

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
(Children's Services)**



**CORPORATE PARENTING  
WORKING GROUP**

Overview  
& Scrutiny



**FINAL REPORT  
April 2010**



# Overview & Scrutiny

**‘Valuing  
Improvement’**

[www.sefton.gov.uk](http://www.sefton.gov.uk)  
[scrutiny@sefton.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@sefton.gov.uk)

## Lead Member's Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to introduce this Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Working Party Report into Corporate Parenting in Sefton. This is an issue that has concerned me personally for many years and I am delighted that finally our 'Looked After Children and Young People' are now finally receiving the attention they deserve through the creation of the Corporate Parenting Board. For too long, concern for these most vulnerable Sefton residents has not been at the level necessary to make the concept of Corporate Parenting a reality in Sefton. Many Elected members and Officers have not been aware of their responsibilities towards this group whose numbers are growing, following the national trend, in the wake of the tragic death of Baby Peter, and the consequent report produced by Lord Laming.

This report seeks to improve the understanding and enactment of Corporate Parenting in Sefton through a series of recommendations resulting from the Working Party's discussions, focus groups and interviews. The recommendations are not heavily dependent on additional resources, and we believe are realistic and achievable. In conjunction with the work of the Corporate Parenting Board if these recommendations are accepted the profile of Sefton's Looked After Children will be raised, hopefully leading to greater attention and improved life chances. The efforts of our Foster Carers and Residential Child Care workers also deserve greater recognition and support.

I wish to thank all those people who took part in interviews and groups for their ideas and interest, and for giving up their time to inform the Working Party. I am also tremendously grateful to my fellow Working Party members for their commitment to our children, and for their ideas and contributions. My final thanks go to Ruth Harrison, Scrutiny Support Officer, for her production of this report, on a subject that has many complexities, and for her excellent organisation, and for her considerable patience. I sincerely hope that this report will not be merely shelved, but that its recommendations are taken forward to enhance the lives of our most challenged children in our borough.



**Councillor P. Cummins,  
Lead Member,  
Scrutiny and Review Committee  
(Childrens Services).**



## Contents

	<u>Page No.</u>	
1	Glossary of Terms	5
2	Introduction – Corporate Parenting Review	6
	- Membership	6
	- Terms of Reference	6
	- Site Visits	6
3	Background	7
4	Working Group Approach	8
5	National Context	9
6	Local Context	10
7	The Improvement and Development Agency	12
8	How do you know that you are a good Corporate Parent?	13
9	Statistics	14
10	Interviewing Witnesses	15
11	Findings	
	- Member and Officer Booklet	19
	- Member and Officer Briefings	19
	- New Members Booklet and Briefing	19
	- Partner Organisations Booklet and Briefing	20
	- School Staff Booklet and Briefing	21
	- Governor Responsibilities	23
	- Out of Borough placements	24
	- Profile Every Looked After Child	25
	- Develop Relationships with PCT (NHS Sefton)	26
	- Multi-agency “After Care” Safety net for Care Leavers	28
	- Employment Opportunities for Looked After Children	30
12	Conclusion	31
13	Acknowledgements and Supporting Information	33
14	Recommendations	35





## 1.0 Glossary of Terms

The Working Group came across many terms that professionals use to describe children in need under the Children Act 1989. Below are simple definitions of the most common:

**Looked after children** – these are children who are looked after by the local authority through a care order made by a court or by agreement with their parent(s), whether in a residential home, with other members of their extended family or with foster carers. Some may be placed outside the area of the local authority but will still remain the responsibility of the local authority. These are the children for whom the council is corporate parent.

**Care Leavers** – These are young people who have been looked after by the local authority and who the authority has a duty to keep in touch with and to support when they leave care. The responsibility lasts up to the age of 21 or beyond if they are in education or training.

**Children in need** – These comprise a much wider group of children who are assessed as being unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development without access to services. In particular the Children Act 1989 identifies all disabled children as children in need, and also those whose names are on the Child Protection Register.

**Children at risk of harm** – These are children about whom there are concerns that they are at risk of suffering harm through abuse or neglect. The Council will maintain a Child Protection Register of the names of children who are the subject of a child protection plan because of continuing concerns about their safety. The Council will monitor closely their safety and developmental progress.

**Personal Education Plan (PEP)** – Each looked after child should have a PEP. The purpose of the PEP is to ensure access to services and support; contribute to stability; minimise disruption and broken schooling; signal particular and special needs, establish clear goals; and act as a record. The PEP should be agreed at the latest, within 20 school days of the child becoming looked after or joining a new school. An accurate and constructive educational record provides a looked after child with a “passport” for the future.



## 2.0 INTRODUCTION – CORPORATE PARENTING REVIEW

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services) met on the afternoon of the 14 July 2009 where a Work Programme Session was facilitated. The purpose of the session was to invite all sections of the Children’s Services Directorate and their partners to share with the Committee issues that they felt required further investigation. It was identified that as the Local Authority was, at that time, not achieving 100% compliance with Statutory Requirement of Member visits to Care Home that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should investigate Corporate Parenting within Sefton M.B.C. (Corporate Objective No. 17 – Ensure the safety of Sefton Children and Young People). Minute No. 19 of the meeting held on 14 July 2009, resolved that a new Working Group be appointed as follows:-

### 2.1 Membership

Minute No. 19 of the meeting held on 14 July 2009, re-affirmed the Membership of the Corporate Parenting Working Group, as follows:-

Councillors P. Cummins (Lead Member), Hough and T. Jones and Mrs S. Cain (Parent Governor Representative).

Further to Minute No. 43 of the meeting held on 22 September 2009, the Membership was amended to include Councillor Bradshaw, as follows:-

Councillors P. Cummins (Lead Member), S. Bradshaw, and T. Jones and Mrs S. Cain (Parent Governor Representative).

### 2.2 Terms of Reference and Objectives

The objective of the review is to make recommendations to Cabinet on:-

1. Having a definition and understanding of Corporate Parenting.
2. Producing a set of guidelines for Councillors and Officers on their Role as Corporate Parent.
3. Scrutinising and commenting upon the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
4. Defining a policy for Corporate Parenting.

### 2.3 Meetings / Site Visits

The following meetings have taken place:-

Date	Meeting	Venue
27 July 2009	Scope Review	Bootle
22 September	Interviewing Witness	Southport
6 October	Interviewing Witnesses	Bootle
20 October	Interviewing Witnesses	Bootle
21 January 2010	Review Scope	Bootle
	Agree Draft Report	Bootle





### 3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Working Group investigated the basic principles and facts of Corporate Parenting. Elected Members become responsible for ensuring that the Council acts as a good “corporate parent” for all the children it looks after, as soon as they sign the Declaration of Office and are officially an Elected Member. The role of corporate parent is to seek for children in public care the outcomes that every good parent would want for their own children. The Council has a legal and moral duty to provide such support to the children it looks after.
- 3.2 The Working Group considered that there was a common misconception about children in care and that being that many people believe that they are there because they have done something wrong. The overwhelming majority of children in care are there because of family pressures and problems or because they have experienced abuse or neglect.
- 3.3 The first meeting was arranged to meet with Members to scope the review. The Scoping Document is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Once the scope of the review had been identified the following documents were obtained to support Members with the review:-
- Reports referred to this Working Group by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children’s Services) Meeting 28 April 2009
  - The Protection of Children in England: Action Plan (The Government’s response to Lord Laming)
  - Young Peoples Guide to the Care Matters – Green Paper
  - “.....” Easy Read
  - Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care
  - Guidance – Education of Young People in Public Care

All the above information is available upon request – details at paragraph 8.

## 4.0 WORKING GROUP APPROACH

- 4.1 Working Group Members agreed that it was of great importance to set a benchmark and have a greater understanding of what being a corporate parent was about. They also agreed that there was a requirement to measure how good the Council is performing as corporate parents.
- 4.2 Working Group Members felt that, because Children in care face a range of challenges from the very reason they came into care in the first place, to their educational and emotional development needs, as the elected representatives of the communities these children come from, we all have a responsibility to do the very best we can for all of Sefton's Children.
- 4.3 The Working Group considered that because Children in care have their own specific needs, it is the job of Elected Members, as corporate parents, to firstly understand those needs and secondly to ensure they are met to the highest possible standard. An understanding that Looked After Children can move from place to place leading to a lack of stability is important in order that the Council can plan for individual needs when they do leave care so that they are less likely to end up in prison, unemployed or homeless.
- 4.5 Ensuring their needs are met is complicated. Social work and safeguarding is complex with professional codes and intricate detail of law.



## 5.0 NATIONAL CONTEXT

- 5.1 National instances of child care neglect and abuse resulting in the death of children have been the catalyst of this type of review being undertaken throughout the Country. In many Authorities it has been a “wake up call” to ensure that all Children who are required to be on Child Protection Plans are, and that Children Known to Authorities are monitored closely.
- 5.2 The increase in statistics, some would say are not surprising as a result of the “Baby P” incident in Haringey in 2008 and the Victoria Climbié case. In the wake of the Baby Peter case, child protection referrals have shot up.
- 5.3 Whilst Local Authorities try, wherever possible to either ensure support networks are in place in order that a child or young person may remain with their parents or placed with other family members any child who is known to the Authority and is at risk will be removed. Unfortunately as cases such as those mentioned above come to light, Local Authorities will continually review children on child protection plans and at risk registers and this could result in some children being removed from risk families and hence the increase in statistics.
- 5.4 The National Picture:-
- 12% of children in care achieve 5 A\* - C grades at GCSE (or equivalent) compared to 59% of all children.
  - 45% of children in care are assessed as having a mental health disorder compared with around 10% of the general population.
  - 30% of care leavers aged 19 are not in education, employment or training (NEET).
  - 9.6% of Children in care aged 10 or over, are cautioned or convicted of an offence annually – almost 3 times the rate for all children of this age.



## 6.0 LOCAL CONTEXT

6.1 Sefton Council currently has 386 children who are looked after by the Council. 120 of those are placed outside the Borough. All of those 386 children should have had Personal Education Plans (PEP's) drawn up for them. Of the 386 Children in care:-

- 12.6% have had 3, or more, placement changes.
- 32% have not been in their placement for more than 2 years, 2 years and more is considered a "stable" placement.
- 92% have had full health assessments completed.
- 89.5% are engaged in education, employment or training; and
- 11% gained at least 5A\* - C at GCSE.

6.2 Sefton Council set up a Corporate Parenting Board in August/September 2009. The Children's Trust Partnership feeds into the Board and the Board feeds into the Sefton Local Safeguarding Children Board. It is made up of Elected Members, Looked After Children, Foster Carers and other partner organisations.

6.4 The Corporate Parenting Boards key responsibilities are as follows:-

To set the strategic and operational priorities for children in care and to monitor and scrutinise service delivery. It will also:-

- Ensure that the commitments outlined in the Sefton Pledge for Children in Care are delivered.
- Oversee the implementation of the Sefton Corporate Parenting Strategy.

6.5 The Corporate Parenting Boards Terms of Reference are as follows:-

The Corporate Parenting Board will work to a yearly work programme. It will:-

- Provide a forum for Children in Care to influence policy, service developments and practice and ensure continuous improvement.
- Ensure there are good joint working arrangements between Council Departments, with Partner Agencies and hold them to account for good, high quality, service delivery.

6.6 The Sefton Pledge:

**Be Healthy:** Improve the emotional and behavioural health of Looked After Children Pledge Standard: we promise to take an interest in your health and encourage you to be healthy.



**Stay Safe:** Improve the stability of placements for Looked After Children (Increase length and reduce number) Pledge Standard: We promise that we will do our best to find a home that suits your needs.

**Enjoy & Achieve:** Increase educational achievement at Key Stage 2 Maths and English, increase number of Looked After Children achieving 5 A\* - C GCSE's. Pledge Standard: We promise to help you to do the best you possibly can at school.

**Achieve Economic**

**Well-Being:** Care Leavers have access to suitable, good quality, living accommodation, increase the number of Care Leavers in employment, education or training. Pledge Standard: we promise to work hard with you to give you all the help and support you need to make a success of moving on from care to adult life.

**Make a Positive**

**Contribution:** Increase number of Looked After Children involved in positive activities (leisure, volunteering), reduce number of permanent exclusions of Looked After Children. Pledge standard: we promise to encourage you to develop your talents interests and hobbies.



## 7.0 THE IMPROVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

- 7.1 The Working Group also examined the National Indicator Set which included several indicators about looked-after children. The Council completes a detailed annual return on looked-after children and in order to do so, information must be collected regularly.
- 7.2 The Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) believe that the following key tasks should be undertaken in the quest to become a good corporate parent:-
- Make sure all councillors understand their corporate parenting responsibilities and are committed to fulfilling them.
  - Appoint a “councillor champion” for looked-after children.
  - Ensure the corporate strategy gives a high priority to the council’s role as corporate parent.
  - Create a corporate parenting group to improve outcomes for looked-after children ensuring children and young people are represented on the group.
  - Ensure that the Council work closely with key partners, the needs of looked-after children cannot be met by a single agency. (The children and young people’s plan should set out how agencies will work together to support looked-after children).
  - Ensure that looked-after children and young people have the opportunity to discuss and give feedback on the quality of the services they receive. (Corporate parents will need to support young people in doing this, it is important, not only to listen to young people’s views but also to act on them).
  - “Care Matters” and its implementation plan state that all areas need a “Children in Care Council” to enable councils and their partners to have regular dialogue with local children in care, involving them in shaping and delivering services. Children in care should also be involved in the recruitment of key staff.
  - Young people who have been in care face particular challenges when they leave. They may have missed opportunities and have little or no family support. Councils should provide the support a good parent would give on housing, education, training and employment. The IDeA state that “this can make all the difference between achieving independence or requiring long-term help”. They also state that



“Councils must keep in touch with care leavers until they are 21, and beyond if they are in education”.

7.3 The IDeA states that “research has demonstrated that educational achievement is a very significant factor in improving the life chances of looked-after children”. Information that helps assess progress includes:-

- personal education plans(PEPs)
- school absenteeism
- exclusions
- SAT scores
- The qualification that looked-after children are achieving

The performance of looked-after children should be measured against those of other children in the area.

7.4 It is also stated that because many looked-after children experience poor health outcomes, looked-after children must:-

- be registered with a GP
- have their immunisations up to date
- receive a regular health assessment and dental checks.

## 8.0 HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE A GOOD CORPORATE PARENT?

8.1 Corporate Parenting places collective responsibility on Local Authorities to achieve good parenting for all children in their care. It requires ownership and leadership at a senior level and this includes all elected Members.

8.2 The circumstances and experiences of looked-after children and young people mean that they can experience many disadvantages. Research indicates that looked-after children experience poorer outcomes than other children across a range of measures, including health and education.

8.3 Looked-after children have a right to expect the following outcomes we want for every child and young person:-

- be healthy
- be safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution to society
- achieve economic wellbeing.

8.4 To achieve the above outcomes, Councils must demonstrate their commitment to helping every child they look after, wherever the child is placed, to achieve their full potential.



## 9.0 STATISTICS

9.1 The following statistics have been obtained from the Department for Children, Schools and Families: Children Looked After in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2009:-

- There were 60,900 looked after children at 31 March 2009, 2% more than last year's figure of 59,400 and relatively unchanged compared to 2005 (61,000).
- There were 25,400 children who started to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2009, an increase of 9% from the previous year's figure of 23,300 and an increase of 2% from the 2004-05 figure of 25,000.
- There were 24,700 children who ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2009, an increase of 1% from the previous year's figure of 24,400 and a decrease of 5% from the 2004-05 figure of 26,000.
- 3,300 looked after children were adopted during the year ending 31 March 2009. This represents a 3% increase from the previous year's figure of 3,200 and a 13% decrease from 2004-05 figure of 3,800.
- In the past 5 years the % of former care leavers, with whom the local authorities were in touch and who were in education, employment or training around the time of their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, had increased from 58.4% in 2005 to 64.9% in 2008. However in 2009 the % dropped to 63%.





## 10.0 INTERVIEWING WITNESSES

10.1 At their first meeting, Working Group Members scoped the review (see Appendix 1 to the report). This meant that they set out clear aims and objectives for the review and listed all key witnesses they would invite to interview. At that time the Lead Member suggested that there would be three main questions to be asked of key witnesses:-

1. What was their understanding of corporate parenting?
2. What would they like to see?
3. What they believe the gaps to be?

(It was highlighted that subsequent questions could and would be asked)

10.2 The notes of those Meetings are available upon request however witnesses' evidence has been referred to within the following paragraphs in relation to findings and evidence.

10.3 The following witnesses were interviewed:-

- 3 Area Managers
- Solicitor Sefton MBC – Children's Social Care
- Strategic Director Children's Services
- Children's Social Care Director
- Resource Managers – Looked After Children, Children's Homes
- Children's Trust Director
- Sefton MBC – Cabinet Member Children's Services and Spokespersons
- Connexions

10.5 The following statements will give a flavour and snap shot of what some key witnesses understanding of corporate parenting was:-

One key witnesses had met with a group of looked after children who had stated that:-

“Everybody who has the power to help us should be helping us”

“Everybody should be working together”

“We don't want sympathy but acknowledge the hurdles looked after children come up against”



Another key witness stated that corporate parenting was a shared responsibility of children in public care, she explained that she looked at it simply as shared responsibility underpinned by a clear commitment – a genuine want.

Corporate parents should ensure the very best for those children like a parent would. It was stated that looked after children can arrive very quickly and that each school should have a designated teacher who is corporate parent to those looked after children within their school.

Corporate parenting was a fundamental part of the work of Children's Services. That in addition to ensuring that a statutory requirement was carried out the Council had a moral obligation to provide the best service it could for what could be some of the more vulnerable children and young people in its area.

One key witness stated that there was a simple benchmark to use when visiting children's homes or foster carers, which would be to ask yourself the following simple question "would I leave my child here?"

Another key witness drew upon experiences from another Authority he had worked for and stated that a care leaver, who had become a Solicitor, had commented that they wouldn't have chosen the Authority to look after them but felt they had done a good job in contrast to another who had stated that the Authority had done nothing for them.

- 10.6 Whilst interviewing key witnesses it was apparent, from that there is a clear commitment and genuine passion to provide the best possible start to our children of Sefton.

*"Corporate parents should do what a parent would do for their child. This can be done by profiling each individual child, assessing their needs, looking at ways we can help them in overcoming challenges, knowing when they are taking exams (as a parent would), ensuring stability of placements and ultimately knowing each and everyone of the Council's children."*

- 10.7 Key witnesses believe that challenging negative attitudes to looked after children can be critical in changing their educational experiences and improving outcomes. Research also illustrates that some looked after children are often vulnerable to bullying, particularly if they lack close friends in school, come from a different social class to the majority of pupils or appear to be less well off. Members believed that schools play a major role in ensuring safe and positive school environment and that pupils require careful induction into new schools and that staff should be diligent to ensure no one is isolated or bullied.
- 10.8 After interviewing key witnesses it became apparent that corporate parenting is a responsibility that stretches beyond elected members and officers. The Council's partners have a key role to play with a corporate parent responsibility to offer a support network for looked after children.
- 10.9 Key witnesses interviewed made it clear that providing the right support and assistance and staying in touch in the first few years of independence was part of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities and a requirement under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The Working Group interviewed the Council's Resource Managers for Looked After Children and they stated that some looked after children were leaving care too early, before they were prepared and ready to leave care. They felt that in those circumstances there needed to be some kind of safety net or provision in order that they have a base they can come back to should they find themselves in difficulty, as a young person would return to their family home.
- 10.10 They also believed that local authorities should ensure there is proper planning and preparation in the run up to someone leaving care. Young people should stay in care until they are prepared and ready to leave. Each young person should have a pathway plan, setting out the preparation for independence and a personal adviser to act as mentor both before and after leaving care.
- 10.11 Key witnesses also stated that as a Council we should aim to maximise the number of care leavers who are engaged in education, training or employment by the age 19 and that our progress should be monitored against those objectives with the overall aim of reducing the gap between care leavers and other young people in our area.
- 10.12 After interviewing key witnesses and questioning them through our lines of enquiry it became apparent that care-leavers are over represented in both the prison and homeless populations, indicating that spending time in care does not help prepare them for independent living when they leave. Key witnesses felt that as a major local employer, the Council with partners could provide work related placements, apprenticeships and other employment and training opportunities to care-leavers.

10.13 After interviewing key witnesses and undertaking further research Members of the Working Group had a clear understanding of their recommendations. The following paragraphs underpin the reasons for the recommendations and the research to support those recommendations.



## 11.0 FINDINGS/EVIDENCE

- 11.1 **Members and Officers should receive a booklet outlining their responsibilities;**
- 11.2 **A Briefing should be arranged for current Elected Members and Officers;**
- 11.3 **Newly Elected Members and Officers should receive a briefing and the booklet as part of their induction**

Councillors have a responsibility as corporate parents to do their best for children in care. “Corporate” conjures up an image of bureaucratic systems served to protect the interests of an organisation, while “parenting” is a reminder of our family ties. The two images do not fit well. The working group felt that it was no wonder that there was confusion around a Councillors role as corporate parent, for some it was about the organisation, reviewing statistics and ensuring due diligence whilst for others it was actually getting to know those children in care for whom they are corporate parent to. The working group believe that both roles have their place, however they felt that to avoid confusion and uncertainty among councillors about how to get corporate parenting right in ensuring that every young person in care gets the start in life that they would want for their own children Training and support was required in the form of a booklet and briefing. The Working Group have designed a booklet “If this were my Child” for both Members and Officers, Appendix 3 to the report. **(If agreed Recommendations 1, 2 & 3 will promote and translate a greater understanding of Officer and Member responsibilities in their role as Corporate Parent).**



## **11.4 Partner Organisations should receive a booklet/briefing on their responsibilities**

11.41 The Children Act 2004 places a duty on the local authority, health and other key partners to co-operate to improve the wellbeing of children in their area. Members of the Working Group agreed that as a Council we should seek to ensure that provision of all public services used by looked after children and young people is high quality, “joined up” and takes account of their needs. It was agreed that a booklet designed for partner agencies would be beneficial as it would set out the ground rules in relation to legal and moral obligations however Members emphasised that this calls for commitment and collaboration across a range of Council services and with key partners in ensuring that the looked after children in our area:-

- Have a flying start in life and the best possible basis for their future growth and development;
- Have access to a comprehensive range of education, training and learning opportunities including acquisition of essential personal and social skills.
- Enjoy the best possible physical and mental, social and emotional health including freedom from abuse, victimisation and exploitation.
- Have access to play, leisure, sporting and cultural activities.
- Are listened to, treated with respect, and are able to have their race and cultural identity recognised.
- Have a safe home and a community that supports physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Are not disadvantaged by child poverty.



## 11.5 Booklet and briefings for school staff - Educational Attainment

11.51 The Working Group agreed that as a Council we are responsible for our looked after children and so we should also be responsible for ensuring that our partner organisations are privy to, and understand, their responsibilities for looked after children within their school. It was agreed that they too should have access to a reference guide to support them in their role.

11.52 Members looked at Section 52 of the Children Act 2004 which places a positive duty on councils to promote the educational achievement of looked after children. Duties of co-operation to improve well-being under section 25 of the Act include education, training and recreation. These duties apply to all council's looked after children, wherever they are placed and to young people leaving care.

11.53 Members of the Working Group felt that, at the very least the Council should be ensuring that:-

- looked after children have educational support;
- looked after children have a school place, attend school regularly, we know how many are excluded (officially or unofficially) from school;
- those looked after children who are out of school are provided with appropriate learning provision;
- we are aware what progress looked after children are making and how they are doing in their examinations, teacher assessments and other assessments;
- every looked after child has a personal educational plan and that it is up to date;
- elected members are aware of what the latest inspection report says about standards of education for looked after children in the authority;
- looked after children receive the support they need to be able to make effective use of the education available to them;
- there are effective practices in place to prevent looked after children from being bullied;
- head teachers and colleagues make every effort to promote stability by avoiding moving looked after children to different schools;
- the numbers of looked after children who have a statement of special educational needs or who are on programmes are known.

11.54 The research that the Working Group undertook indicated that too many children in care do not achieve their educational potential. Even allowing for the effect of trauma on children before they came into care, being in care has shown to adversely affect children's educational attainment. The UK Government's Social Exclusion Report confirms that the major barriers to achievement continue to be:

- Lack of stability.
- Time out of school.
- Insufficient help with education, particularly catching up.



- Lack of proactive support and encouragement from carers.
- Insufficient help with their emotional, mental and physical health.

11.55 “If this were my child”, any good parent will want their child to do well at school and to get the best start in life. As a corporate parent it is our responsibility to have the highest aspirations for children in the Council’s care. Ensuring close co-operation between education and the council is crucial in raising standards. Members of the Working Group believe that designing a guide for schools will go some way in bridging the gap and improving knowledge of what is expected of them in their corporate parent role.





**11.6 Where there are a number of Looked After Children in a school a Governor be nominated to have special responsibilities for them.**

- 11.61 Elected Members who are school governors have a key role in ensuring schools have high expectations of and focus on raising attainment standards for looked after children. Looked after children have said they want schools and councils to believe in them and to have the same aspirations for what they can achieve as for other children.
- 11.62 At governing body meetings Elected Members who are school governors should be requesting to scrutinise the strategies that should be in place that assist looked after children in doing better. It may be seen as appropriate for councillor-governors to be the link governor for this issue, given the dual responsibility as both governor and corporate parent.
- 11.63 Councils should expect council appointed governors to act as champions promoting the needs of children in care in schools and nurseries. Under the Children and Young Persons Act, every school will be required to have a designated member of staff who is well versed in education and children in care who has specific responsibility for looked after children. The Working Group believed that this should be examined by taking the requirement one step further in order that where there are a number of looked after children in one school a council – governor be nominated to have special responsibility for them. Members of the Working Group have also requested that a list of all those teachers and councillor-governors assigned to looked after children be kept by the Strategic Director Children, Schools and Families.



## **11.7 Reach an Agreement with other authorities to share information on Looked After Children transferred into another Authority – Out of Borough Placements**

11.71 The Working Group looked closely at looked after children whom for one reason or another have been placed outside the Borough. This can occur for various reasons the most likely reason would be because extended family are outside the Borough. Out of Borough Placements still remain the responsibility of the Authority.

11.71 Sefton Council has 23 looked after children who are placed outside the Borough.



## **11.8 Every Individual Looked After Child be profiled – Personal Education plans for Children and Young People in Public Care.**

11.81 “Every child and young person in public care needs a Personal Education Plan which ensures access to services and support; contributes to stability, minimises disruption and broken schooling; signals particular and special needs; establishes clear goals and acts as a record of progress and achievement.”

11.82 The Personal Education Plan should be sensitive to the diverse needs of children and young people and should focus on the action that is required for them to fulfil their potential. The Plan should be an integral part of the Care Plan. Plans should set clear objectives or targets for the young person which relate to academic achievement as well as other personal and, if appropriate, behavioural targets, and details of who will action the Plan with timescales for action and review. The Plan should cover the following four areas:-

- An achievement record (academic or otherwise);
- Developmental and educational needs (short and long term, development of skills, knowledge or subject areas and experiences);
- Short-term targets (including progress monitoring); and
- Long term plans and aspirations (targets including progress, career plans and aspirations).

11.83 Ensuring that each child has a Personal Education Plan and is profiled should make it easier to map where every child is living, giving Elected Members a clear understanding of how many looked after children are within their own wards. This will allow Elected Members to champion this vulnerable group ensuring they are aware of and have access to services.

## 11.9 Develop relationship with PCT (NHS Sefton)

- 11.91 The research Working Group Members undertook indicated that looked after children, especially those in residential units, tend to have more health problems than their peers, including higher rates of mental health problems, pregnancy, smoking and alcohol or drug misuse. One of the issues children in care feel most keenly about is not having someone to talk to in confidence about their health needs and concerns, particularly information about growing up. Members of the Working Group considered that all looked after children should be offered a holistic health assessment which covers mental health and emotional needs, as well as physical health. Such assessments would provide the opportunity to discuss the children's health concerns and to offer advice on health promotion. Each looked after child should have an individual health plan that sets out their health needs and how they will be met.
- 11.92 There should have been a specialist health practitioner to co-ordinate a child's health care plan and address the health needs of looked after children. Children's homes are required to designate a link worker responsible for promoting the child's health and education in liaison with key professionals.
- 11.93 Working Group Members agreed that as a Council arrangements should be in place to regularly review how it assesses the health of looked after children in a sensitive way and seeks to promote better health and wellbeing. Members of the Working Group agreed that a joined up approach with health partners was required to ensure the health needs of looked after children are being given sufficient joint priority by the Council and its National Health Service (NHS) partners, particularly in the development of the local health and wellbeing strategy. As part of the recommendation in relation to ensuring a joined-up approach, Working Group Members recommend that it should be the role of the Council with their NHS partners to ensure priority is given to child protection responsibilities and promoting looked after children's health. The Council should work with NHS partners in order that all whom have a responsibility for looked after children know the following information about them:-
- How the Authority is improving the health (including mental health) of looked after children including those in out of Borough placements.
  - How many have had health assessments.
  - How many are registered with a GP and have access to a dentist.
  - What is being done to improve the health of those who refuse to attend an assessment.
  - That the health needs of children placed in children's homes are being adequately met, particularly those placed out of the area.

- How many have got personal health plans and how planned outcomes are being achieved.
- How the Authority and NHS partners are ensuring that the views of looked after children are taken into account in health and wellbeing strategy development.

11.94 The Working Group considered that by developing relationships with the PCT (NHS Sefton), the Authority could be in a position to use the flexibilities in Section 31 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 to pool budgets, fund or commission services jointly with the NHS. This would need further investigation and examination.

11.95 Following on from the suggestion in paragraph 5.94 above, Working Group Members agreed that they would also like to see, as a longer term goal, the Authority using powers in the Children Act 2004 to jointly fund projects across a wider range of local partners including police and probation as well as health services.



## 11.10 Multi-agency “After Care” safety net for Care Leavers

11.101 All Members of the Working Group and key witnesses agreed that most young people need care and support from their parents during the transition to independence when leaving home. It was felt that this was even truer for the majority of care leavers who have had a disadvantaged start in life.

11.102 The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 strengthens current arrangements to ensure that young people are not forced out of care before they are prepared and ready to leave by giving them a greater say over moves to independent living and ensuring they receive the support they need for as long as they need.

11.103 Members of the Working Group agreed that the following set of simple guidelines or questions would support Officers, Elected Members and Partners:-

- Are we (Officers, Elected Members and Partners) confident that our care leavers are leaving care when they are prepared and ready to leave?
- How many young people who left care at 16 are still in touch with their social worker, carer or other approved person at the age of 19/21
- What sort of progress, for example in education, training, and employment, do young people make after they leave our care?
- How many of our care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET)?
- How does this compare with other young people in the area?
- How will they secure employment?
- How many care leavers do we (the Council and Partners) employ?
- How many work experience placements and apprenticeships do we make available for care leavers?
- Do we provide assistance with the costs of education, training or employment for care leavers?
- How have we implemented the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 200 in our area?



- Do we contribute to the Child Trust Funds of our looked after children to give them an investment for their transition to adulthood? (Do Government re-imburse local authorities for top-ups they make to the Child Trust Fund accounts?)

11.104 Working Group Members are recommending that the Council work with their partners to provide a multi-agency “after care” safety net for when children leave care.



## 11.11 Employment Opportunities for Looked After Children.

- 11.111 Through the work of the group it became apparent that the previous Strategic Director for Children's Services had given an undertaking that Sefton's care leavers would be guaranteed employment opportunities once they had left education. This was a personal pledge that he fulfilled. The Working Group agreed that this gave care leavers a sense of security and helped with their identity, as the Council had been their family whilst growing up and that identity was translating through to their employment.
- 11.112 Once the cycle, in the majority of cases, has been broken, that is care leavers going into unemployment, there is less of a chance of history repeating itself. Working Group Members believed that whilst the Strategic Director for Children's Services had grasped this notion, it wasn't being conveyed to other Council departments and indeed partner organisations.





## 12.0 Conclusions

- 12.1 While the Working Group was investigating Corporate Parenting, the Children's Services Department was making improvements through the work of its Corporate Parenting Board. The Working Group would like to express its congratulations for the hard work which has already been achieved.
- 12.2 The purpose of recommendations 2, 3, 4, and 5 is to raise awareness of Elected Member and officer responsibilities in terms of their Corporate Parenting role. The concept of corporate parenting isn't new, it has not just appeared. Councils have been corporate parents for many many years. It is about being the best corporate parent for our looked-after children as if it were our own child, always asking the question "Is this good enough for my child?". By asking that question, we are most likely to ensure that the most vulnerable children are given the best that society can offer, the care, safety and security and opportunities to make the most of their lives that all children deserve. Corporate Parenting is about our community, our children and young people, our responsibility. The Working Group's scope was to have a definition and understanding of Corporate Parenting and to draft a set of guidelines for Elected Members and officers. Recommendations 2,3, 4 and 5 seek to address those objectives. (Paragraphs 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 and 7.5 of the report explore the rationale for recommendations 2, 3, 4 and 5).
- 12.3 Throughout the report and indeed the review itself, Members of the Working Group felt that the importance of the Council's role and responsibilities as Corporate Parent should not be under-estimated or under-stated. In that respect the Working Group felt that any proposals or recommendations including budget cuts considered by Cabinet or Council should include what impact they may have on the Council's Looked After Children, hence recommendations 6 and 7.
- 12.4 It became apparent from early on in the review that Looked After Children should be the responsibility of all public organisations. Members of the Working Group agreed that for Looked After Children to get the best possible care, there was a requirement for all partner organisations to understand their role and responsibilities and to work together with the Council, hence recommendations 8, 9, 16 and 17.
- 12.5 Working Group Members examined the concept of nominating a Teacher and Governor to have special responsibilities for Looked After Children attending their individual schools. Members felt that the designated Teacher and Governor should be an advocate for young people in public care, accessing services and support, and ensuring that the school shares and supports high expectations for them, hence recommendation 11. (Paragraph 7.6 of the report examines in further detail the rationale for recommendation 11).

- 12.6 Working Group Members agreed that, when taking on the role as an Elected Member, they were taking on one of the most important roles as corporate parent to Sefton's looked after children, including those who live outside the Borough. The importance of that role can not be overemphasised. Elected Members have a responsibility to ensure that children looked after by the Council are able to thrive, that they are nurtured, supported, educated, listened to and prepared for adult life in the way any good parent would want for their own children. Recommendation 13 should address the issue of ensuring that all Looked After Children have a personal profile set up setting out when they are due to take examinations, identifying who their individual mentor including advocate is and any other relevant information that the Council deems to be necessary to be included.
- 12.7 Recommendation 14 refers to a representative from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services being invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee. The National picture states that 45% of Children in Care are known to have a mental health disorder compared with around 10% of the general population. Members agreed that, with that in mind and after considering key witness interviews, that NHS Sefton should be approached to explore taking a more active role in Looked After Children's physiological and psychological welfare, hence recommendation 15.
- 12.8 Members of the Working Group agreed that part of their brief was to raise awareness of the Elected Members' role in being a good corporate parent and this report is the beginning of that task.

*"Elected councillors have a crucial role. Only you can carry it out. You can make sure that the interests of the children come first. You bring a fresh look and common sense. As councillors you set strategic direction of your council's services and determine policy and priorities for your local community within the overall objectives set by Government. It is the responsibility of our officers to manage services and resources in order to achieve those policy objectives and to advise your council on the best way forward. Councillors and officers need to have a good dialogue to ensure that councillors clearly understand their role and responsibilities, and that officers understand the expectations of your council".* Extract from Frank Dobson's letter to all councillors, September 1998.

## 13.0 Acknowledgements and Supporting Information

- 13.1 The Working Group is grateful to all those witnesses and other persons who have assisted with research, provided and shared information and given up time to attend interviews.
- 13.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Officer will circulate the Final report to all witnesses who have taken part in the review.
- 13.3 Finally the Working Group would like to take this opportunity to thank Members, Officers and Partner Organisations who do all they can for the looked after children of Sefton.
- 13.4 During the process of this review, the Working Group has gathered a substantial amount of information and data, which will be invaluable in helping it to form its conclusions and recommendations.
- 13.5 Any background information that has been gathered so far is available on request from Ruth Harrison, Scrutiny Support Officer (telephone 0151 934 2042 e-mail: [ruth.harrison@legal.sefton.gov.uk](mailto:ruth.harrison@legal.sefton.gov.uk))



## 14.0 Recommendations

1. That the Cabinet approves the booklet “If This were my Child”, attached as Appendix 3, to the report.
2. That, in order to raise awareness of the Council’s responsibilities as Corporate Parent, all Elected Members and appointed officers receive the “If This were my Child” booklet outlining their responsibilities, to be distributed by the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families, as detailed in Appendix 3 to the report.
3. That the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families in consultation with the Children’s Social Care Director, be requested to brief, by way of a presentation, all Elected Members and all officers.
4. That all newly Elected Members and appointed officers receive a briefing, from the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families and the booklet “If This were my Child” as part of their induction.
5. That the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families be requested to draft a Role Description for an Elected Member Champion for Corporate Parenting, to be agreed in consultation with Corporate Parenting Board.
6. That an Elected Member Champion for Corporate Parenting be nominated by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board, once a Role Description has been agreed.
7. That the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families, in consultation with the Children’s Social Care Director, be requested to deliver a presentation in relation to the Corporate Parenting Strategy to all of the Council’s Area Committees at each first meeting of the Municipal Year, 2010.
8. That the Finance and Information Services Director, in consultation with the Strategic Director Children, Schools and Families be requested to, when reporting any proposed budget cuts, determine their impact on the Council’s Looked After Children.
9. That, in the future, Cabinet proposals/recommendations be considered, in relation to assessing the impact on the Council’s Looked After Children, if appropriate.
10. That the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families in consultation with the Children’s Social Care Director, be requested to approach partner organisations to make a pledge in relation to what Looked After Children can expect from them and how they can contribute to Corporate Parenting.

11. That the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families in consultation with the Children's Social Care Director, be requested to prepare a separate booklet specifically detailing the Council's expectations of partner organisations in delivering services for Looked After Children across Sefton.
12. That the Strategic Director Children, Schools and Families, in consultation with the Children's Social Care Director, be requested to design a booklet specifically for school staff detailing schools responsibilities in their Corporate Parent Role.
13. That the Strategic Director, Children Schools and Families be requested to ask those schools with Looked After Children attending, to nominate a Teacher and Governor to have special responsibilities for them, the names of the nominated persons to be held by the Strategic Director, Children Schools and Families.
14. That the Strategic Director Children, Schools and Families be authorised to approach other Authorities in order to reach an agreement to share information on Looked After Children transferred into another Authority (Out of Borough Placements).
15. That the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families, the Children's Social Care Director and appropriate officers assigned by them, take a more individual interest in Looked After Children regarding a profile being set up for each child, including examinations, mentoring and advocacy.
16. That the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) be requested to make a presentation in relation to Looked After Children to a future Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services).
- 17a. That the Strategic Director Children, Schools and Families, in consultation with the Children's Social Care Director, be requested to approach an appropriate representative from NHS Sefton requesting them to take a more active role in Looked After Children's physiological and psychological welfare, in that the possibility of a dedicated psychologist for each children's home be explored.
- 17b. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Health and Social Care) be requested to support recommendation 17a above.
18. That the Strategic Director Children, Schools and Families, in consultation with the Children's Social Care Director, be requested to explore the possibility of a multi-agency after care safety net approach to be adopted when children leave care.

19. That Sefton Council and its partner organisations be encouraged to offer work placements to Looked After Children on finishing their education.
20. That the Strategic Director, Children, Schools and Families be requested to report on progress to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services) in September 2010.

