

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 4 November 2013	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Corporate Parenting and the Voice of the Child in Care	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Children's and Adults Services	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the corporate parenting committee notes the measures that have been put in place to meet the requirements set out in the letter from Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, to all Lead Members for Children and the Directors of Children's Services.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. On 5 June 2013, Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families, wrote to all Lead Members for Children and Directors of Children's Services about the importance of strong corporate parenting and embedding the voice of the child in care in local practice.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

3. The letter highlights the importance of members and senior officers taking responsibility for outcomes for children across a range of areas including education, health and welfare.
4. The areas highlighted for attention in the letter are listed below:

Children in Care Councils

5. At the heart of every system should be the voice of the child in care. Speaker Box provides support to looked after children and care leavers, targeting those aged from 8 to 24 years. It ensures that they have a voice; that the messages from consultation are heard and acted on by decision-makers. Speaker Box operates independently, and is run by those in care and care leavers. It is supported by our children's rights officer, children's services practitioners, senior managers, elected members and other agencies including health and youth services. Ofsted has recognised Speaker Box as an example of outstanding practice. Regular meetings are held between Speaker Box and members and senior officers.

Role of Independent Reviewing Officers

6. IROs in Southwark are experienced and well-trained so that they can fulfil their responsibilities in relation to oversight of care plans for looked after children. The service ensures that statutory reviews are held on time and that the quality of planning and provision is maintained to a high standard. The activities of the

IROs are governed by statutory guidance known as the IRO handbook. The head of service provides an annual report to the DCS and Corporate Parenting Committee which highlights some of the major themes emerging over the previous year. The IROs provide oversight of children in care and can act on behalf of children and young people when there is a dispute over the care plan.

7. The IROs meet regularly with Speakerbox to hear how they can improve the service. As part of their role, they also meet with children and young people outside of the review meeting so that they can take their wishes and feelings into consideration.

Advocacy

8. We employ a full-time children's rights worker who actively seeks out the views of children and young people in care, and supports Speakerbox, our children in care council. As part of her work programme, the children's rights worker is undertaking a programme of visits to children placed in residential care to feedback their views and address any of their concerns. In addition, we have commissioned an independent advocacy service from Barnardo's
9. Advocacy plays a critical role in enabling children and young people to safeguard themselves by exercising their rights, as outlined in the United Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and specifically in relation to having their voice heard when key decisions are being made. Local authorities are under a statutory obligation to provide an independent professional 'voice' or advocate, for every looked after child and young person, care leaver and child in need, who wants to take part or comment on decisions about their lives or to make a complaint.
10. The service will:
 - Have as their core purpose better outcomes for children and young people
 - Provide advice, information and advocacy services, for all children and young people, who request or need this service
 - Provide effective assistance and support to children and young people who wish to make a representation or complaint to children's services
 - Provide assistance and support to children and young people who wish to make a disclosure or allegation of child abuse to children's services, as well as during any resulting child protection investigation
 - Provide access to the helpline for all children and young people
 - Make every effort to take account of the wishes of the child in respect of racial, religious and cultural background and any special requirements relating to the gender of the Advocate
 - Provide children and young people with opportunities to influence the development of children's services in the borough
 - Provide advocacy for children and young people attending family group conferences; looked after review and other official meetings
 - Ensure children and young people with specific language and communication needs are allocated appropriate advocacy
 - Contact the Southwark Service Lead each time the provider wants to appoint an Advocate to a case and expect a response from Southwark within 24 hours.

11. Southwark complies with the statutory requirements to freeze a placement should a child or young person object to the move. All children are supported by the children's rights officer, advocate or IRO, to ensure that moves do not take place until the issue is resolved.

Keeping children informed

12. There are a number of ways in which the department keeps children informed. IROs meet with children outside the formal review meeting and keep them up to date with developments. This is also a key part of the social workers role. However in addition to this the Speakerbox magazine is distributed to all children in care on a quarterly basis. This includes advice and information and a list of contact numbers should young people feel the need to seek independent advice and advocacy. This includes information about the ChildLine number so that young people can have access to a counsellor should need it. The adolescent and aftercare service has also launched a website which provides information, advice and support for young people, and details what their entitlements are.
13. Southwark has a number of measures in place to ensure that children and young people in their care have a clear voice which is heard by both members and senior officers. There are a number of safeguards in place to provide them with advocacy and support should they feel their views are not being heard by the service. Through our effective communication with children and young people, the department will continue to develop the service in response to the wishes and feelings of young people in care and care leavers.

Policy implications

14. There are no new policy implications relevant to this report.

Community impact statement

15. The report has set out how Southwark has addressed the points in the letter identifying any relevant community impact implications.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background papers	Held At	Contact
Letter from Edward Timpson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families " Corporate Parenting and the Voice of the Child in Care."	160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	http://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=129&MId=4559&Ver=4

APPENDICES

No.	Title
None	

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson, Director Children’s Social Care		
Report Author	Rory Patterson Director Children’s Social Care		
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Key Decision?	No		
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER			
Officer Title		Comments Sought	Comments included
Director of Legal Services		No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services		No	No
Cabinet Member		No	No
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