

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)	Date of Meeting:	Monday 6 March 2023
Subject:	LGA Training Proposals and Frequency of Meetings		
Report of:	Assistant Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (Strategic Support)	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member - Children's Social Care		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

This report outlines proposals for the Local Government Association to provide training for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and for all members in relation to corporate parenting.

The report also seeks approval for the committee to return to its normal pattern of 5 meetings per year.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) That the proposals for training by the Local Government Association be endorsed.
- (2) That the committee return to the normal cycle of 5 meetings per municipal year.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

The training offered by the LGA will improve the effectiveness of the Committee and support all members in their role as corporate parent. Returning to the normal frequency of meetings will assist officers in concentrating their efforts on implementing the service improvement plan.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

For members not to receive specialist training may hinder them from performing their function effectively.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

The revenue cost of training will be funded by the Local Government Association.

The revenue cost of committee meetings is met from within existing Council budgets.

(B) Capital Costs

There are no direct capital costs associated with the recommendations in this report.

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): None - the provision of the training will be covered by the LGA	
Legal Implications: S9F Local Government Act 2000	
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications directly from this report.	
Climate Emergency Implications: The recommendations within this report will	
Have a positive impact	No
Have a neutral impact	Yes
Have a negative impact	No
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	No

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: An effective Overview and Scrutiny Committee will ensure that members of the Council who are not part of the Executive hold the executive to account for the decisions and actions that affect their communities.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities: Children's Services work with partners to support families in need of support and improve resilience.
Commission, broker and provide core services:
Place – leadership and influencer: The Council will take the lead role to work with partners to improve the provision of children's services in the borough.
Drivers of change and reform:
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:

Greater income for social investment:
Cleaner Greener

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.7164) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD.5364) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee meeting.

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Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction

1.1. Effective overview and scrutiny should:

- Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
- Drive improvement in public services.

1.2. When a child comes into care, the council becomes the **Corporate Parent**. Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by us.

2. LGA Proposals

2.1. Officers have been in discussion with the Children's Commissioner about member development in relation to Children's Services and he has recommended that training should be provided to at least cover corporate parenting, understanding safeguarding, scrutiny, key questions for officers and such training should be comprehensive and reviewed on a regular basis to understand what further training might be required.

2.2. In light of this, officers have been liaising with the Local Government Association (LGA) and they have put forward proposals as follows:

2.2.1. The intentions of the support from the LGA are as follows:

- To support the members of the Children's Services and Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify strengths and areas for development in their practice and provide tailored support around this.
- To offer mentoring support to the Chair of the Children's Services and Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- To deliver a briefing session on children's services and corporate parenting to all members.
- To support all members of Overview and Scrutiny committees to fulfill their roles.
- To offer support to the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of all scrutiny committees.

2.3. Crucially the above is an indicative outline of initial support, not an exhaustive list. This has been based on an initial discussion with support officers for Overview and Scrutiny, however the above would lead to further support for members based on the learning from each of the above sessions. The LGA, as part of the

sector support offer, is committed to supporting the Council with its improvement journey and will tailor support as required.

2.4. The LGA's expertise in political leadership development programmes helps to support and develop councillors; ensuring local politicians are confident and capable, well equipped and well supported to make a difference, deliver and be trusted. The sessions detailed below will be co-facilitated by a Labour member peer and an LGA officer representative.

All of the below support is offered to the Council, fully subsidised by the LGA.

3. Dedicated support for the Children's Services and Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1. Support for this committee would commence with an initial session on **14 March 2023 at 6.00pm in Bootle Town Hall**. This session would support the committee to identify strengths and areas for development using an established LGA self-assessment tool. From this, dedicated support and resources will be used in a tailored way, to the needs of the committee helping to enhance the ability and confidence of the committee, around the following themes

- Knowledge of Children's Services
- The role of children's scrutiny
- Work programming and planning
- Demonstrating value and influence
- Engagement and working with others
- Creating a strong organisational culture

3.2. The session(s) would be delivered by an LGA Associate, alongside a LGA member peer. The LGA would also look to involve the LGA's North West Children's Improvement Adviser with this session. The support is for members of this Committee only, although separate support can be provided following this with the stakeholders around this Committee as appropriate.

3.3. This session can be used to target further, future support specific to this Committee. It is also supplemented by a session detailed below on more general Overview and Scrutiny which would be offered to all Overview and Scrutiny members.

4. All Member Corporate Parenting Briefing

4.1. This briefing session will support all members across the Council to consider their roles and responsibilities in relation to their duties as corporate parents. The session will help councillors to understand legislation, the local context for children in care and care leavers, and help them understand the practical ways they can carry out their duties.

4.2. Alongside this, members will have free access also to the LGA's e-learning module which can be accessed via the LGA e-learning platform - <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/leadership-workforce-and-communications/councillor-development/councillor-e-learning>

5. Support for members of all Overview and Scrutiny Committees

5.1. A 2.5 - 3 hour session in person, open to all members of the different Overview and Scrutiny committees. This session will provide the opportunity to:

- Revisit the underlying principles of scrutiny as an essential function of a strong system of local governance, accountability and policy development.
- Explore the different roles that scrutiny can play in Sefton.
- Look at ways of utilising powerful questions.
- Consider ways of creating impact and 'making a difference'
- Identify further steps that members can take to increase their impact as effective 'scrutineers'

5.2. The LGA would fund the costs of this session in full and would use a relevant LGA Member Peer alongside an LGA Officer. This session would take place June/July 2023 – following the Council AGM.

6. Support for the Chair of the Children's Services and Safeguarding Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6.1. The LGA would be happy to offer the Chair of this Committee a mentor, who they could use as they choose in this role. The LGA would fund the time of the mentor in full as part of this support and suggest a Labour Member Peer with relevant experience in mentoring and of chairing a children's overview and scrutiny committee for this role.

7. Support for all Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs

7.1. Following the initial discussion which arrived at the above offers of support, there has been a request for a dedicated session for Chairs and Vice-Chairs. The LGA would be happy to resource in full a session such as this which would take place in-person over the course of 2.5 – 3 hours. It is recommended to hold this in the June/July 2023 window also, following the Council AGM and potentially on the same day as the all-member scrutiny session. This would be facilitated by a LGA Officer and Labour Member Peer. A full outline would be developed with the Council following this offer, shaped by local specifics. Based on the LGA's experience of operating similar sessions elsewhere, this session could cover themes such as:

- Leadership of Scrutiny – the relationships and skills that are key to this.
- Effective Chairing
- Developing the relationship with the Cabinet
- A rapid review – where the Chairs and Vice-Chairs feel the approach to overview and Scrutiny works well, where there are challenges and actions that can be taken.
- Taking the learning forward.

8. Frequency of Meetings

8.1. Members will be aware that the normal cycle of meetings of Overview and Scrutiny meetings is to meet five times per year, but it was agreed that given the position with Children's Services that the committee would meet every 6 weeks.

8.2. However, it is now felt that in order to support officers to focus improving practice within Children's Services and on delivering the improvement plan, it would be beneficial to return to the normal cycle of meetings. Should it be deemed necessary ad hoc meetings of the committee could be arranged.

8.3. If agreed the committee would meet as follows:

- 6th June (B)
- 26th September (S)
- 14th November (B)
- 30th January (S), and
- 12th March (B)