

CORPORATE PARENTING FORUM

TUESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2022

PRESENT: Councillors Amy Tisi (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Sayonara Luxton, Gerry Clark and John Story

Officers: Laurence Ellis, Lin Ferguson and Elaine Keating

WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Vice-Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves.

Apologies were received from Councillor Carroll (substituted by Councillor Luxton), Councillor Da Costa (substitute not available) and Sarah Moran.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 - EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the motion to exclude the public for the remainder of the meeting be approved.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30th June 2022 be approved as a correct record.

UPDATE ON THE CARE LEAVERS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Marie Bell, Associate Director for Corporate Parenting, gave a verbal presentation regarding the Care Leavers' Covenant Work, a promise made by private, public or voluntary organisations to provide support for care leavers. On the basis to develop a good parenting model in RBWM, Marie Bell informed that a task-and-finish group was gathered to review where the Borough stood on its corporate parenting and compare this to the Covenant's objective.

The recommended strategic idea was a 'Whole Council Approach' which involved every department in the Borough having an involvement and partnership in order to support care leavers towards independence. The concept promotes a Five Part Strategy:

1. Raising Awareness of the Covenant
2. Council Tax Exemption
3. Training and Employment Opportunities
4. Social Value Policy
5. Economic Development

Marie Bell then explained that the next approach was to develop care leaver champions in every department in the Council and possibly go further by extending care leaver champions to businesses and voluntary sector organisations. The main objective was to raise awareness of the Covenant and potential opportunities for care leavers.

Marie Bell stated that the task-and-finish group, in terms of the Five Part Strategy, looked at some core principles. These were:

- Independent Living
- Education Training and Employment opportunities
- Safety and Security
- Mental & Physical Health
- Finance

As a result of the work, an action plan was created to bring all the principles and objectives as well as partners together in hope of creating an overall social value policy for RBWM.

Looking at independent living for care leavers, Marie Bell explained that:

- The previously used Horizon Programme had now redeveloped itself into an independence program led by the Virtual School.
- Links had been established with Department of Work and Pensions and businesses to support training and opportunities for young people.
- Activities would include cookery lessons, finance skills, home environment, safety planning, relationship building, housing employment, and education training.
- Michael Guard, AfC Virtual College Assistant Headteacher, was also pushing for internships and apprenticeships.

Marie Bell requested Councillors to consider how the Borough could respond. Some suggested actions included support from the Housing Department to support young people making their applications to be represented, promote opportunities for care leavers to be involved in decision-making and feedback in different departments, and Asbury (a housing provider for the Council) to include care leavers in decision-making and feedback.

Under education, employment and training, Marie Bell sought for improved access to education, employment and training for care leavers to prepare them for work. She requested the Council to provide direct work and training opportunities through training opportunities or apprenticeships, work experience, or even the opportunity to observe and learn other employees.

At the moment, the current support for care leavers included a mentoring programme from Kingston University, NEET tracking, strong collaboration between the Virtual School and social care teams, and Attachment Aware Programmes in multiple schools.

Marie Bell stated that there could be more training and apprenticeship opportunities in RBWM. Because of this, she reiterated her request for the Council to provide work and learning opportunities through apprenticeships, internships and work experience, with the Council department being a potential starting point.

Marie Bell suggested to establish a social value event where businesses could be invited while young people attended to raise awareness and recruit partners. She stated that this would probably come after care leaver champions were established.

Marie Bell also informed that AfC (Achieving for Children) as an organisation had signed up to a guaranteed shortlisting of care leavers applying for jobs. She added that AfC had successfully recruited a care leaver to join AfC as a personal advisor to support other care leavers. She also mentioned that a Care Leaver had secured a job in RBWM HR.

Marie Bell added that AfC's social care teams were collaboratively working with departments such as DWP, Employment Support Partnership and Maidenhead Library. She also stated that AfC continue to meet with its library partnerships as they were doing initiatives all the time.

On safety and security, which sought to ensure care leavers felt safe, secure and stable in their living situations, Marie Bell explained that AfC began to extend its existing children's forums to include care leavers. This included:

- EMRAC (Exploitation Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference) encompassing care leavers.
- AMRAC (an adult version of EMRAC) being established by Adult Services which improved managing the consent element.
- Risk Management Framework being developed, a multi-agency approach used when young people who were not considered at a threshold for adult safeguarding.
- The service giving young people a choice as much as possible as to where they move to when ready for independent living.
- Ensuring care leavers were supported to move to suitable accommodation.

In terms of actions required, Marie Bell explained:

- More development around adult safeguarding and risk element, namely around in who held the responsibility. She stated it would be helpful if care leaver champions within the mental health services.
- Develop and expand networks of tradesmen and services to support and offer care leavers opportunities to learn.
- In terms of personal security, bring care leavers into as a specific cohort in Community Safety Partnership boards.
- Request the Council to develop a partnership with local locksmith companies.
- A care leaver champion in Adult Services.

Marie Bell then moved onto mental and physical health, which sought to improve care leaver access to emotional and mental support. This would include sports and leisure to develop physical and mental health. Other support provided at the moment included:

- Good links with the Children-in-Care Nurse; however, she could only support care leavers on an *ad hoc* basis as it was not under her remit.
- A pilot to include Care Leavers as part of the existing Children-in-Care Mental Health Triage Panel.
- The East Berkshire CIC Strategic Health Meeting to include Care Leavers which could hopefully establish a Care Leavers' nurse who could be the single point of contact.

In terms of future actions, Marie Bell included:

- A better transition in terms of mental health when children-in-care become Care Leavers once they turn 18 years of age.
- Promoting free leisure activities, such as gym, swimming classes.
- Support around Maidenhead Cycle Club, such as second-hand bikes at discounted prices, safe cycle training and support for repairs for those without the skills.

Regarding finance, where AfC sought to promote financial independence amongst Care Leavers, the support Care Leavers received already included Council Tax Exemption for Care Leavers being implemented and then being raised to those aged 25 years of age as well as expand support to Care Leavers living outside of the Borough.

In terms of what the Borough and AfC could improve upon, Marie Bell explained:

- Review the entitlement document in line with the Council and private sector to extend the entitlement offer for Care Leavers.
- More discussions about exemptions for Care Leavers.
- Provide financial guidance as there was no support for emergency financial needs.
- Consider free bus passes.

Councillor Luxton asked about how Care Leavers would be trained to live independently. Lin Ferguson answered it was about working alongside young people rather than training to ensure that they had got the skills to live independently into adulthood. She mentioned the independence programme being led by Michael Guard which looked at skills as part of

transitioning into adulthood, like budgeting, house cleaning and cooking. Regarding Care Leavers with special educational needs, they would be given particular support based on their needs.

Councillor Luxton responded that she did not see a teaching structure, arguing that teaching had to be a balance of giving (teaching) and taking (learning). In other words, the method of teaching was important. Marie Bell replied that AfC had been looking into what they were not doing rather than what was being done. She explained that an assessment of needs takes place before a young person turns 18 which analyses the knowledge and skills the young person has and what they need to learn. This would be then added to a pathway plan while the care leaver has a personal adviser who supports and guides them. All this support would be given to the care leaver until they are ready to live independently.

Councillor Clark suggested that the actions that were achieved and the objectives should be listed so that it could identify what had been achieved and what needed to be done. He also stated that there needed to be an understanding how these objectives were going to be achieved. Marie Bell agreed with Councillor Clark's point and informed that she had a presentation to present to the Forum which may answer his questions.

Suzanne Parrot, Executive Headteacher of Virtual College (AfC), responded to a couple of points on some of the objectives which were already in place. She explained that the Care Leavers Recruitment Scheme was established to train and support AfC managers in taking care of care leavers. The next step was to train the managers at RBWM Council.

Suzanne Parrott also stated that a business event was planned to take place in February 2023. The event is in collaboration with John Lewis and the Care Leavers Covenant and would involve training amongst educational psychologists. The intended result of the training was to ensure business managers would better understand young people as well as encourage businesses to sign up to the Care Leavers' Covenant and then support care leavers.

Councillor Story asked what action from the Council in which Marie Bell believed would make the largest difference. Marie Bell answered that RBWM could identify a champion in every department which would then act as a starting point to look at what to do next.

The Vice-Chairman asked if the notes from the presentation which could be circulated amongst the Forum. Marie Bell said she would share them.

ACTION: Marie Bell to share her presentation notes to the Forum.

The Forum noted the report.

REVIEW OF CORPORATE PARENTING ACTION PLAN

Elaine Keating, Youth Engagement Officer, introduced the report. Before starting, she commented that the Corporate Parenting Forum needed to improve holding itself to account.

Elaine Keating explained the six objectives of the Action Plan:

- For all councillors, professionals, partner services and young people to work together to improve relationships and outcomes for children-in-care (CiC) and care leavers (CL). This would mostly include various activities between Corporate Parenting Forum (CPF) members and children-in-care and care leavers, such as sports days and barbecues, and actions to build relationships like birthday cards, Councillors being mentors and hosting annual meals. While some of these objectives were implemented, the Covid pandemic inhibited the implementation of some of these face-to-face events.
- For children in care and young people leaving care to be listened to and involved in service design and delivery. While Elaine Keating stated that the CPF had come along

way, such as making reports easier to read for young people, there were still some areas to work on.

- For all professionals and elected members to be aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities and are able to make informed decisions. While some actions were achieved, some were not. These included regularly feedback from Kickback members in the members bulletin, include LGA resource pack and pledge on corporate parenting on the members' portal and more Councillors to attend Total Respect training.
- For all children in care and care leavers to be supported and encouraged to achieve. Successful actions included apprenticeships (such as the success of recruiting a care leaver at AfC) and establishing better links with housing department. Actions which still needed to be achieved were formalisation of the Positive Activities for Children in Care Team (due to Covid), developing the leaving care mentoring scheme to support children in care, and organising of annual events to bring together local businesses and care leavers (which was being planned).
- A clear framework for the governance and monitoring of corporate parenting responsibilities and the effectiveness of CPF. The two main actions were achieved: corporate parenting action plan progress report to be regularly reviewed by the children and young people's overview and scrutiny panel, and CPF annual report presented to Full Council outlining progress against the corporate parenting responsibilities.
- CPF meetings to effectively monitor the progress of CiC/CL, including the voice of CiC/CL and review the progress of how the new corporate parenting principles were being embedded. The actions which needed more work on were CPF to review the corporate parenting action plan on a quarterly basis and CiC/CL representatives to meet the CPF chair before each meeting to discuss the agenda. One action which was achieved was CPF meetings and reporting agenda to be set a year in advance and only moved in exceptional circumstances.

Councillor Story suggested to the Vice-Chairman a list of action points before and after every meeting so that it was understood which actions had been achieved and not. The Vice-Chairman and Lin Ferguson agreed with the advice.

The Forum noted the report.

PROPOSED NEW CORPORATE PARENTING FORUM STRUCTURE AND DRAFT CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY FOR 2022-25

Lin Ferguson gave a presentation on the 'new look' Corporate Parenting Forum proposal. She informed the Forum that the previous Corporate Parenting Strategy had recently expired and therefore a new one needed to be drafted. She reminded the Forum that the draft Corporate Parenting Strategy for 2022-25 was circulated amongst the Forum to be reviewed. She also requested that the Forum as well as Kickback and the Care Leavers Hub read the draft and then forward any comments or suggested amendments by 30th September 2022. Once this was done, the final draft would then be presented at Full Council in November.

Councillor Story gave some comments on the draft Strategy. Firstly, he suggested a summary of the differences between the new Strategy and the previous one. Secondly, the draft included how the new Strategy would be communicated. Thirdly, information on who the authors of the draft Strategy were and how it was formulated. Fourthly, some reference to what provisions existed for care leavers over 25 years old in the draft Strategy.

Referring to the last comment, Lin Ferguson replied that some of the Adult Services documents could be linked to the draft Strategy to provide that information.

The Vice-Chairman commented that some priorities were specific while other priorities were too vague in the sense that they did not have measurements.

The general proposal was to have a series of thematic officer-led workstreams which report to the main Corporate Parenting Forum which then holds the officer workstreams to account. Based on the feedback she had received, Lin Ferguson believed the Forum would be in an even better position if it had particular officer workstreams which focused on particular areas that were really important to young people.

The proposed new structure of the Corporate Parenting Forum would involve 5 officer workstreams:

- ‘Your Physical and Mental Health Wellbeing’, chaired by Lynette Jones-Jardine (Safeguarding Lead and Designated Nurse for Children and Young People in Care).
- ‘Your Education, Training and Employment’, chaired by Suzanne Parrott (Executive Headteacher, Virtual School).
- ‘Your Safety, Stability and Permanency’, chaired by Marie Bell (Associate Director for Children in Care and Care Leavers).
- ‘Your Journey to Independence’, chaired by Sarah Moran (Deputy Director, Children’s Social Care).
- ‘Your Voice’, chaired by Elaine Keating (Youth Engagement Officer) with support from Lin Ferguson (AfC Director of Children’s Services).

Each of these officer-led workstreams would have the following:

- Chaired by a senior subject expert.
- An Elected Member Champion.
- Relevant operational champions.
- Voices of children and young people.
- A working action plan, based on the priorities from the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- Meet once every 6 weeks to begin with.

Lin Ferguson then stated that each workstream should be underpinned by the phrase: ‘your identity and diversity – the unique you.’ Under this phrase, each officer would need to consider and analyse the needs of each young person.

Lin Ferguson informed that the new draft Strategy would outline the aim of the Corporate Parenting Forum, the remit of the Forum, the key objectives of the Forum and the membership of the Forum. As outlined in the draft Strategy, there were reports that needed to come to the Forum for scrutiny and challenge.

Lin Ferguson then presented a list of considerations for the Forum to consider and debate on. Regarding how often workstream meetings should meet, the Vice-Chairman believed that regular meetings may be better for shorter-term action plans, while Councillor Story questioned whether having a fixed frequency was a good idea. Elaine Keating and Lin Ferguson suggested a minimum requirement for meeting frequency with the workstreams deciding if they need to meet more frequently to progress certain elements.

On Elected Member Champions and Operational Champions for each officer workstream, Councillor Clark commented that this would need to be on a voluntarily basis as individuals would recognise their own skills and expertise. He also added that some discussion may be needed on how this would be explained as some Councillors may have busy lives and therefore may not want the additional responsibility. Councillor Clark and Vice-Chairman also supported seeking candidates amongst all Councillors rather than being restricted to the Forum members.

Councillor Clark also suggested that the Forum should see if the CPF Chairman could investigate recruiting Councillors as Care Leavers’ Champions. Lin Ferguson stated she would speak to the Chairman about this.

ACTION: Lin Ferguson to speak to the Chairman about recruiting Care Leavers’ Champions.

Regarding how each officer workstream should feed into the Forum, Lin Ferguson explained the options could be each workstream giving feedback and updates at each CPF meeting or limit it to 2 workstream updates per meeting. Councillor Story suggested doing a trial with one officer workstream giving feedback for 6 months and see how it went. Lin Ferguson stated her concern would be that the Forum would not be progressing in other areas.

Suzanne Parrot suggested reviewing all the officer workstream during the 6-month trial as work would still be happening, nevertheless. Elaine Keating also supported reviewing all the workstreams during the 6-month trial.

(Councillors Luxton and Clark left the meeting at 19:04)

Regarding how often CPF should meet, Lin Ferguson asked if the Forum were satisfied with the Forum meeting around 5-to-6 times a year. Elaine Keating mentioned that the Forum may be bounded to the scheduled CPF meeting dates; but suggested that this could be double-checked.

In terms of who should sit on the Forum, Lin Ferguson requested that the Forum look through the draft Strategy and forward any comments on those who could sit in the Forum by the end of September.

Lin Ferguson asked the Kickback representatives their views on the new proposed structure, namely the workstreams. They both agreed with the proposal which may greatly improve corporate parenting.

Lin Ferguson reiterated her request for Forum members to forward any comments that they have regarding the draft Strategy by the end of September.

ACTIONS:

- **Forum members to forward comments that they have regarding the draft Strategy by 30th September.**
- **Lin Ferguson and Elaine Keating to work on the Forward Plan for next year after receiving feedback on the draft Corporate Parenting Forum Strategy and present this at the next CPF meeting in October**
- **The chairs of each officer workstream to present their draft action plans to the CPF meeting in December.**

The Forum noted the report.

COMMUNICATION PLAN WITH CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

Elaine Keating introduced the item. She explained that she believed CPF could be better at relating information to children-in-care and care leavers. She gave an example of children-in-care not being aware of Lin Ferguson taking on a new role. While various communication methods were already used, Elaine Keating believed these could be improved upon.

To improve communication with children-in-care and care leavers, Elaine Keating explained her proposal. This included an expansive use of social media, such as using Instagram and expanding the reach on Facebook, and a newsletter. She also suggested using a messaging software called GOV.UK Notify to regularly send text messages to young people to ensure they were frequently updated. She also stated that she hoped to recruit a young person (care leaver) in a paid position to handle communication and social media. This was support by the Forum.

The Forum noted the update.

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Forum noted the future meeting dates.

The Forum noted that the next meeting date was 17th October 2022 at 5:30pm and was to be held in the May Room.

The other future meeting dates were:

- 13th December 2022
- 8th February 2023
- 18th April 2023

Lin Ferguson asked if the Clerk could investigate Councillors being trained in corporate parenting during a members' training.

ACTION: The Clerk to investigate Councillors being trained in corporate parenting.

The meeting, which began at 5.35 pm, finished at 7.29 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....