

Time Commenced: - 6.00 pm
Time Finished: - 7.05 pm

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMISSION 9 DECEMBER 2008

Present: Councillors Ginns and Latham

10/08 Appointment of Chair

Councillor Latham was appointed as Chair of the Sub-Commission.

11/08 Apologies

Councillor Bolton.

12/08 Late Items to be Introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

13/08 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

14/08 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were noted by the Commission.

15/08 Call-In

There were no items.

Items for Discussion

16/08 Statistical Information on Looked After Children

The Sub Commission considered a report from the Director of Children and Young People on Statistical Information on Looked After Children. The statistical information would be updated for future Commission meetings to assist councillors in fulfilling their corporate parenting role.

It was noted that in recent years that the numbers of children in care was increasing. Interest in adopting children remains high and the Directorate is seeking to translate this interest into solid placements which can be processed into legal orders. However, Members were informed that this is a lengthy procedure. The minimum period for child placement with prospective parents stands at ten weeks, although the norm is six months,

and Officers must be convinced that the child's best interests will be served by the order.

Members asked if relatives who foster children are CRB checked. Officers informed the Sub-Commission that all relatives would be subject to a CRB check and a thorough fostering assessment. This would often adopt a lighter touch approach and the standards would perhaps not be as high as a regular application. This is because these families were placed under increased pressure when compared to regular foster carers as they would not have made provision for the extra child.

Resolved to note the appendix of the report, which gave statistical information on children looked after and the relevant key performance indicators.

17/08 Maintenance work on Children's Homes

The Sub-Commission considered a joint report from the Director of Children and Young People and the Director of Corporate and Adult Services on the maintenance work on children's homes. It was reported that this report originated in 2005 from a Member review. It resurfaced in 2007 after negative comments from an Ofsted report about the standards of the children's homes. The report contains two main strands; one to establish a service level agreement and the other is a full condition survey of the Council's facilities.

Members were informed that the service level agreement was now in place but not enough time had elapsed to monitor its progress. The purpose of this report was to report on condition surveys carried out on Bute Walk and Moorfield children's homes which were the buildings identified as the most in need of repair.

Officers stated that the Sub-Commission had to consider any works in order of priority against the City Council's existing £116,000,000 buildings maintenance bill. Members were also asked to consider whether to keep the existing facilities or build new purpose built sites.

Members asked if the budget for the maintenance of the homes was administered by Children and Young People. Officers informed the Sub-Commission that this was the remit of Property Services. Members asked how the costs for the provision of care for children compared in public and the private sector.

Members raised concerns that the report, although it considered the current situation, did not take into account the future options for the children's homes. Officers said that options for replacement had not been considered until all the condition surveys had not been completed.

Members asked if the day to day maintenance could be carried out by a designated employee in each of the homes. Officers said that if this was

the case then it could not be guaranteed that the work would be up to an acceptable standard and that in the past some maintenance operatives had undertaken work that they were not qualified to do.

Resolved to:

- A. Note the maintenance report;**
- B. Recommend to Cabinet that the Priority 1 works required at Bute Walk and Moorfield children's homes are implemented as soon as practicable using the £310,000 available from the 2008/09 and 2009/10 capital maintenance budgets; The remaining budget spent on priority 2 works;**
- C. Receive a report to the June 09 meeting of the Sub-Commission considering the future alternative options for the homes and possible improvements to their energy efficiency; and**
- D. Receive a report on the remaining condition surveys to the next meeting of the Sub-Commission.**

18/08 Elected Members Visits to Children's Homes

The Commission considered a report from Director of Corporate and Adult Services on Elected Members Visits to Children's Homes. The report informed Members that the visits had proved positive and the reports passed back to officers were a useful tool. The report forms had since been simplified to encourage more participation by Councillors. Officers stated that they wished visits to children's homes to be co-ordinated centrally so that all staff involved could be kept informed.

The Sub-Commission asked for the visits of children's homes to be opened up to all Members and not just ward members as not all wards contained children's homes.

Resolved that:

- A. Democratic Services co-ordinate the Members visits;**
- B. All Members be contacted and informed of the facility to carry out visits of the City Council's children's homes;**
- C. The Members visit feedback forms be reported quarterly to the Sub-Committee; and**
- D. Members are provided with an information pack on the respective home prior to the visit.**

19/08 Annual Adoption Agency Report

The Sub-Commission considered a report from the Director of Children and Young People on the Annual Adoption Agency Report. Members were informed that there had not been any significant developments since the last report. The number of Adoption Panels had increased to accommodate the rising workload. Officers recommended 41 children for adoption in 2007/08 and 25 in 2008/09 to date.

Members asked whether fostering or adoption was better for children. Officers stated that adoption would provide better long term stability for children although each case was different.

Resolved that

- A. The Adoption Agency continues to provide Agency reports from period 1 April to 31 March and reviews the Statement of Purpose as required in the Adoption Minimum Standards;**
- B. A monthly highlights report is produced to track key indicators of performance;**
- C. The Agency continues to develop adoption support services in line the National Adoption Standards; and**
- D. To note the work and developments of the Adoption Agency as outlined in the report.**

MINUTES END