

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – 20 JULY 2009

Title of paper:	Councillor Visits to Children's Homes	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Satinder Gautam Director of Specialist Services	Wards affected: Berridge, Bestwood, Bridge
Contact Officer(s) and contact details:	Julie Lewis – Head of Children in Care, Children's Services, Sandfield Centre, Sandfield Road, Lenton, Nottingham NG7 1QH Tel: 0115 9150850 E-mail: julie.lewis@nottinghamcity.gov.uk	
Other officers who have provided input:		
Relevant Council Plan theme(s):		
Choose Nottingham		X
Respect for Nottingham		X
Transforming Nottingham's Neighbourhoods		X
Supporting Nottingham People		X
Serving Nottingham Better		X
Summary of issues (including benefits to customers/service users):		
<p>The paper proposes the introduction of visits to Nottingham City Children's Homes by Councillors and Officers who are members of the Corporate Parenting Board.</p> <p>The proposal will increase the Board's awareness of challenges faced within the service, achievements gained and will most importantly contribute to the safeguarding of young people living in residential care in the City.</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	That all members of the Corporate Parenting Board sign up to visits to at least one residential home during the period September – October 2009 (Appendix 1).	
2	That all members of the Corporate Parenting Board provide feedback on visits to the 16 November 2009 Corporate Parenting Board meeting.	
3	That the Corporate Parenting Board on 16 November 2009 discusses how Corporate Parenting Board members might contribute to future Regulation 33 visits in children's homes.	

1 **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The concept of Corporate Parenting was first given prominence in 1998, within the Quality Protects Programme, launched by Frank Dobson, the Secretary of State for Health at that time. The key message was that Councillors should view the needs of children in public care and have ambitions for them as though they were their own. Since 1998, Central Government has continued to strengthen the concept of the Council as corporate parent and the role of elected members in championing this approach.

On 21st June 2007 the Government published the White Paper, 'Care matters: Time for Change', which set out the steps the new Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) will take, together with local delivery partners, to improve outcomes for children and young people in care. The White Paper set out key components for effective corporate parenting;

'The Director of Children's Services and Lead Member have overall responsibility for leading corporate parenting arrangements – both across the authority and with its partners in the children's trust.'

'Authorities may also appoint a group of senior officials with responsibility for the corporate parenting of children in care. The accountability and governance arrangements of these groups must be clear.'

On the 26th March 2008 the Government published the Implementation Plan, 'Care Matters: Time to Deliver for Children in Care'. This sets out the national framework for change and guides Children's Trust partners in implementing this change locally. There is a requirement for the Local Authority to ensure that corporate parenting arrangements are robust and that children in care have links with the Lead Member and Director of Children's Services through a 'Children in Care Council'. This Board will fulfil this function.

Outcomes for children in care across the country are slowly improving, but there is still an unacceptable gap between their outcomes and those of their peers. For example, national data shows children in care are five times less likely to achieve five good GCSEs, nine times more likely to be excluded from school, and six times less likely to enter higher education, than their peers. In general, the outcomes for Nottingham's children in care are lower than this. Care leavers are over represented in some of the most vulnerable adult groups including young parents, prisoners, and the homeless.

The current Corporate Parenting Board was established in 2009. Nine Councillors representing all political parties have been appointed to the Board and Corporate Parenting Champions from all City Council departments plus partner agencies are also represented.

Members of the Board are keen to fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities to the best of their ability and visits to children's homes will enable them to gain further understanding of the challenges faced by this vulnerable group of young people.

A suggested list of questions visitors might ask is attached as Appendix 2.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS (INCLUDING OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION)

- 2.1 The involvement of Members of the Corporate Parenting Board in visits to Nottingham City's children's homes will contribute to ensuring that children in care are appropriately safeguarded, that outcomes for them are being achieved and that the service provides value for money.

It will enable members of the Board to more closely scrutinise reports in relation to the service presented on future agenda's.

3 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED IN MAKING RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 Maintaining the status quo in relation to Councillor visits (i.e. Councillors not visiting) restricts the way in which a Councillor might wish to exercise their corporate parenting responsibilities and so is not a preferred option.

Visits to children's homes by ALL_Councillors would impose a significant demand on the staff and residents within a home. This is not a preferred option as the regulatory framework within which the service operates states that "any visitor to the home who has not been checked via the Criminal Records Bureau is not allowed unsupervised access to the home" and "staff take responsibility for the monitoring and management of visitors in consultation with children and in the interests of the safety and welfare of all resident children" – (National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes 2002)

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING VALUE FOR MONEY)

- 4.1 There are no financial implications in respect of the proposal apart from the time incurred by members of the Board during their visits.

5 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES (INCLUDING LEGAL IMPLICATIONS, CRIME AND DISORDER ACT IMPLICATIONS AND EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS)

- 5.1 Staff and young people will be adequately prepared in advance of the proposed visits in order to minimise any anxieties which unannounced visits might provoke.

6 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS OTHER THAN PUBLISHED WORKS OR THOSE DISCLOSING CONFIDENTIAL OR EXEMPT INFORMATION

- 6.1 Establishment of the Corporate Parenting Board – Executive Board 16.12.2008

7 PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS REFERRED TO IN COMPILING THIS REPORT

- 7.1 National Minimum Standards – Children's Homes Regulations Department of Health 2002.

If This Were My Child – Department for Education and Skills 2003.

Appendix 1

Corporate Parenting Board Visits to Children's Homes

Name of Unit	Date Offered	Visitors
9 Beckhampton Road	Tuesday 8 th September	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
9 Beckhampton Road	Monday 14 th September	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
9 Beckhampton Road	Tuesday 22 nd September	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
12a Ranskill Gardens	Monday 7 th September	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
12a Ranskill Gardens	Monday 14 th September	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
12a Ranskill Gardens	Tuesday 15 th September	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
23 Vivian Avenue	Tuesday 8 th September AM	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
23 Vivian Avenue	Wednesday 9 th September AM	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
23 Vivian Avenue	Friday 11 th September AM	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
Crocus Fields	Wednesday 2 nd Sept PM	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
Crocus Fields	Tuesday 8 th September PM	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -
Crocus Fields	Tuesday 29 th September PM	Councillor - Councillor - Officer -

Appendix 2

Questions Visitors Might Ask

Overriding Question – Would this be good enough for my child?

1. Do young people living in the home feel safe?
2. How are they protected from harm?
3. Did staff know what to do if they are concerned about a child's safety?
4. What educational provision do young people attend?
5. Are they involved in extra curricular activities?
6. Do young people living at the home have access to a full range of support services available to all children?
7. What links are there with the Leaving Care Service?
8. Are there any recruitment issues in the home?
9. What checks are carried out on new recruits?
10. What training is provided?
11. What contact do young people have with family and friends?

**Adapted from “If This Were My Child” – Guide to being a good Corporate Parent”
– DfES 2003**