

# Report of the Director for Children's Services to the meeting of Corporate Parenting Panel to be held on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024

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**Subject:** Corporate Parenting Development and Progress Update

**Summary statement:**

This report provides an update on the work that has been undertaken to improve Corporate Parenting for children looked after and care leavers of Bradford District.

**Background Information:**

In Bradford our ambition is for robust and comprehensive corporate parenting across the Bradford district that all partners are fully committed to. It will be well informed, and outcome focused and can demonstrate improved outcomes for care experienced children and young people. Being a corporate parent means collectively striving to create a positive impact on the lives of these children and young people, just as any caring parent would and this is where we want to get to.

We know ourselves, and from external sources including Ofsted and national government representatives, that we need to significantly improve Corporate Parenting across the District. The Local Authority Children's Services and the Trust will jointly steer the partnership in Bradford to realise these necessary improvements.

**EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:**

Corporate Parenting involves continuously considering equality objectives as set out in the Council's equality objectives. Therefore, as part of the Corporate Parenting development activity with our partners, equality assessments will be undertaken as required.

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**Overview & Scrutiny Area:**



## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the work that has been undertaken to improve Corporate Parenting following the Local Government Association (LGA) peer review that took place on 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024. This development work involves the Local Authority, Bradford Children and Families Trust (BCFT) and partners and is being supported by the Local Government Association (LGA).

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Corporate Parenting Panel was previously reviewed and refreshed with updated arrangements coming into place at the start of 2022 with new Terms of Reference to reflect the panel becoming young person led for every other Panel meeting. Prior to that there had been a hiatus through 2020/21 when the panel had not been meeting due to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 2.2 In September 2022, a visit to Bradford was carried out by the National Implementation Advisor for Care Leavers (Mark Riddell); recommendations from the Advisor include those which would improve Corporate Parenting and were detailed in a follow up letter to the Chief Executive. Although the Advisor acknowledged good buy-in from elected members and the introduction of a first phase of a Champion Model approach for themed areas, he highlighted the need to fully implement this approach.
- 2.3 In addition, following the Ofsted inspection (ILACS) which commenced in November 2022, the published report included an area for improvement around the need to strengthen corporate parenting, *'Council and corporate senior leaders should ensure that they fully and effectively discharge their role as corporate parents, and ensure that children's social care is provided with the resources and support required in a timely way to expedite sustainable improvements.'*
- 2.4 Furthermore, the report goes on to state, *'the local authority is not acting as a strong and effective corporate parent. Although the corporate parenting board arrangements have recently been strengthened through the inclusion of children and identification of areas for priority action, the corporate parenting strategy remains incomplete and is not demonstrating how it impacts on the quality of services to children in care.'*
- 2.5 The Ofsted Action Plan was developed in response to the ILACS report and include the following relevant actions:
- A multi-agency process to produce a cross system Corporate Parenting Strategy
  - Delivery of the shared and individual Corporate Parenting Objectives agreed by the Council Senior Leadership Team, and all services to have a Corporate Parenting Goal in their service plans.
  - Strategic Directors to report on Corporate Parenting activities in their departments to the Corporate Parenting Panel
  - Implementation of a training and development programme to bolster strategic support and challenge role incorporating Corporate Parenting.

- Collective commitment and implementation of the Foster Friendly Bradford, and Child Friendly Bradford approaches

### 3. CONTEXT

- 3.1 In Bradford our ambition is for robust and comprehensive corporate parenting across the Bradford district that all partners are fully committed to. It will be well informed, and outcome focused and can demonstrate improved outcomes for care experienced children and young people. Being a corporate parent means collectively striving to create a positive impact on the lives of these children and young people, just as any caring parent would and this is where we want to get to.
- 3.2 We know ourselves, and from external sources, including Ofsted and national government representatives, that we need to significantly improve Corporate Parenting across the District. The Local Authority Children's Services and the Trust will jointly steer the partnership in Bradford to realise these necessary improvements. As such, an urgent programme of improvement for Corporate Parenting was required.
- 3.3 To support this work, we held a successful stakeholder event in December 2023 to identify strategic objectives, ambitions, and opportunities to deepen our understanding of the Corporate Parenting role across the partnership.
- 3.4 This was followed by a peer review undertaken by a Local Government Association commissioned team in January 2024. To prepare for this, the Local Authority and the Trust jointly completed the LGA toolkit assessment, and during this process identified many areas for improvement which aligned to the main headings of the LGA toolkit. The Peer Review team have since presented their findings back to us in Bradford. We will use the learning and recommendations from the Peer Review to shape a project plan.
- 3.5 We know that to get things right, we need to start with how we organise ourselves and make decisions together as Corporate Parents. As such, our first steps will be to review, refresh and develop our Corporate Parenting board by way of membership and other terms of reference, how it is structured, and the information that is presented to it.
- 3.6 Local Government Association Peer Review that took place in January 2024 made, a number, of recommendations:
- 3.6.1 The support, development, and training offer to be provided by the LGA will enable the Council, the Trust, elected members, and partners in:**
- Embedding strong governance and accountability for Corporate Parenting, with clear understanding of responsibilities and expectations.
  - Achieving a whole system approach to Corporate Parenting across the wider council and partners, driven by the voice and experiences of children and young people.
  - Understanding what good looks like and measuring impact.
  - Achieving improved outcomes for children and young people who are care experience.

## 4. PROGRESS AND UPDATES ON DEVELOPMENTS, AND NEXT STEPS

### 4.1 Progress and updates on developments

4.1.1 We have developed a comprehensive improvement plan which addresses the recommendations from the LGA and the National Implementation Advisor and includes taking up the support offer from the LGA. The plan has been developed around the following priorities:

- Priority A Strengthen current governance arrangements and champion engagement to support greater accountability at all levels for corporate parenting.
- Priority B Strengthen the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- Priority C Strengthen the functioning of the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- Priority D Strengthen the corporate parenting offer available to children and young people.
- Priority E Make improvements for care leavers.

4.1.2 Since April 2022, the Bradford Children's Improvement Board, chaired by the Bradford Commissioner, has been providing an effective forum for change. Progress on the Corporate Parenting Improvement Plan will be reviewed and monitored at the Improvement Board.

### 4.2 Corporate Parenting Strategy

4.2.1 Work is in progress to develop a co-produced Corporate Strategy which reflects the voice of our children in care and care leavers and stakeholder feedback, and which builds on the recommendations from the Peer Review.

4.2.2 The strategy will set out our vision:

**For every Bradford child who is in our care or a care leaver to experience the love and care that all good parents offer their children to support them to be themselves, achieve their potential and reach their dreams.**

4.2.3 The strategy will also reflect the key principles for corporate parenting enshrined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 through our shared commitment that:

- The voice of children and young people will be at the heart of all that we do. We will support children and young people to be heard and have access to advocacy services.
- Wherever safe and possible, children and young people will live with their family or wider family network.
- We will work with children and those family networks to offer them the support that meets their collective needs when that is safe to do.
- When children need to be in our care, we will work with them to plan for their future so that they are only in care for the time that is right for them.

- We will enable all children and young people to live in a home that is safe and comfortable with adults who are committed to help provide stability and meet their needs.
- We will support and help strengthen the relationships that are important to children and young people, helping them to stay connected to those that they love throughout their childhood and into adulthood.
- We will give them the best education possible and the support they need to meet their full potential. We will work with their school, college and workplace to support this.
- We will understand their emotional and physical health needs and make sure those are met.
- We will champion and support young people as they leave our care and start to live independently, doing everything we can to make sure they are set up for life.

4.2.4 We want care to be an enriching experience which enhances the life chances of children in care and care leavers. The Corporate Parenting Strategy will show our ambition for our children by refreshing the Care Leavers Local Offer, developing opportunities for children and young people in the “family firm” and celebrating their achievements.

#### **4.4 Structure and Governance Arrangements**

- 4.4.1 The Corporate Parenting Strategy will be overseen by the Corporate Parenting Panel which is chaired by the Lead Member for Children. Consideration by Corporate Parenting Panel to broaden the membership to include membership from the wider Council, Trust and partner agencies to strengthen overall engagement and accountability for Corporate Parenting, in line with the recommendations of the Peer Review.
- 4.4.2 Subject to agreement, the Corporate Parenting Partnership Working Group will sit below the Corporate Parenting Panel. Its primary function will be to drive the strategic priorities and monitor progress. The partnership working group will be co-chaired by the Assistant Director, Improvement and Partnerships and the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting in the Trust. All key agencies will be represented in the working group.
- 4.4.3 Themed workstreams linked to the agreed strategic priorities will feed into the working group and Corporate Parenting Panel. These may be existing groups, for example the Virtual School Board of Governors, or task and finish groups set up to address a particular area of service development or improvement.
- 4.4.4 All levels of the Corporate Parenting structure in Bradford will champion the voice and influence of children in care and care leavers and their quarterly Take Over of the Corporate Parenting Panel will continue to provide a platform for them to highlight what matters to them and to hold the Panel and its members to account.

#### **4.5 How we will know how well we are doing**

- 4.5.1 As corporate parents, we are committed to improving the lives of children and young people in our care and working with partners to achieve this and it is important that we know how well we are doing in delivering on the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- 4.5.2 The Corporate Parenting Panel will have oversight of progress of the strategic priorities via regular reporting from the working group, as well as key reports that will be provided quarterly and annually to show the quality of services and support provided to children and young people and their lived experience in our care.
- 4.5.3 The Panel will also have a line of sight to the lived experience of children in care and care leavers via a high-level Corporate Parenting Dashboard which reports on:
- The children in care and care leaver population.
  - Where children and young people live.
  - Timeliness of care plans, visits, personal education plans, health assessments and SDQs.
  - How many children go missing or are at risk of exploitation.
  - Education, employment and training.
  - Care leavers accommodation.
  - Pathway planning and keeping in touch.
- 4.5.4 We are building additional feedback mechanisms for our children and young people led by the Participation Service. This will include a more robust “You Said, We Did” approach to the Takeaway Themes from young people led Corporate Parenting Panel Meetings and working with the Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum to achieve co-produced solutions.
- 4.5.5 The Children in Care Council and Care Leavers Forum take over the Corporate Parenting Panel through young people led meetings on a quarterly basis where they tell Elected Members and leaders from across the Council, Trust and partner agencies what matters to them and hold them to account for delivering on their commitments to them. The children and young people put a lot of time and effort into planning and delivering the Young Person Led Corporate Parenting Panels every quarter and the sessions are very much valued by all who attend. At the end of each session, the collective group highlights three ideas, known as Takeaway Themes, which will lead to improved service delivery and joined-up working, to the benefit of children in care and care leavers.
- 4.5.6 We are in the process of co-producing a robust process for how we follow up on the Takeaway Themes to ensure that they are responded to in a timely way and that the children and young people feel valued and listened to. A proposal is for the Assistant Director for Corporate Parenting to track progress with the relevant service/agencies and provide a written response to the Children in Care Council in a “You Said/We Did” format ahead of the young people led Corporate Parenting Panel, and for service leads to attend the meeting so that the children and young people can ask any follow-up questions in person.
- 4.5.7 A further idea is for the children and young people to provide a “So What” response

after six months, for example, to show the impact of the changes implemented as a result of their challenge to the Corporate Parenting Panel to improve services and support for Bradford's children in care and care leavers. This was discussed with the Children in Care Council on 12/06/24 who were in favour of the proposals.

#### **4.6 Next steps**

- 4.6.1 We know that to get things right, we need to start with how we organise ourselves and make decisions together as Corporate Parents. As such, some of our first next steps will be to review, refresh and develop our Corporate Parenting board by way of membership and other terms of reference, how it is structured, and the information that is presented to it.
- 4.6.2 We will also finalise the Corporate Parenting Strategy with clear measures for success that involve care experience children and young people and our partners.
- 4.6.3 We will establish the partnership working group with a workshop planned for 15/07/24 to agree terms of reference, workstreams/workstream leads, and expectations for reporting on progress against the strategic priorities.
- 4.6.4 We will be supported by a programme of support from the Local Government Association which will include:
  - a) Guidance, resources, and case studies.
  - b) Leadership training and support for elected members.
  - c) Support for Whole Council Leadership including a facilitated conversation with the Chief Executive and their senior leadership team.
  - d) Support to Political leadership.
  - e) Corporate Parenting Panel support programme.
  - f) Session to all officers in leadership roles across the Council and the Trust.
  - g) Action Planning and embedding learning.
  - h) Review and follow up.

#### **5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

N/A

#### **6. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on corporate parenting and there are no financial implications arising from this.

#### **7. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

The risk to not undertaking this work for care experienced children and young people would be significant and have a negative impact for their outcomes and experiences.

In addition, there are statutory duties and requirements to undertake this improvement work and such improvements contribute towards our inspection framework with DfE/Ofsted.

If we do not make the required improvements, we would run the risk of sustained reputational damage.



## **8. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

Bradford Council as a whole and Bradford Children and Families Trust (BCFT) has a legal requirement to fulfil corporate parenting obligations to children in care and care leavers under the Children Act 1989, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, and new duties and responsibilities under the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

## **9. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

### **9.2 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

### **9.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

### **9.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

The Children Act's 'backbone' is based on children's rights and the broader legal area of Human Rights. It is however recognised that regular consultation with legal services will be key to the improvement activity.

### **9.5 TRADE UNION**

There are no specifics to consult and or draw in Union support. Should this change over time then the Unions will be approached accordingly.

### **9.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

None

### **9.7 AREA COMMITTEE LOCALITY PLAN IMPLICATIONS**

### **9.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

As specified in the Summary and detailed background of this report above, the entirety of this work is concerned with the improvement of outcomes and experiences for children and young people who are care experienced.

It is anticipated that making the improvements set out in the Improvement Plan will improve outcomes and experiences for children in care and care leavers.

### **9.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

Undertake a Privacy Impact Assessment to determine whether you need to deal with data protection and information security matters arising from the Data Sharing Agreements are already in place between key partners for this 'Public Interest' activity- and would be regularly reviewed throughout the life cycle of the improvement project activity. Further careful consideration and or data sharing being reasonable, anonymised, and other security measures will be standardised sharing requirements.

## **10. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None

**11. OPTIONS**

None

**12. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- a) It is recommended that the progress updates and next steps in this report are noted by Corporate Parenting Panel.
- b) To agree reports to be established which will be presented to Corporate Parenting Panel and the Bradford Children's Improvement Board and confirm frequency of reporting.
- c) To agree the development and implementation of the corporate parenting partnership working group.

**12. APPENDICES**

None

**13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None