

Draft Corporate Parenting Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 Commission is asked to consider the attached draft strategy and comment on the proposals.
- 1.2 Following wider consultation Commission is asked to receive the final Corporate parenting strategy at the June meeting for approval.
- 1.3 Commission is asked to approve 'in principle' the plan to adopt the strategy from September 2009.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 As a corporate parent of children in care the Council has a special responsibility for their well being. Like any good parent the Council should put its own children first. That means being a powerful advocate for them to ensure that their needs are met in the best way possible.
- 2.2 In terms of corporate parenting there are particular obstacles that may prevent children in care from achieving their full potential against the five key dimensions identified in 'Every Child Matters'. As corporate parents we must ensure that we have an accurate picture of what our children in care need and where there is work to be done to improve outcomes. This will always require a partnership between agencies and departments.
- 2.3 The creation of a formal corporate parenting strategy will strengthen the already good arrangements that we have in the City. The proposal to create a Children in Care Board along similar lines to those for the Local Safeguarding Children's Board should ensure that sufficient attention and action is brought to bear for the City's children in care.
- 2.4 The strategy also formalises the arrangements by which agencies and departments hear what children in care have to say about the services they receive and the issues that affect their lives. As an Authority we have a good track record in the area of 'Making a Positive Contribution', where in our last APA we were rated as outstanding. It is important that our Corporate Parenting strategy reinforces the arrangements we already have in place for consulting with Children in Care.

- 2.5 The presentation of the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy for Derby to this Commission is part of the wider expectation that we will consult widely on this. Our intention is to complete this work by June and to bring the finalised strategy back for approval with a planned implementation date of September 2009. The draft strategy is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.

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Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 Implications Appendix 2 Draft Corporate Parenting Strategy

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. Any actions arising from the implementation of the final Corporate parenting Strategy will be met from existing budgets both within the Council and within partner agencies.

Legal

2. The establishment of a Corporate Parenting Strategy will help the Council to fulfil its statutory obligations as required by the Children Act 2004 and the 'Care Matters' initiative.

Personnel

3. None arising.

Equalities impact

4. The adoption of the strategy will help to ensure that the needs of some of our most vulnerable children are met.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

5. The proposals support the Council priority of 'supporting everyone in learning and achieving.'

Derby's DRAFT Corporate Parenting Strategy

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1. Corporate Parenting

1.1 The Purpose of a Corporate Parenting Strategy

Outcomes for Children in Care in all five areas of the 'Every Child Matters' framework have been repeatedly shown to be poor, and Corporate Parents should be attempting to narrow the gap between the outcomes of Children in Care and those of their peers in every possible way.

Responsibility and accountability for the well-being and future prospects for Children in Care rest with their Corporate Parents. A good Corporate Parent must offer everything that a good parent would, and improving the role of the Corporate Parent is key to improving their children's outcomes. This improvement relies on addressing both the difficulties which Children in Care experience and the challenges of parenting within a complex system of different services.

Equally it is important that the children themselves have the opportunity to shape and influence the parenting they receive.

The Corporate Parenting duty needs to be met collectively by Local Authority Children's Services, but responsibility extends beyond these to include:

- other local authority services such as housing and leisure;
- Strategic Health Authorities and Primary Care Trusts (PCT's) who should actively promote the health of children in care;
- Community Safety partnerships Crime and Disorder reduction Partnerships will need to consider whether children in care are being supported in avoiding offending behaviour;
- Police;
- Probation Services;
- Connexions;
- Youth Offending Teams;
- Governing bodies of maintained schools and Further Education institutions;
- Voluntary and Community organisations.

The purpose of this Corporate Parenting Strategy is to outline how Derby will meet its statutory Corporate Parenting duties in the context of the characteristics of its own care population and its own governance arrangements.

Developing a Corporate Parenting Strategy has been identified as a key target in Derby's Parenting Commissioning Plan 2009/10. This strategy embeds the following core values that all children in care should benefit from:

- A positive sense of identity and self-worth.
- Belonging to a family 'in the widest sense' and also a community.
- Good health.
- A safe, healthy, child-friendly environment, including appropriate housing, play and leisure facilities.
- Freedom from bullying.
- A right to privacy.
- Equal access to services.
- Respect.

1.2 Elected Members as Corporate Parents

‘As the Corporate Parent of Children in Care the State has a special responsibility for their well-being. Like any good parent, it should put its own children first. That means being a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and helping children to make a success of their lives.’ (DfES 2006)

Councillors are ultimately responsible for the quality of care provided by their local authority, with specific responsibility to lead this work and to monitor its effectiveness. This needs to be done by working in partnership with other agencies, including voluntary and community organisations, and also by networking with members of the local business community. Care Matters describes social workers as embodying the Corporate Parenting role on a day-to-day basis but they do not hold ultimate responsibility, which rests with elected members supported by their senior officers. The term Corporate Parenting is used throughout this document to refer to those who do hold this ultimate responsibility.

2. Derby’s Context

2.1 Derby’s Corporate Parenting Principles - September 2001

Over seven years ago, partnership working in Derby among the Executive Members for Lifelong Learning and for Social Care and Health, the Directors of Education and Social Services, and the Chief Executives of local PCTs and Southern Derbyshire Community and Mental Health Services, resulted in a commitment being made by all of these to Derby’s nine Corporate Parenting Principles.

This strategy will further enhance the commitment and duty to deliver national policy developments, and proactively support the participation of children and young people.

2.2 Matthew’s Letters - October 2006

In October 2006, a play was written and acted by Children in Care and care-leavers to a multi-agency conference in Derby. This took the form of a series of letters written by ‘Matthew’ to explain what Children in Care need from their Corporate Parents. This has since been made into a leaflet ‘Looked After Children – what children want to tell their Corporate Parents’ and distributed widely among Children’s Services’ staff. Children and Young People in Care made a significant contribution to the Children and Young People’s Plan 2008-2009 by sharing their views and comments about their experiences of being in care.

In Derby’s current context, the rationale for the proposed development of Corporate Parenting arrangements and structures In Derby has been informed by the following plans.

2.3 Children in Care Innovation Project – March 2008

In March 2008, the Children in Care Innovation Project report, commissioned jointly by the East Midlands authorities, contained a number of recommendations, two of which were specifically related to Corporate Parenting:

- That there are effective lines of communication to ensure all involved in the Corporate Parenting of each child are informed and involved and that roles and responsibilities are identified and accountability is clear.
- That elected members are actively engaged in ensuring Children in Care are a high priority for all Council Departments, and that all Children in Care who need one are offered a work experience placement by the Council and that no care-leaver should be unemployed.

2.4 Derby Children and Young People's Plan 2008-11 (CYPP)

Parenting has been identified as strategic priority in the Children and Young People's Plan 2008-2011 and there is a clear expectation that Corporate Parents are *"positive, caring and responsible parents, who enable children and young people to meet the five outcomes"*

The CYPP promotes:

- On-going effective multi-agency partnership work that identifies and responds to the needs of children at risk in an appropriate and timely way.
- The contribution of local services to improving outcomes for children and young people in care. This area of work has been assessed in the as being strong and effective
- Partnership working as this makes a discernible difference to children's lives.'

2.5 Derby City Partnership – Parenting Strategy 2009-11

From the national parenting agenda, research provides substantial evidence that parenting is the single most important influence on a child's life. Strong, positive and supportive parenting is linked to better outcomes for children.

The role of parents in improving children's life chances is emphasised in the five outcomes introduced in 'Every Child Matters'. Parents, and families, who do the following, in a consistent, loving and affirming way, are likely to be providing good parenting:

- promote healthy choices,
- provide safe homes and stability,
- support learning,
- promote positive behaviour,
- provide support to their children to be economically active.

For Corporate Parents for Children in Care, the same principles apply.

2.6 Care Matters Action Plan - Autumn 2008

Derby's Care Matters Action Plan includes the outcome to develop a whole city approach to Corporate Parenting with the objectives:

- To promote the meaningful acceptance of corporate responsibility for Children in Care.
- To formalise the business of Corporate Parenting activity, within the Council and more widely in the city.
- To deliver an effective Corporate Parenting agenda and ensure compliance with a Corporate Parenting Strategy.

And by the actions:

- Implement the strategy.
- Identify key components of an effective Corporate Parenting Board, these are; structure, format, involvement of children in care, statement of purpose, the Pledge.
- Increase participation of Corporate Parents in relation to Children in Care.
- Develop and work with a Child in Care Council.

2.7 Corporate Parenting Board – to be established

In order to meet the requirements of Corporate Parenting in Derby, our Care Matters Action Plan describes the establishment of a Corporate Parenting Board, with membership which includes those who have ultimate responsibility for Corporate Parenting from the Elected members and senior representation from across the Children and Young People's Department and other Council Departments, and all other relevant partner organisations in the city. The Board should be chaired by the Lead Member for Children's Services or the Director of Children's Services, and has decision-making powers.

The Board will operate to:

- Ensure that all relevant services are responsive to specific identified needs of Children in Care and care leavers;
- Raise the profile for elected members as Corporate Parents;
- Be a meeting point for members, young people, and senior managers of all agencies and council departments involved in Corporate Parenting;
- Be a mechanism for dealing with issues between agencies and departments;
- Define new requirements to steer development of the Corporate Parenting agenda;
- Ensure that the quality of service is high for Children in Care and care leavers.

3. The Whole City Approach to Corporate Parenting

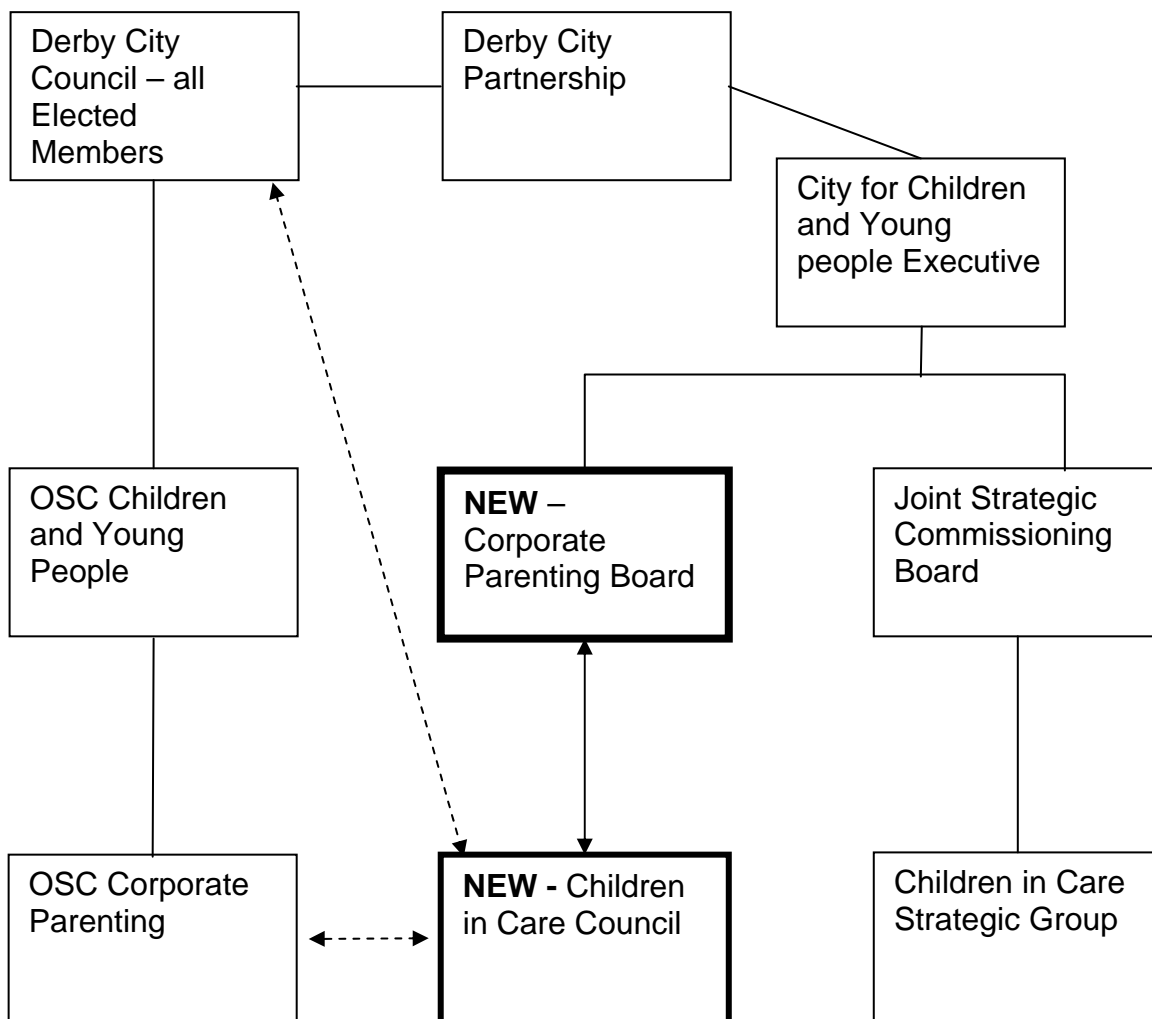
3.1 Governance

There are a number of options for the proposed new Corporate Parenting Board.

- The current Corporate Parenting Sub-Commission could be expanded to incorporate both the current Local Authority requirements and the partnership and wider issues.
- The Corporate Parenting Board could be regarded as one of the sub-groups of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).
- The Board could be established as a distinct group within the current Children's Trust governance structure as part of Derby City Partnership.
- The proposed Children in Care Council would need representation on the Corporate Parenting Board as well as formal links to the City Council.

Further work is required to explore these options, look at what other Council's have done and propose the best options for Derby.

3.2 Example of Governance Structure



3.3 Partnership Working

There are many local partnership arrangements which are already in place which can be used to facilitate all the key agencies' contributions to strategic planning for Children in Care and care-leavers. Existing forums include;

- Children in Care Strategic Group.
- Education of Children in Care multi-agency group.
- Out of Authority Placements Panel.
- Promoting the health of children in care steering group.
- Children and Young People's Outcome Groups.
- Teenage pregnancy partnership.

Schools use their own inspection and performance management framework, based on initial self-evaluation tool that refers to Children in Care, in relation to both potential under-achievement, and to providing care, guidance and support for vulnerable groups. There is also a general duty on the governing bodies of maintained schools, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, to promote all pupils' well-being, and elected members as governors have an opportunity here to exercise their duty as Corporate Parents.

3.4 Ensuring non-discriminatory practice

All agencies have a responsibility to ensure that their services are non-discriminatory. This means that decision-making about the care of a child must give consideration to the child's religion, racial origin, cultural and linguistic background, and any disability.

Corporate Parents need to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to enable them to understand whether their services are failing to meet the needs of any groups of children. Elected members, as visitors to Children's Homes for example, should ask appropriate questions such as:

- Are children encouraged to observe their religion?
- How are children helped to maintain their culture?
- Can the children choose food that meets their religious, cultural or spiritual requirements?

As school governors, elected members can also ask about the school experience and achievements of Children in Care and about how the needs of particular minority groups within that population are met.

For Children in Care with disabilities, research evidence shows that there are poorer care experiences and even poorer outcomes for them than for other Children in Care. In view of this Corporate Parents should monitor:

- The plans and arrangements for disabled children, especially those living far away from home.
- The length of time children wait for their care plans to be achieved.
- The suitability of their placement and transition to adult provision.

3.5 Placements

When a child is removed from their home, maintaining contact with their family is important and should only be restricted if the child's welfare indicates it is harmful or does not meet their needs. Finding and keeping a suitable care placement is key to improving stability and the lack of placement choice and poor strategic planning and commissioning of care placements can hamper social workers. Multi-agency planning and commissioning will contribute to ensuring that children are placed as near to their home and community as is consistent with their needs, and reduce dependence on out of authority placements solely because the authority lacks the appropriate resources.

Corporate Parents need to have an overview by asking questions such as:

- How many children are placed outside your authority?
- What are the needs of those children?
- What resources would be required to meet more needs within the authority?
- What are the contact arrangements for children placed ?
- How many children are placed by other authorities within your authority?
- Are their needs being met and what are their outcomes?

4. Involvement of Children in Care and Care-leavers in decision-making

4.1 The Children in Care Council

Since December 2008, there has been an established Children in Care Council in Derby, following the recommendations of Care Matters, and supported by children's services staff. The Council meets monthly, inviting various professionals to the meetings, and discusses any relevant issues.

The Council also manages the 'Top Ten Issues' list for children and young people in care, and care leavers, which is the basis for Derby's arrangements for the Pledge for Children in Care which is also recommended in Care Matters.

The membership of the Council is comprised of children and young people who have volunteered and want to help all others to air their views, including those who cannot readily be members of the Council themselves. So the views of very young children, and those living out of authority, are considered, as are the views of the disabled and those from black and minority ethnic communities.

All are invited to be members and all are informed and consulted frequently, through a newsletter 'Focus on Us', and by other contacts from Council members such as consultative telephone calls. Membership of the Council tries to be fully representative of various minority groups within the care system, including those in different types of care settings.

4.2 The Top Ten Issues - Derby's Pledge for Children in Care

In Derby, the Pledge which Care Matters expects Corporate Parents to make to Children in Care and care leavers is to take the form of a 'Top Ten Issues' list, compiled and managed by the Children in Care Council and considered by the Corporate Parenting Board.

Through the Children in Care Council and the 'Top Ten Issues' list, the children can put their views about the care system, and describe their experiences, directly to those responsible for Corporate Parenting. By this route, Children in Care should influence the services and support they receive. As an issue on the list is dealt with satisfactorily, it will be replaced on the list by another issue. The Children in Care Strategic Group has a regular agenda item to consider issues from the Children in Care Council, to discuss the Top Ten Issues list and to feed back to children in care via the Children in Care Council.

4.3 Individual children's planning

Local authorities must ensure that assessments, care and education planning are based on the child's needs and that the child has opportunities to participate and comment. For children for who English is not their first language, or for whom their disability makes some means of communication difficult, consultation must take into account the child's preferred method of communication. Facilities, by means of required equipment or the support of an appropriate adult carer, should be established to enable their views and wishes to be heard.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

When defining who has responsibility, there are those with defined responsibilities, but a much larger group of people within local authorities and partner organisations who need to 'own' the issue of Children in Care. All members of the local authority have a shared responsibility for Corporate Parenting, but the Lead Member for Children's Services is responsible for taking the lead in this area, and ensuring that Children in Care have their interests protected and their opportunities maximised by the mechanisms in place to deliver children's services. The Director of Children's Services have designated responsibility for the local authority's duty under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004 to promote the educational achievement of Children in Care.

The following description of the three levels of role within Corporate Parenting is contained in 'Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice', a National Children's Bureau toolkit 2008.

5.1 Universal (level 1)

Every elected member and manager within the council will, in conjunction with members of the governing bodies of partner agencies:

- Be aware of the Corporate Parenting role and the shared responsibility for ensuring that the need of Children in Care and care-leavers are met.
- Have some knowledge of the profile and needs of the children their authority looks after and how these may be changing.
- Understand the impact on Children in Care of all council decisions.
- Receive information about the quality of care and the quality of services that children are experiencing.
- Consider whether this would be good enough for their child.
- Ensure that action is being taken to address any shortcomings in the service and to constantly improve the outcomes for Children in Care.

5.2 Targeted (level 2)

For elected members who visit Children's Homes or who are members of a Corporate Parenting group, and for the managers of children's services, their role will be as above but also more extensive. They will need to make sure, in partnership with those with lead responsibility in partner agencies, those they:

- Are aware of government expectations regarding the service to Children in Care and care-leavers.
- Have access to both qualitative and quantitative information on the service, and have enough knowledge to understand and evaluate this information.
- Consider how they are going to hear and respond to the views of Children in Care, their parents and carers.
- Have an understanding of the arrangements that need to be in place in order to be an effective Corporate Parent.
- Continually take action, in conjunction with officers and partner agencies, to improve the service and to ensure it responds to changing needs.

5.3 Specialist (level 3)

There are key roles where Corporate Parenting is at the heart of an individual's role. The Lead Member for Children's Services and Director of Children's Services and the chairs of Corporate Parenting groups will need to:

- Provide leadership across the authority in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in care.
- Ensure that governance arrangements are in place to implement any decisions regarding Children in Care across the authority and partner agencies.
- Undertake an in-depth analysis of the needs of the council's care population and all aspects of the service required to meet those needs so that there is clear evidence to inform future action. There will need to be a review process to reflect changing needs.
- Ensure that the strategic plans of the local authority and joint plans with partner agencies meet the needs of Children in Care and care leavers.
- Keep up to date with emerging research findings and new initiatives that should inform the direction of services.

6. Translating Theory into Practice

There is no single or simple answer to improving outcomes for all Children in Care, and authorities need thorough knowledge of the characteristics of their care populations, and a range of appropriate strategies. The aim should be to ensure concern for Children in Care becomes fully and permanently embedded in the culture of children's services, as there are few other specific issues of higher moral order for local authorities than caring for the children and young people for which they have a degree of parental responsibility.

Even where Children in Care are prioritised at a strategic level, the relatively slow progress in delivering improved outcomes partly reflects the complexity of Corporate Parenting. The individual child needs to be able to rely on a small group of people, including, preferably, one key individual, who will champion their interests. But there is a potentially large group of people who have a responsibility, direct or indirect, for the welfare and progress of a particular child or for those in care generally. These needs are not easy to combine. The

Corporate Parenting role is not straightforward – looking after children is never easy, and looking after other people's children is even more challenging.

The translation of corporate commitments to Children in Care to the operational level – effective and consistent day-to-day practice – needs to be a continuing process. It is especially important to have a professional workforce at all levels and in all disciplines which understands the issues involved.

7. Evaluation and Review of the Strategy

This strategy will be evaluated and reviewed by the Corporate Parenting Board at least every three years. The strategy will be monitored on an annual basis and reported in to the CYPP process.

8. References and Bibliography

'Care Matters: Time for Change' White Paper June 07

'Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice. Developing an effective approach – a toolkit for Councils'. Di Hart and Alison Williams NCB 2008

'Show Me How I Matter' (LGA and I&DEA) March 2006

'LGiU – Local Government Information Unit Policy Intelligence – Children in Care' Phil Jones 22 August 2008

'Children in Care Innovation Project' – Sue Dean March 2008

'Derby's Care Matters Action Plan Autumn 2008'

'Derby Children and Young people's Plan 2008-11'

'Derby's Parenting Strategy 2009-11'