



CORPORATE PARENTING JOINT SUB COMMISSION 23 February 2005

Report of the Director of Social Services

Councillors' Visits to Children's Homes

RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 That each children's home hosts an open event once a year for all councillors in a group. Staff and young people present issues specific to that home for discussion in a sociable atmosphere. This would be an alternative to the current system of member visits. These would be co-ordinated by the Project Manager for Quality and Customer Care.
- 1.2 To prepare councillors for open event at the homes, an introductory session is held, facilitated by Planning and Partnerships.
- 1.3 Children's Core Group reports its recommendations to Corporate Parenting Joint Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Commission on 23 February 2005.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 **Background**
There is no statutory requirement for councillors to visit homes but it has long been an expectation for them as corporate parents. Some councillors have already demonstrated their real commitment to this.
- 2.2 Visits were last reported to Joint Corporate Parenting Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Commission on 30 September 2003.
- 2.3 The current inspection format is under review since the volume of inspection has increased significantly. The Commission for Social Care now inspects children's homes twice a year as well as the monthly Regulation 33 inspections by officers. The Head of Service reports a summary of these visits to councillors.

It is proposed to shift the ethos of councillors' visits to a supportive and participative one rather than an inspection framework, to assist them in fulfilling their corporate parenting role more fully.
- 2.4 There are currently 10 nominated councillors identified. There are 2 vacancies one at Queensferry Gardens and for an experienced visitor for Cricklewood Road. Councillors are due to visit homes in pairs twice each year.
- 2.5 **Training**
The last training event for members on visits was October 2003 by Hazel Lymbery and Naomi Feldman.

2.6 **Obstacles to Councillors' Visits**

Member Services feedback has indicated that possible obstacles include intrusive CRB checks, 'cold' calling and onerous report write-up. The issue of capacity for councillors being able to fulfil the demands of the visiting schedule was first identified in September 2003.

Restricting the group of councillors who visit to Overview and Scrutiny members could increase ownership of issues but would exclude some councillors who have built up a visiting relationship over time. This may not assist in encouraging all councillors to be more aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities.

The alternative proposed is intended to minimise these obstacles.

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Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 1.1 None.

Legal

- 2.1 Section 27 of The Children Act 1989 places a duty on health, housing and education authorities to assist social services authorities in carrying out their functions under the Act, which includes assisting in the corporate parenting role.

The Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' highlights the need for 'joined up' services to ensure children's need are met, further strengthened within the Children Act 2004

Personnel

- 3.1 None.

Equalities impact

- 4.1 Member visits to children homes will assist Councillors to undertake their corporate parenting role in seeking to secure positive outcomes for children in need.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 5.1 This supports the Council's objective of supporting and protecting people.