

Corporate Parenting Panel report



4 January 2023

PROPOSAL TO DISSOLVE CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL AS A COMMITTEE OF COUNCIL

Committee Chair	Councillor Marie Bradburn
Cabinet Member	Councillor Zoe Nolan Cabinet Member for Children and Families
Report Sponsor	Mac Heath Director of Children's Services
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Exempt / confidential / not for publication	No
Council Plan reference	Tackling social Inequalities: delivering excellent services for our children and young people
Wards affected	All wards

Executive summary

The Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) is a meeting that supports the Council to ensure that it is fulfilling its duties towards those children looked after corporately by Milton Keynes City Council. CPP has a duty to oversee the services provided to children and young people in care. Currently Milton Keynes CPP is a Committee of Council which must by law meet in public. In most Councils, the CPP is not held as a public council meeting, but privately, to enable a wider number of partners to be involved, alongside looked after children and young people for whom it would not be appropriate to be part of a public meeting.

By invitation, our Corporate Parenting functions in Milton Keynes were recently scrutinised as part of a Local Government Association (LGA) Diagnostic Review. From this review a clear recommendation, as part of the improvement plan for Children's Services, was that the Milton Keynes' CPP should be dissolved in its current form and reconstituted as a non-Council Committee to enable it to meet without being in public. The CPP considered this matter in their meeting on 7 December 2022 and were minded to recommend to Council this proposal

to enable this different approach with the aim of strengthening the effectiveness of our Corporate Parenting role and enable a stronger voice of our children in care and care leavers in our decision making.

1. Proposed decision

- 1.1 That a referral be made to Council to approve the dissolution of the Corporate Parenting Panel as an advisory Committee of Council.
- 1.2 That a referral be made to the Cabinet member to constitute a new body comprising a broader range of partners, maintaining political membership on a 2:2:2 basis, with the Cabinet member additionally sitting as a non-voting member, in order to enable a stronger development in the role of responsible Councillors and partners as Corporate Parents.

2. Why is the decision needed?

- 2.1 Currently, CPP is an advisory Committee of Council which means that its membership is predominantly made up of Councillors, it must be politically balanced and its governance arrangements are driven by statute, regulation and the Council’s Procedure Rules. Most fundamentally it must therefore meet in public, although press and public can be excluded for particular items.
- 2.2 In order to strengthen its effectiveness in ensuring the Corporate Parenting responsibilities for Children in Care and Care Leavers, it is recommended that CPP make a formal referral to Council requesting the Committee in its current form be dissolved. It would then be proposed that a new body and governance would be appointed and agreed by the Executive.

3. Implications of the decision

Financial		Human rights, equalities, diversity	
Legal	Y	Policies or Council Plan	Y
Communication		Procurement	
Energy Efficiency		Workforce	

a) Legal and procedural

The implications of the decision to dissolve CPP are predominantly procedural. . Although Corporate Parenting is an executive function, CPP is constituted under s102(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 as a non-statutory ‘advisory’ Committee of the Council. As is set out in the executive summary of this report, it is anomalous for Corporate Parenting to be a Committee of Council, with only two of our seventeen ‘family authorities’ operating similar arrangements (Peterborough and Thurrock).

If the Council were minded to dissolve CPP as a Committee it would mean that the number of committee seats overall, would be reduced and an administrative review of the Council's political balance would be required to ensure overall balance of the remaining seats across committees. This could be resolved at the same Full Council meeting, should the decision be confirmed.

Moving forward it is proposed that a new body is constituted, which effectively operates as an advisory group or board to the Cabinet / Cabinet member and officers, with more focus on the Council's advocacy role and engagement with young people in care. It would have a developed Terms of Reference and retain cross party membership. As the successor body would not be constrained by the usual governance associated with formal Council Committees its meetings would not be held in public, but it is anticipated that agendas and minutes would still be published.

b) Financial

There are no immediate financial implications of this decision and whilst the Terms of Reference to a successor body are yet to be decided, it is anticipated that the officer resources required to serve the group would be broadly similar as to those of CPP now.

Currently, the Council's Scheme of Councillors Allowances includes provision for the payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) to the Chair of CPP. Once a decision is made about the Terms of Reference for the successor body, the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel would be asked to provide a recommendation as to whether the payment of an SRA to the Chair is appropriate moving forward.

4. Reason for decision

- 4.1 In October/November 2021 H.M. Ofsted inspected Milton Keynes through an Inspection of Local Authorities Children's Services (ILACS) with a finding that the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. A subsequent improvement plan was therefore submitted, and development work has been progressing. Part of this plan included the commissioning of an LGA Corporate Parenting Diagnostic to review our progress, and to submit recommendations for our improvement journey.
- 4.2 The diagnostic review was led by an experienced Director of Children's Services of a 'Good' Authority and a long-standing Lead Member for Children's Services from an Outstanding Authority. The review included the observation of a Corporate Parenting Panel and the interviewing of key offices and Councillors to understand our approach to Corporate Parenting.
- 4.3 The initial feedback received from the Diagnostic review has been largely positive and they considered in MKCC there is an 'energy and commitment' alongside the 'ambition and intention' to be the very best corporate parent. However, there were areas for consideration which included 'the need to encourage stronger constructive challenge at

CPP, with high expectations/high challenge for children; supporting an open and honest culture and strengthening the effective voices of cared for and care experienced children’.

- 4.4 A key recommendation from this was for the CPP to return to being a private meeting. This, it considered, would allow higher engagement with our children and young people whilst enabling more open and forensic challenge.
- 4.5 The LGA peer review were clear that the change to the meeting in no way dilutes the democratic oversight or scrutiny of the process, as the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee will continue, with the critical role they have in relation to Children’s Services and ensuring Corporate Parenting Principles are owned and acted upon.
- 4.6 Whilst the current practice is for the Committee to resolve to exclude the public and press when hearing from young people, this requires that several procedural steps are undertaken, including giving notice of this intention and the completion of a public interest test. This practice also means that the voice of young people is heard either via video link or pre-recorded presentations, or in some cases in person, but in all cases only for the agenda items where the public and press have been excluded, as opposed to being able to contribute for the duration of the meeting.

5. Alternatives

- 5.1 To take no further action and the CPP to continue as a Committee of Council and open to the public. This is not recommended, as alongside the view of the CPP and the recommendation of the LGA Diagnostic, this is unlikely to enable further improvement at the pace and depth that could help MKCC become the best Corporate Parent it can be for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Further, this change would enable the stronger engagement and voice of children, young people and partners that may be difficult to achieve in its current form.

6. Timetable for Implementation

- 6.1 If approved, the new body and governance could be approved without delay and all arrangements in place for the next CPP in March 2023, to progress as a private executive advisory meeting with clear Terms of Reference and Statement of Purpose.

List of Annexes and Background papers

None