

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE WORK OF THE MILTON KEYNES CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL 2016/17

Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel: Councillor Miles

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Executive Summary:

The Corporate Parenting Panel oversees how the Council fulfils its responsibilities as a Corporate Parent to Milton Keynes' children and young people in care and care leavers. This annual report provides Councillors, all of whom are "Corporate Parents", with information about our children and young people and summarises the Panel's work during the council year 2016/17. The report also explains how the Panel have engaged with young people during the year and plans to develop this in 2017/18. Councillors are invited to suggest any additional issues which they, as Corporate Parents, would like the Panel to address as well as any ways in which they can actively promote the needs of these young people within their council work and activity.

[NB the Annex to this report, detailing year end key information about Milton Keynes children and young people in care and Care Leavers, will be added when the data is available and verified in April 2017.]

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 Councillors are recommended to:

- (a) Receive the report and ensure their personal awareness of the needs of the children and young people for whom they are Corporate Parents;
- (b) Note the work undertaken on their behalf in 2016/17 by members of the Corporate Parenting Panel; and
- (c) Note and comment on the emerging agenda for the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel in 2017/18.

2. Issues

2.1 Essential information for all Corporate Parents about the children and young people living in and leaving Milton Keynes Council Care is included in the Annex to the report. *[See note in executive summary.]*

2.2 Milton Keynes Corporate Parenting Panel has met formally on four occasions during the 2016/17 Council year. Its members are Councillors Betteley, Cannon, Clancy, Crooks, Green, V Hopkins, Miles and Nolan. The Panel has been chaired by Councillor Miles, with the support of the two vice-chairs, Councillors Crooks and Hopkins. The Panel has also met informally on one occasion during the year (see point 2.6). Members have also visited the council's children's homes and attended social events with children, staff and parents/carers (see point 2.5).

2.3 During the year, the Panel has received, considered and discussed reports from professionals about a number of priority issues for Milton Keynes children in care and care leavers.

2.4 The key issues discussed at Panel were:

- **The Education of Children in Care.** The Virtual School Headteacher attended the panel to report on a number of key areas relating to the education of Looked After Children in Milton Keynes. The panel discussed young people's examination and key stage performance, the Virtual School improvement plan for 2016/17, the annual report of the Virtual School and alternative education provision for Looked After young people in Milton Keynes.

The Virtual School Headteacher highlighted that the results at Key Stage 1 had been better than predicted, whilst the results at Key Stage 2 and GCSE were not as good as hoped. The Panel considered the reasons for this, which included changes to the required standards. The Panel noted the individual achievements of young people and talked about how we can best encourage our young people to remain in education beyond their GCSEs. The Annual Report of the Virtual School identified that attendance in the Virtual School remains good, with no unexplainable persistent absence. Exclusions from school were reducing, but this remained an area of concern; the Panel were pleased to hear that schools were being appropriately challenged about this. The Annual Report also covered attainment and specifically noted the improved achievement of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, illustrated by an example of one young person's success. The report detailed progress made against the Virtual School's priorities for the previous year (2015/16) and the priorities for the current year (2016/17). Councillor Miles represented the Panel on the Virtual School's governing body throughout the year.

The Panel received a joint presentation from the Virtual School Headteacher and the Executive Principal of the Bridge Academy. This detailed the alternative education provisions available to children in care in Milton Keynes and the way in which these work with support from the Virtual School to enable children in care to progress educationally. The presentation included case studies which illustrated the impact of provision on individual young people. The Panel asked questions of both professionals and engaged in discussion around the topic.

- **The Health of Children in Care.** The Panel received and reviewed the annual report for the statutory health services provided to Milton Keynes Children in Care during the year 2015/16. Members discussed key areas, including a new protocol for health assessments of newly arrived asylum seekers in partnership with Thames Valley Police, the increase in demand for health services due to the increase in numbers of looked after children and joint work with doctors at Milton Keynes hospital to provide timely and effective health checks. The Panel also heard about the Care Quality Commission review of services for looked after children and safeguarding in Milton Keynes (the formal report was not published at the time of the discussion). The Panel reviewed the information and asked questions about the health support provided to care leavers, how young people's views are included in the Health and Social care forum and the potential contribution of other agencies to health assessments of children in care.
- **The statutory role of the Independent Review Officer (IRO).** The Panel considered the annual report of the IROs for the previous year (2015/16). The role of the IRO was outlined to the Panel, along with information about the significant changes and developments that had taken place in the IRO service. This included responding effectively to the impact of an increase in the number of children in care. The Panel reviewed the information and asked questions around key areas. This included the use of interpreters to communicate with children whose first language was not English (in response to the increase in the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children), changes to mid-year reviews (in line with individual young people's wishes about how these would best meet their needs), the creativity of the IROs and their contribution to wider service improvements and developments, the role of IROs in assessing the appropriateness of voluntary care arrangements and work to ensure that staff across the reviewing service understood each other's roles and shared their skills.
- **Work to increase the recruitment of foster carers in Milton Keynes.** The Panel received a presentation from a National Graduate Scheme Trainee working on placement with the fostering team. He detailed ongoing work to increase the number of 'in house' Milton Keynes foster carers, particularly for children with complex and challenging behaviours. The Panel heard about '*MK Fostering 2020*,' the service vision that all children will, if appropriate, be placed with internal foster carers by 2020 and that external placements will only be used where a child's specific needs require this (e.g. if they are already settled and thriving in a long-standing external placement). The Panel was asked to support this vision and to suggest additional ideas and promotion opportunities for foster carer recruitment. The Panel responded very positively to this and agreed to take this forward.
- **Children and Young People's Participation.** The Panel received a report from the Participation Youth Worker explaining how young people in care and care leavers are involved in service development and have opportunities to celebrate their achievements. The report detailed instances of young people participating in foster carer training, of young

people being part of the commissioning and tendering process for supported accommodation and being consulted on developments with the contact centre. There were also examples of *Our Voice* (formerly the Milton Keynes Children in Care Council, *TCTF*) developing a 'coming into care' pack and rebranding their logo and of new groups being developed, such as the 'New2UK' group for asylum seeking young people

The Panel was provided with the findings of the *Children and Young People's Survey* of children in care. These included young people's views about social worker involvement, the care they received and the things that could make life better for children and care leavers. Panel reviewed this information and asked questions about the findings.

Further involvement of the Panel with children and young people in care and care leavers are detailed in paragraphs 2.5-2.7

- 2.5 During 2016/17, the Corporate Parenting Panel continued to engage with children and young people. Members of the Panel visited the council's children's homes, Furze House and Westminster House, and met with parents, children and staff. The Panel also received summary reports of the monthly visits to the homes by an independent visitor to provide assurance about the quality of care, safeguarding, leadership and other key issues. Members attended events with children, young people and carers, including Fostering Fun Day and True Triumph (our annual celebration and awards evening for Children in Care), and a Christmas meal hosted by our young people.
- 2.6 Panel members have continued to prioritise young people's participation and to explore how to develop their engagement in the Panel's work. An informal Panel meeting was hosted by the children and young people at the *Our Voice* venue in January 2017. The meeting provided an opportunity for the children and young people to get to know members of the Panel through group activities and to talk about their issues in small group discussions with Panel members.
- 2.7 Members have discussed a range of proposals to develop participation and impact, including regular less formal joint meetings with young people and involving them in setting the Panel's 2017/18 priorities.
- 2.8 Milton Keynes Council's services for children in need of help and protection and care leavers and Local Safeguarding Children Board were inspected by Ofsted in September 2017. Two members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, Councillors Miles and Crooks, met the inspectors in their respective roles as Chairs of the Corporate Parenting Panel and of the Children and Young People's Committee. The Panel have subsequently received feedback about the inspection findings and had the opportunity to review the post-inspection action plan. The Panel is strongly committed to the recommendations and taking an active interest in the work required to put these into practice. The action plan was formally scrutinised by the Children and Young People's committee on 8 February 2017.

2.9 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel also discussed ways in which all Councillors can actively promote the needs of Looked After Children and care leavers in Milton Keynes within their council work and activities. The foundation for this being the role of all Councillors as “Corporate Parents” for Looked After Children.

3. Legal

3.1 The Council’s role as a Corporate Parent is governed by legislation (primarily the Children Act 1989), associated guidance and regulations and case law. The Council’s legal department provides clear advice as required by officers in their discharge of the council’s corporate parenting responsibilities for individual children and young people.

4. Other implications

Y	Equalities/Diversity	N	Sustainability	Y	Human Rights
N	E-Government	Y	Stakeholders	N	Crime and Disorder

Background Papers: Milton Keynes Children in Care (Looked After Children) and Care Leavers Key Data 2016/17