young people as far as is possible to achieve their full potential, and should consider whether further practical support and finance can be made available for the small number of young people who want to study at university.

### **6.4 Work programme 2008/09**

6.4.1 A number of items have been identified for the CPSMG work programme 2008/09. These will be added to as other issues are identified. Items noted for follow up are:

- Independent Review Action Plan
- Placement Strategy, including feedback from the Fostering Panel member representative
- Laming Audit
- Regulation 33 Action Plan.

6.4.2 Other items to consider are:

- Rights & Representations Annual Report
- Performance report
- Complaints
- Corporate Parenting Team Annual Report
- Joint Adoption Service Annual Report
- Education Champion role
- Follow up to scrutiny reviews of Care Leavers Services and Foster Care Services
- Care Matters implementation
- Linking CPSMG meetings with young people to the Care Council that will be set up under Care Matters
- Services to children in care with BME backgrounds
- Services for children placed out of the borough.

## 7. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

AREA	COMMENTS
Equal Opportunities	The CPSMG has a role in ensuring that Council services are providing equal opportunities to children in care as to other children and young people.
Environmental Impact	None.
Legal Implications	Legislative changes under the <i>Care Matters: Time for Change</i> White Paper are awaited and will impact on some Council services to children in care.
Links with Corporate Priorities	Giving Children & Young People the Best Possible Start in their Lives
Financial Implications	There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
Opportunities and Risks	
Ward Implications	Relates to all wards.



April 2008  
Issue 2

# News & Views

*Rights and Representations Project for Children and Young People in Care*

## Inside this issue:

- Feedback from Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Group meetings
- Hot Shots Award Ceremony
- Hot Shots Music Project
- Pledge Consultation winner
- Corporate Parenting's promise to young people

## Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Group

Three Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Group meetings have been held since the last issue of News & Views. They were attended by a total of 8 children in care and care leavers. Different topics were discussed at each meeting which were support for care leavers, education and health.

### Support for Care Leavers

Young people raised these issues:

- Contact with a social worker every three months is not enough.
- Young people are being moved on from residential care at 16 whether they were ready or not. These young people do not have the option of returning home to families if living by themselves didn't work out.
- Not having their birth certificates made opening a bank account and getting a national insurance number difficult.

### Group members replied:

- Although contact every 3 months is the legal minimum requirement, the 16+ Team tries to give more support when they can. Maintaining contact will be part of the role of 2 Personal Advisors who have recently been appointed.
- Young people can stay in residential care after 16 in certain cases, and those who have to leave should meet with their social worker to discuss the best option for them.
- Social Care is putting a system in place to make sure that a copy of their birth certificate is available to every care leaver. They also take responsibility for Care Leavers having a national insurance number and will help them with setting up bank accounts.



Telford & Wrekin  
COUNCIL



2005-2008  
Integrated Children's Services  
2006-2007  
Early Intervention  
(Children at Risk)  
Culture and Sport for  
Hard to Reach Groups

Produced by the Children and Young People's Active Involvement Service



## More Issues Raised at Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Groups

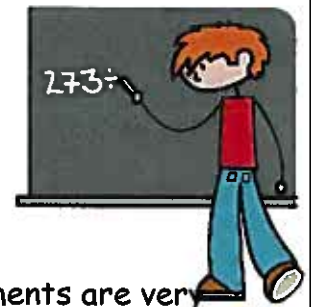
*Schools to be given advice about writing references*

### Education

- Not all young people knew they could go to the designated teacher for children in care at their school for help and support, or they didn't know who the teacher was.
- A poor reference from school could stop children in care from getting jobs.
- Not all young people could remember being involved in their Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings.

### Group members promised:

- To remind designated teachers to make themselves known to children in care at their schools.
- To send schools advice about writing references.
- All young people should be involved in writing their own PEP.



### Health

- Young people were concerned that health appointments can be missed when they move because of post going to old addresses.
- Young people don't have access to Help 2 Quit unless they are in school or college.
- Young people don't have enough money to choose healthy eating options.
- There needs to be sensitivity around arrangements for health assessments.
- There are not as many leisure & fun activities for care leavers as for younger children.

- appointments are very important and social workers and carers should ensure they are kept.
- Fern Zihni, the Nurse for Children in Care can advise on all health related issues, including Help 2 Quit. Contact her on 01952 385838.
- An information pack on healthy eating would soon be available to all care leavers from Health Promotions.
- Jenny Cockcroft, Fun & Leisure Co-ordinator and Sophie Beard, Leaving Care Youth Support Worker, would plan activities for older children in care and care leavers shortly. Contact Jenny on 01952 385838.



*Jenny Cockcroft to plan activities for older children*

### Group members:

- Agreed that health

## Pledge Consultation



Corporate Parents were recently asked to produce a set of promises to children and young people in care.

Children and young people in care over 8 years old were asked to think about 6 promises they thought the Council should make to help them be happy and safe.

All suggestions were entered into a prize draw and the winner

was an 8 year old girl whose name was pulled out of a hat to receive £20 worth of WH Smith's vouchers.

Well done, and thank you to all of you who returned your promises.

Corporate Parenting's promise to young people can be seen on page 6.



## Turn Up, Tell Us! By Councillor Gill Green



"If any aspect of your care has been bothering you, why not TURN UP, TELL US" - this is the message from Gill, Chair of Corporate Parenting Scrutiny Monitoring.

Gill is joined by Mike, Tracey, Karen, Louise, Neil and Beryl on this group which meets regularly to check the Council's services to the young people in our care.

She says "Councillors do have good intentions but when the one thing that used to be missing from our meetings turned out to be the young people themselves we decided it was time for a change.

First of all, we felt that the style of the meetings, all sat round a big table at the

Council offices could put some people off, particularly the younger ones or those who hadn't ever been to a formal meeting before. And so our latest meeting was at Highfield House, with chip supper supplied, and a much more friendly atmosphere, which we hope made it easier to speak out.

Some good topics have been raised so far but if it matters to you, it matters to us so we are looking forward to meeting more of you in the future. The next meeting will be on Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> May at Highfield House in Wellington. If you want to come along but are a bit nervous about being by yourself you can bring

someone along to support you - some people have brought their social worker or residential care worker, and Mike Bould, the Rights and Representations worker, is usually at the meetings too."

If there are any issues you would like us to talk about at the meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> May email or text Mike Bould at [michael.bould@telford.gov.uk](mailto:michael.bould@telford.gov.uk) or on 07976 100588 or leave a message with Amanda on 01952 385112.



Councillor Gill Green who says "Turn up, tell us!"