

FALKIRK COUNCIL

SUBJECT: CORPORATE PARENTING

MEETING: HOUSING AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

DATE: 3 FEBRUARY 2009

AUTHOR: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to brief Members on the content of the document “These are our bairns; a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent” and to present Members with proposals for how corporate parenting can be strengthened in the Falkirk Council area.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Since 2007, Members have received a range of information relating to the Council’s corporate parenting responsibilities. This has included an induction pack on corporate parenting and the provision of training in 2007. Specific aspects of the Council’s corporate parenting responsibilities have also been highlighted in a range of reports that have been presented to Members over the last 18 months.
- 2.2 In June 2008, the Council agreed to endorse the principles in the report from the Children’s Commissioner on young people leaving care, “Sweet 16”. Those principles were informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular, by its emphasis on placing the best interests of children and young people as the primary consideration and to listening to the views of children and young people. In the same way, the proposals made in this report are informed by the UN Convention.
- 2.3 The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 sets out the circumstances in which children may become looked after by a Local Authority. Once a child is “looked after”, any decisions, including the decision to discharge the child from the looked after system, should be based upon the paramountcy of the child’s welfare and should also give due weight to the child or young person’s views.
- 2.4 Corporate parenting is the term used to describe the formal partnerships needed between all local authority services and associated agencies who are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children and young people and care leavers.

The way in which the Council fulfils its corporate parenting responsibilities has the potential to transform the lives of looked after children, young people and care leavers and it is therefore vitally important that everyone in our organisation is aware of their responsibilities and is aware of the potential they have to make a real and lasting difference to the lives of Falkirk's children.

- 2.5 Historically, outcomes for looked after children have been well below those of other children and this remains the case both locally and nationally. At a national level, increasing attention has been paid to the need to improve outcomes for looked after children through more effective corporate parenting. This has culminated in the publication in 2008 of "These are our bairns; a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent".

3. A SUMMARY OF "THESE ARE OUR BAIRNS"

- 3.1 This guide was published by the Scottish Government in September 2008 and has been produced in conjunction with COSLA. It provides a very useful source of information on what looked after children need from their corporate parents and provides detailed information on the role that community planning partnerships, Chief Executives, Elected Members and individual council services can play in promoting excellence in corporate parenting.
- 3.2 This guide has been considered in detail by the Corporate Management Team who receive regular updates on aspects of corporate parenting. The guidance has helped to inform the content of the draft Corporate Parenting Policy which is attached at Appendix 1 and which offers a way forward for Falkirk Council in promoting excellence in corporate parenting.

4. DRAFT CORPORATE PARENTING POLICY

- 4.1 The draft Policy contained in Appendix 1 sets out Falkirk Council's commitment to corporate parenting. It sets out the context in which we act as corporate parents and contains 10 high level commitments which, if approved by Members, would bind all council services into becoming the best possible corporate parents.
- 4.2 Part 1 of the draft Policy provides an overview of the context of corporate parenting and, in particular, highlights the vision for all children and young people in the Falkirk Council area as articulated in "for falkirk's bairns", the integrated children's services plan. Our vision is that we want every child and young person to have an enjoyable, fulfilling life in a nurturing, healthy and safe environment. We will encourage children and young people to work to their potential and make a positive contribution to society. "for falkirk's bairns" also articulates the outcomes which we seek for all children and young people. These are that all Falkirk children:
- will be happy and healthy and will be enabled to make positive decisions about their own health and wellbeing
 - will achieve their potential through learning and creativity, developing skills and knowledge to make them fulfilled, happy adults.

- will grow up in a safe environment where they are protected, loved and enabled to enjoy their lives.

Looked after children are valued and valuable members of our local community and require our assistance to achieve the outcomes to which we aspire for all Falkirk's children. The draft Policy indicates that this can be achieved by the Council acting as good corporate parents to looked after children. The remainder of Part 1 provides additional contextual information on who our looked after children are, why they become looked after and what they expect from the Council as their corporate parents.

- 4.3 Part 2 of the draft Policy contains a summary of the contribution that can be made by the Community Planning Partnership, by Elected Members, by all Council Services to improve our effectiveness as corporate parents. The Policy contains 9 high level commitments to looked after children which are as follows:-

Commitment 1 – The Council will establish a reference group consisting of looked after children and young people with experience of the care system. This reference group will be a conduit for young people to raise issues and concerns and will also provide an opportunity for the Council to seek their views on any developments which could impact on them. This reference group will be appropriately supported by staff who the young people feel able to trust. The reference group will be entitled to invite Senior Officers and Elected Members to meet with them to discuss specific issues or concerns.

Commitment 2 – The Community Planning Partnership will ensure that our corporate parenting responsibilities to looked after children are reflected in the Community Plan, associated Service Plans, the Integrated Children's Service Plan and the Single Outcome Agreement.

Commitment 3 – Elected Members will ensure they are well informed about how the Council is meeting the needs of looked after children and that, in their monitoring and scrutiny role, pose the question "is this good enough for my child"?

Commitment 4 – The Chief Executive will ensure that the promotion of excellence in Corporate Parenting is a key priority for the Corporate Management Team and that the Corporate Management Team develop a challenging Corporate Parenting Action Plan and are rigorous in monitoring this.

Commitment 5 – Social Work Services will ensure that all looked after children are able to build trusting relationships with their Social Worker and with other care staff and that plans for individual children reflect their needs, hopes and aspirations.

Commitment 6 – Education Services will ensure that all looked after children have the same opportunities, as their peers who are not looked after, to benefit from high quality full time education through Curriculum for Excellence, including progressing to further and higher education and Education Services will be proactive in addressing any inequalities.

Commitment 7 – Community Services will ensure that looked after children are able to access sports, leisure and other cultural activities appropriate to their needs and interests and that any barriers are proactively addressed.

Commitment 8 – Corporate and Neighbourhood Services will ensure that when they reach decisions about housing, housing support and responses to anti-social behaviour, they take full account of the needs of looked after children and the impact on them of any decision they make.

Commitment 9 – All Council Services, including those not directly involved with looked after children and their families, will constantly seek ways of ensuring that their role in the corporate family is a supportive one.

Commitment 10 – All Council Services will play a part in ensuring that looked after children have the opportunity to make a positive transition into adulthood and into the world of employment, education and training.

- 4.4 It is proposed that within 3 months of approval of this Policy, a detailed Corporate Parenting Action Plan will be developed by the Corporate Management Team and will be presented to Elected Members for scrutiny and approval. Following the approval of the Corporate Parenting Action Plan, it is proposed that regular reports would be provided to Members on progress achieved.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The development of the Corporate Parenting Policy is entirely consistent with the vision for children as articulated in “for falkirk’s bairns” and previously approved by Members. The Policy and its implementation will also make a significant contribution to our single outcome agreement and, in particular, outcome 8, i.e. we have improved the life chances of children and young people and families at risk. Likewise, it will demonstrate our commitment to promoting greater equality for looked after children, as outlined in our Equalities Plan.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific financial implications arising from this Report.

7. HR IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific HR implications arising from this Report.

8. CONCLUSION

Falkirk Council has demonstrated over the years that we take our responsibilities as corporate parents very seriously. While there are many positive developments in relation to corporate parenting, e.g. the ongoing development of more local residential resources for children and young people, there remains much that needs to be done. The development of this draft Corporate Parenting Policy sets out clear commitments for how we can improve our effectiveness even further as corporate parents. The implementation of the Policy would be through the development of a detailed Corporate Parenting Action Plan which would be monitored by the Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team and which would be the subject of further regular reports to Elected Members.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that

- 9.1 Members of the Housing & Social Services Committee endorse the principles set out in the draft Corporate Parenting Policy and, in recognition of the importance of this issue for all Members, refer the policy to Falkirk Council for approval.
- 9.2 Members of the Housing & Social Services Committee request the Director of Social Work Services to provide an update on the content of the Corporate Parenting Policy Action Plan and thereafter on progress achieved in implementing this.

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Date: 15 January 2009

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

“These are our bairns; a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent”