

Terms of Reference for the Inquiry into Corporate Parenting

Context

Councillors and officers of the local authority, collectively as 'corporate parents', have a statutory duty to take an interest in the wellbeing and development of children in the care of a local authority.

This role of corporate parent to looked-after children is carried out by all councillors, regardless of their role in the Council. However in practice the duty is discharged through a framework of officers, elected members and groups.

- Every Councillor should be familiar with the profile of looked-after children in the county and how the Council looks after children in its care. They should also be aware of their duties as corporate parents.
- Officers and bodies with statutory oversight roles, such as the Independent Review Officer, the People Overview Committee and Shropshire Safeguarding Children Board, should ensure that the Council and its partners have the frameworks, policies and people that it needs to provide effective support to looked-after children.
- The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People and Director of Children's Services have specific responsibilities to "to act as effective and caring corporate parents for looked-after children, with key roles in improving their educational attainment, providing stable and high quality placements and proper planning for when they leave care."¹ In particular they are responsible for ensuring the Council:
 - appoints a Corporate Parenting Board to ensure the Council and partner agencies carry out their responsibilities towards looked-after children;
 - makes elected members and officers aware of their responsibilities as corporate parents;
 - appoints a Children in Care group that gives looked-after children the chance to shape and influence the parenting that they receive;
 - produces a strategy for corporate parenting; and
 - recruits officers with specific statutory duties with regard to looked-after children, such as the virtual school head, and independent reviewing officer.

This framework is central to ensuring that Shropshire Council provides high-quality services to looked-after children.

¹ *Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services*, Department for Education, April 2013

Objectives

- To examine how the Corporate Parenting Panel ensures that it understands the profile of looked-after children in the county, and the outcomes for looked-after children compared to their peers including:
 - keeping safe;
 - staying healthy;
 - achieving in school and training; and
 - making a successful transition to adulthood.
- To understand how the Council ensures that its officers and elected members understand their responsibilities as corporate parents.
- To scrutinise the structures in place to support looked-after children in Shropshire, in particular the Children in Care Council, Children's Charter and Corporate Parenting Panel.
- To look at the effectiveness of Regulation 44 visits by corporate parents.
- To learn how looked after children and care leavers understand the support available from corporate parents.

Information Required

Statistics on looked-after children in Shropshire

Shropshire Corporate Parenting Strategy 2016-2018

Agendas and minutes of Corporate Parenting Panel

Agendas and minutes of Children in Care Council

Sample Regulation 44 visit reports

Induction and Regulation 44 training material

Methods to be used

Hearing from the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Director of Children's Services and Looked-after Children Service Manager.

Examining agendas and minutes of Corporate Parenting Panel and Children in Care Council meetings.

Scrutinising Regulation 44 visits training and reports

Listening to Children in Care Council members.

Looking at examples of good practice from other similar local authorities.

Hearing from Corporate Parenting Panel members.

Developing recommendations based on the findings of the inquiry.

Timescales

The task and finish groups will present its final report to the People Overview Committee at its meeting on 14 March 2018. The report and any agreed recommendations will be present to Cabinet on 21 March 2018 and to Council on 17 May 2018.

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