



Report

Cabinet

AGENDA ITEM: 11

Date 10 September 2001

Title Response to the Personal Care Select Committee Examination of the Corporate Parent role

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Electoral Divisions Affected All

Summary

The Personal Care Select Committee made a number of recommendations relating to the issue of the Corporate Parent role. This report outlines the progress that has been made on implementing those recommendations and identifies related future plans.

Recommendation

That the Cabinet supports the portfolio response to the Select Committee's recommendations as outlined below:

Corporate Parent Role

Recommendation 1(i) Accept
Recommendation 1(ii) Accept
Recommendation 1(iii) Accept
Recommendation 1(iv) Accept subject to consultation with headteachers
Recommendation 1(v) Accept

Information re Looked After Children

Recommendation 2 (i) Cabinet Member to consider further
Recommendation 2 (ii) Accept
Recommendation 2 (iii) Accept
Recommendation 2 (iv) Accept

Recommendation 2 (v) Further clarification needed and a scoping exercise to be undertaken

Recommendation 2 (vi) Cabinet Member to consider further

Recruitment and Retention

Recommendation 3 (i - vi) Accept

Alternative education packages

Recommendation 4 (i - vi) Accept

Comparison with other local authorities

Recommendation 5 (i) Accept

Recommendations of the Personal Care Select Committee

Set out below are the main recommendations of the Select Committee together with the sub-recommendations. These are followed by the service responses to the recommendations, including timetables for action.

Recommendation 1: An explicit set of expectations as a Corporate Parent are set for all Members in the new County Council

Comment

- i) The Corporate parent role is defined as a key task for all Members of the County Council as part of a job profile. **Accept**

A workshop on Corporate Parenting for Members will be arranged by senior education and social care staff. It will take place in March 2002. The workshop will involve key Schools, Special Educational Services and Education for Children in Public Care (ECPC) staff. In addition a number of Looked After Children will be invited to participate.

- ii) A dedicated number of Members across political parties, are assigned to undertake a rota of visits, with visit targets being set, monitored and reported quarterly to Council. **Accept**

A rota of visits to Children's Homes will be drawn up by the end of October 2001 together with targets and a system for monitoring will be set up. This will be done via collaboration between Policy Support Team (PST) and the Looked After Children (LAC) service.

- iii) Briefings and a pro-forma are available for member visits. **Accept**

A pro-forma will be produced and a date organised for briefing by the end of October 2001. Heads of Homes and the ECPC will be involved with this work.

- iv) In their role as school governors, all Members will meet annually with the designated teacher to discuss issues relating to Looked After Children. **Accept subject to consultation with headteachers**

A set of questions will be compiled for Councillors/Governors and a briefing session set up. This will be done by the end of November 2001. Consultation will take place with Headteachers prior to commencement of meetings.

- v) Early in the life of the new Council all Members receive a 'Corporate Parent' Pack. This should include a laminated A4 statement about the requirement of the Corporate Parent. It should be clear that it is a statutory responsibility and not voluntary and that it is distinct from making visits to homes. **Accept**

The pack could include a reminder designed by one of the youngsters e.g. badge/fridge magnet "I am a Corporate Parent", "Don't forget you are a Corporate Parent". (To be considered along with the rest of the possible contents of the pack)

Corporate Parent pack to be compiled by the end of October 2001 and a dummy provided to the Select Committee for consideration.

Recommendation 2: Members have a forum for discussing issues and receiving information concerning Looked After Children.

Comment

- i) Members are represented on the Joint Agencies Committee for Looked After Children (JACLAC) and on the steering group for the Buckinghamshire Children's Rights and Advocacy Service (BCRAS). **Cabinet Member to consider further**

The Assistant Director for Children and Families Services will, by the end of October consult with relevant Committees/Steering Groups and with Members.

- ii) A quarterly digest is distributed to all Councillors. **Accept**

Draft specification for the first issue to be drawn up by the Service Development and Quality Protects Manager by the end of January 2002.

- iii) Develop a web site 'The Corporate Parent'. **Accept**

The Policy Support Team will, by January 2002, add this to the corporate web-site.

- iv) The relevant Cabinet Members Policy Advisory Groups (PAGs) have Corporate Parenting as a regular agenda item communicating information to and from Members and monitoring targets for visits. **Accept**

The Policy Support Team will ensure that Corporate Parenting is a regular feature of appropriate PAG agendas.

- v) A contact network for Looked After Children is developed. **Further clarification needed and a scoping exercise to be undertaken**
- vi) A forum for member contact with those for whom they are Corporate Parents is established. **Cabinet Member to consider further**

Feasibility study to be undertaken by the end of November

Recommendation 3: A fully costed long-term strategy for recruitment and retention of staff is implemented. Strategy to include ring fenced costings and an implementation plan specifying lead officer, timescale, outcome and costing for each required action in the strategy.

- i) Sustained and persistent advertising campaign
- ii) Recruitment and retention post to manage advertising
- iii) Links with colleges to recruit: de Montford, Brunel etc.
- iv) Recruit degree graduates and second to Dip.SW
- v) Ensure links to new housing initiatives
- vi) Recruitment stand purchased for conferences

Accept all as ongoing commitments

Comment

There is a corporate action plan on Recruitment and Retention issues which includes initiatives designed to tackle social care recruitment problems.

The Human Resources Division regularly mounts advertising campaigns around difficult to fill jobs such as Social Workers. Monitoring takes place on a regular basis and strategic managers are kept abreast of the up to date situation.

Some of the medium term measures include a market premium being paid to social workers. Other measures have been put in place such as an improved Housing and Relocation Scheme, a Mortgage Subsidy scheme and an extension of the car leasing scheme for employees who undertake a high mileage on behalf of the Council. In addition stronger links are being developed with appropriate colleges and universities to directly recruit into the areas of skills shortage.

Consideration is being given to implementing an improved salary package for social workers. It is hoped that this could be put in place once ongoing funding can be assured.

Each element of the recruitment strategy is costed and work on the strategy is led by a senior manager the Human Resources Division. An officer working group has been set up to monitor and review recruitment and retention and to develop new and more longer term initiatives as appropriate.

Recommendation 4: Services work together with carers to ensure that notifications of exclusion are made and alternative educational packages are implemented.

Comment

- i) Carers as well as Social Workers and the ECPC team are immediately informed about any exclusion of children in public care. **Accept**

Pupil Support, who are responsible for logging exclusions, alert ECPC electronically of all exclusions of children in public care. In addition, exclusions guidance highlights the need for schools to discuss any behaviour or exclusion issues with the Social Worker. The Head of Learning Support will write to Designated Teachers (DT) reminding them that if a child in care is excluded both social workers and carers need to be informed, as well as birth parents. Headteachers will also be reminded of this in the Schools Management Briefing.

- ii) Increased advocacy for Looked After Children prior to the serious action of exclusion. **Accept**

A standard is to be set (by the Assistant Chief Educational Psychologist) whereby, if a child in care is at risk of fixed term (or permanent) exclusion, schools should set up a pastoral support programme (PSP). If one is already in place it will be reviewed. In both cases copies will be sent to the ECPC team. The PSP will identify an advocate within school; this is likely to be the DT, unless that would bring a conflict of interests.

Buckinghamshire Children's Rights and Advocacy Service will publicise the help they can give to pupils in this situation.

ECPC to arrange in service training in advocacy for DTs in schools in Spring Term Network Meeting

- iii) Development of alternative packages of educational provision for those permanently excluded from school. **Accept - Initiatives are already underway related to this item. They are set out below.**

Any pupil who is permanently excluded from school will be referred to the Reintegration Group (RIG) once the process is complete. It is the responsibility of this group to ensure that a plan is developed and

implemented to return the child to an educational placement as quickly as possible. From 2002, placement will be required within 15 days.

RIG monitors all temporary placements until a suitable final placement is agreed. We have an identified Reintegration Officer who is responsible for ensuring that plans are progressed and she works closely with ECPC in respect of those children who are permanently excluded and in public care

Full-time educational provision to be available to all excluded pupils in Buckinghamshire within 15 days, by Sep 02 – national standard.

ASDAN Youth Award initiative (within ECPC and funded by Connexions) to offer nationally recognised accreditation to all residents of children's homes. For any young person excluded these activities will be stepped up during any interim period.

Children in care to have some places on the INCLUDE project, offering full-time alternative packages to 10 excluded young people aged 14-16.

Consideration is being given to a research project (using an Educational Psychologist in training) into cases where children in care are not receiving full time education ie who they are and what they need.

In most instances, the child will have a placement in a Pupil Referral Unit initially, and a number of alternative packages have been developed with the colleges and private providers to supplement time at the PRU.

- iv) Data systems are explicit concerning the total number of days any one Looked After Child is excluded. (10 days of fixed term exclusion would account for the loss of almost 5% of a school year.)
- v) Data systems are explicit in recording the number of days a Looked After Child is without any educational provision. **Accept - For this and (iv) above data is collected as far as possible now**

All exclusions are monitored on our EMS database and Social Services 'flags' the database to indicate a child in public care. Unfortunately, SSID and EMS cannot directly 'talk' to each other.

The number of days a child is excluded is logged on EMS. As a child often will go 'in and out' of public care, any reconciliation of days excluded with period of public care, can be complex. Currently, this reconciliation has to be undertaken manually.

- vi) Review impact of the ECPC Team in 6 months. **Accept**

Report to be produced showing ECPC Team's:-

- Implementation of DfEE and DH Guidance in Buckinghamshire.
- Impact upon staff practice across the authority and in schools.

- Progress in establishing baseline data on children's educational provision and attainment + process for tracking.
- Individual casework involvement and outcomes for children.
- The development of a high profile for Buckinghamshire CC in this area of work nationally.

Recommendation 5: Further work be undertaken in comparison with other authorities

- i) Comparison is made with an authority of similar size with a similar number of Looked After Children and one with a smaller number of Looked After Children. **Accept - Already part of an established process**

There are a number of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) that relate to these statistics as well as local performance indicators. These are the subject of a monitoring report that the Chief Officer's Management Team (COMT) considers three times a year.

Background Papers

Personal Care Select Committee report April 2001

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

If you have any views on this paper which you would like the Cabinet to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Head of Cabinet Support by 9.00am on 10 September 2001. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382966), Fax (to 01296 383441), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk