

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director of Social Work & Health
and Executive Director of Educational Services

Council Meeting 26 March 2008

**Subject: Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better -
The Corporate Parent Function**

1. Purpose

- 1.1** This report is to inform members of the Report "Looked After Children and Young People – We Can and Must Do Better", especially the requirement to develop a Corporate Parenting Strategy. Further, this report makes recommendation regarding the use of additional short term funding from the Scottish Government to support local authorities in strengthening their corporate parent role.

2. Background

- 2.1** In January 2007 the Scottish Executive launched the report *Looked After Children and Young People: We Can and Must Do Better*. The report indicated Scottish Ministers' desire to see a step change to improve outcomes for looked after children and young people and set out the actions which needed to be taken to ensure that such changes are implemented.
- 2.2** The Children (Scotland) Act 1995 introduced the term "looked after" replacing the previous description of "in care". "Looked after" refers to the legal status of children and young people to be subject to the formal supervision of the local authority, through an order from the Children's Panel or other statutory order. A child or young person can be looked after at home but if they are no longer able to be cared for by their family and are in a Children's Home, Residential School or Foster Home they are Looked After and Accommodated (LAAC). In any of these circumstances the Local Authority becomes the Corporate Parent.
- 2.3** The current Scottish Government has affirmed its commitment to working with partners to improve outcomes for Looked After Children and has adopted the "We Can and Must Do Better" action plan. This commitment has been formally articulated as the aim to drive up aspirations and achievement across the board for Looked After Children. Specifically, this means delivering year on year improvements in educational attainment, post education pathways, health and dental outcomes and access to sustained, appropriate accommodation.
- 2.4** There are 19 action points within "We Can and Must Do Better" which divide into five key themes:
- working together;
 - becoming effective Life Long Learners;

- developing into successful and responsible adults;
- being emotionally, mentally and physically healthy;
- feeling safe and nurtured in a home setting.

2.5 The report highlights and addresses “8 notable messages” one of which is the importance of the corporate parent role.

2.5.1 Through better corporate parenting, the ultimate outcome should be that there is no discernible difference in life outcomes for children and young people who have experienced the care system and their peers who have not. The opportunities available to children and young people in care should stand comparison to those provided by a good parent to their own children, whether in terms of education, play and leisure, health and well-being, accommodation, or preparation for independent living.

2.5.2 For organisations involved in delivering services to looked after children and young people, the outcome should be that their services are child-centred, accessible and inclusive and they target services in such a way that the particular needs of looked after children and young people are met. It should be possible to measure the positive impact that being in care has had on a child’s life.

2.6 Recognising the challenge of improving outcomes for Looked After Children and Young People, the Scottish Government took the lead by setting up an Implementation Board chaired by Colin McLean from the Scottish Government which, in turn, set up high level national working groups. The Corporate Parenting National Group is chaired by Fiona Lees, Chief Executive of East Ayrshire Council. Lynn Townsend, Head of Service in Educational Services is the ADES representative on the group. Colin McLean will be visiting West Dunbartonshire in April as part of a programme of visits to local authorities.

2.7 The National Corporate Parent Working Group is responsible for the production of corporate parent guidelines to support local authorities and ultimately their partner agencies. In addition, £2.5 million was made available by Ministers to support Councils developing structures and processes which would strengthen their corporate parenting role.

2.8 As part of the Scottish Government action, Anna Fowlie, Head of Corporate Parenting, has taken on a national role in developing corporate parenting and supporting the work of local authorities. She has particular focus on raising awareness and supporting elected members to fulfil their corporate parenting duties and has visited Councils to discuss these issues. Ms Fowlie has offered to meet with elected members in West Dunbartonshire.

3. The Position in West Dunbartonshire

3.1 At present, West Dunbartonshire is Corporate Parent to 387 children and young people. 213 are looked after at home. 70 are in foster care, 47 live with family or friends and 57 are in some form of residential care. Every Secondary School and most Primary Schools have had Looked After Children on their rolls. Full statistical information is attached at Appendix 1.

3.2 West Dunbartonshire has a number of areas of good practice in relation to Looked After Children upon which we can build. Some examples are:

- Young People in Mind : Based at the Acorn Centre this service to address the mental health and wellbeing of Looked After Children is a joint venture between CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) and the Council. Improving the mental and emotional health of Looked After Children is an Action Point of We Can and Must Do Better.
- Educational Services, in collaboration with Social Work and Health have in place specific additional educational support for both Looked After and Looked After and Accommodated Children.
- West Dunbartonshire has a well established service for young people leaving care. Supporting the transition to independence is another key action point in the report.
The Care Commission has inspected Housing Support Services provided by the Throughcare Team. The Commission highlighted the knowledge of staff, how young people were valued and the clear commitment to improving outcomes for young people.
An HMle report highlighted the “inspirational work” of the Throughcare Team as evidenced by the powerful testimony of the young people. The Throughcare Team has been invited to participate in a National Working Group to take forward “We Can and Must Do Better”. The Team is currently supporting 4 young people at University in Edinburgh and Paisley and 8 young people in fulltime education courses at college.
- Work being undertaken on More Choices More Chances (previously referred to as NEET) is showing encouraging signs of improving the school-leaver destinations for those young people most likely to have difficulty in making the transition into Further Education, employment or training. Looked After Children figure significantly in this group and it is expected that they will benefit from the impact of improvements for all young people who need More Choices and More Changes.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** Although local authorities had a duty under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 in respect of the care and education of children who are looked after, the report “We Can and Must Do Better” highlights the continuing poor outcomes for this vulnerable group of young people and stresses the importance of action at national and local level to improve outcomes for Looked After Children. Contained within the report is an expectation that local authorities will develop a corporate parenting policy to enable them to take the necessary actions to improve outcomes for children and young people. Over recent months, officers with Educational Services and Social Work and Health, in consultation with colleagues from Health, have been working on the proposed action to take forward the implementation of ‘We Can and Must Do Better’.
- 4.2** As indicated above, corporate parenting as a concept is not new but corporate parenting as a policy initiative to drive change is now a key national and local priority. The following implementation steps are recommended:

- Set up a strategic Corporate Parent Working Group to include an elected member, or members, and key officers from within the council.
- Have corporate parenting as a main agenda item for a future Senior Managers' Network.
- Invite each Corporate Director to present a draft action plan outlining the contribution of their services to a corporate strategy.
- Utilise part of the additional government funding of £64,000 to provide a new, short term post of Corporate Parent Implementation Officer.
- Expand the remit of the current LAAC Raising Attainment group to take forward operational co-ordination of policy development and implementation.

4.3 The creation of the post of Corporate Parenting Implementation Officer has been agreed by the CMT and recruitment is underway. This post will increase the capacity within the council to develop and co-ordinate the actions which will flow from both the Strategic Officer/Member Group and the Operational Implementation Group. Agreement has been obtained from the Scottish Government that the funding for the financial year 2007/08 can be carried forward into 2008/09 in order to obtain best value. The post will be offered on a seconded basis for the period of a year. The tasks to be carried out by the postholder are as follows:

- to provide support to the operational working group on corporate parenting and, as required, the officer member working group;
- to write the corporate strategy;
- to lead/co-ordinate consultation on corporate strategy;
- to lead on issues of communication regarding the strategy;
- to support single agency and inter-agency awareness raising and training;
- to involve young people in the development and implementation of the policy;
- to develop links across agencies and with the community in relation to corporate parenting;
- to develop and disseminate good practice, for example, in terms of strong working relationships between Education staff and Children's Units, and Through Care Services.

5. Personnel Issues

5.1 The only personnel issue is the additional post to carry out the remit as summarised in 4.3. In the longer term, any activity flowing from the strategy will be undertaken by staff within their existing remits.

6. Financial Issues

6.1 Additional funding of £64,000 has been allocated to the Council to support development work on the Action Points within 'We Can and Must Do Better'. This will fund an additional post and cover the costs of training, support materials and a

communication strategy. Any enhancement to existing services for LAC would require to be funded from existing budgets.

7. Risk Assessment

- 7.1** There is no risk to service delivery. It should be noted however that consideration is being given to how inspection of corporate parenting can be incorporated into existing inspection cycles. There are also plans for HMIE to launch thematic inspection of services to Looked After Children in March 2008. Both HMIE and SWIA have inspections of this Council's services planned for this year. Failure to implement action on the corporate parent role could result in unfavourable outcomes from such future inspections.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1** Improving outcomes for Looked After Children is a national priority, and strengthening the role of the local authority as corporate parent is viewed as central to achieving this. The Scottish Government has set up a structure to develop and support work at local level, and has provided short term funding to assist Councils. There is a need for this Council to develop and implement a corporate policy which enables elected members, senior officers and the wider community partnership structures to understand and successfully discharge their corporate parent function.

9. Recommendations

9.1 Council is requested to:

- i) note the priority being given to the implementation of outcomes for Looked After Children as contained in the report "Looked After Children and Young People : We Can and Must Do Better".
- ii) endorse the actions proposed to implement the work required within West Dunbartonshire, in particular, the use of the additional funding to increase the capacity of the Council to respond
- iii) invite Anna Fowlie, Head of Corporate Parenting at the Scottish Government to visit the Council at a mutually convenient time to brief members and officers.

William W Clark
Executive Director of Social Work & Health

Terry Lanagan
Executive Director Educational Services

Persons To Contact: Anne Ritchie, Head of Social Work (Operations)
Garshake Road
Dumbarton
01389 737709
Anne.ritchie@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Lynn Townsend, Head of Service (Support)
West Dunbartonshire Council Headquarters
Garshake Road
Dumbarton
01389 737387
Lynn.townsend@west-dunbarton.gov.uk

Appendices: None

Background Papers: None

Wards Affected: All