

Our children first

Report of the Corporate Parenting Commission in Salford

Executive Summary September 2005

The Aim of the Scrutiny Commission

Salford City Council launched a Scrutiny Commission to investigate the current service provision relating to the council's corporate parenting role and how it compared to best practice elsewhere.

The Commission was established to ascertain the number of looked after children the authority is responsible for and the range of services provided; to identify the relevance, effectiveness and quality of the services on offer; to investigate whether the delivery of services contributed to a holistic service for looked after children and to find out how inter-agency working is progressing and what difficulties and successes there are. The Commission investigated the contribution to Corporate Parenting from Lead Members, Directors and front line staff from each Directorate within the Authority and various stakeholders, partners and other 'best practice' local authorities. The Commission also met with a group of children and young people in the care of Salford City Council.

National Statistics for Looked after Children and Young People reveal that they are:-

- 4 times more likely to suffer mental ill health
- 4 times more likely to be unemployed
- 10 times more likely to be permanently excluded from school
- 12 times more likely to leave school with no qualification
- 50 times more likely to be sent to prison
- 50 times more likely to have children who come into public care
- 50 times more likely to seek help from substance misuse agencies
- 60 times more likely to experience homelessness

*Social Exclusion Unit Figures 'Bridging the Gap 2000'



The aim of the evidence gathered was to develop a clear understanding of Corporate Parenting Salford and offer direction to the city council and its partners, as to how they could work together to improve the quality of life and raise the aspirations for and of looked after children in Salford.

Councillor B. Pennington (chair)



Recommendations

Stability

The City Council and relevant partners where appropriate should:

R1 Explore ways of sustaining, developing and increasing the number of foster carers, particularly in light of competition from the private sector.

R2 Refer the problems in the recruitment and retention of social workers to the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) to examine the possibility of introducing standard pay, terms and conditions across Greater Manchester and devising a joint human resources strategy to address the issue.

R3 Investigate the potential of a consultant social worker model for a small group of experienced and post qualified staff working with children and families social workers to address the staff shortages in the children and families social work team.

R4 Identify a strategy to further reduce the number of moves that young people make during their care.

R5 Review the needs of children placed outside Salford with a view to identifying what resources would be required to provide their care in Salford with a view to developing suitable care provision.

R6 Consider extending the role of support workers to friends and family placements

Education

R7 Examine the possibility of extending educational support to all looked after children irrespective of their stage of education.

R8 Consider ways of providing extra support to looked after children when they are moving from primary school to secondary school.

R9 Consider ways of increasing the motivation of young people looked after, raising their aspirations and recognising achievements - not just academic achievements

R10 Improving access to computers for all looked after children.

R11 Ensure mentoring is offered to young people from the age of 14 when they are taking options at high school to ensure young people are aware of the educational, employment and training opportunities available to them.

Employment

R12 Introduce a Work Placement scheme for looked after children with clear opportunities to be offered by all directorates tailored to meet the needs of the young people.

R13 Explore the possibility of approaching the Local Strategic Partnership to extend the work placement scheme to other public/private and voluntary organisations in Salford to open up more opportunities for young people in care.

Structural issues

R14 Develop a corporate vision for the children looked after in Salford with clear implementation plans as to how this is to be developed, co-ordinated and implemented with a clear timetable including reporting mechanisms for members.

R15 Consider appointing a dedicated officer to take a strategic role in relation to corporate parenting issues and to raise awareness for corporate parenting issues throughout all the various Directorates within the Authority.

R16 Refer the Corporate Parenting Commission report to the Children and Young People Partnership Board to assess their role in taking forward the recommendations and to ensure that Looked after Children are kept at the forefront of the agenda within the new Children's Services Directorate.

R17 Ensure that the findings of the Commission be taken into account when devising the Children and Young People Plan for Salford.

R18 Establish a sub-group to undertake the monitoring of the recommendations of the Corporate Parenting Commission and to further investigate after care provision in Salford and the issue of outside placements.

R19 That members' responsibilities of being a corporate parent be included in all new members induction and that an annual seminar be held for members to give feedback about how children looked after are doing and how well members have fulfilled their responsibilities.

Health issues

R20 Highlight the issue of young people aged 16-18 accessing mental health services as part of the formal consultation on the reconfiguration of Children's Health Services for Greater Manchester.

R21 Ask the board of Salford Community Leisure to consider offering free leisure passes to foster carers' families.

Pre and post care issues

R22 Investigate the possibility of developing halfway provision to prepare young people for independence.

R23 Examine the support offered to young people leaving care with a view to ensuring that they are sufficiently prepared for adult life.



A copy of the full Corporate Parenting Commission Report is available from:

Amanda Carbery, Overview and Scrutiny Support Division, Chief Executive's Directorate, Salford Civic Centre, Chorley Road, Swinton, Salford M27 5BN

Telephone 0161 793 3316 www.salford.gov.uk/scrutiny

Salford City Council

Overview and Scrutiny Support Division

Chief Executives Directorate
Salford Civic Centre
Chorley Road
Swinton
Salford
M27 5BN

Telephone: 0161 793 3316

E-mail: amanda.carbery@salford.gov.uk

www.salford.gov.uk/scrutiny

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