

**Extract from Minutes on:**  
**Presentation on Children Services and Corporate Parenting – O&S Committee**  
**4 June 2013**

The Committee welcomed Jenny Boyd, the Director of Local Delivery West, Children's Social Care at Essex County Council. She was there to talk about Corporate Parenting and Children Services, what corporate parenting was and just what was a member's responsibility in relation to it. She started by quoting Frank Dobson from a letter he wrote in 1998 that "for children who are looked after, your council has a legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children...you should do your utmost to make sure that children in public care get a good start in life..." this was the principal that underlined and still underlined the concept of Corporate Parenting.

These responsibilities were primarily laid out in the Children Act 1989 and updated and refined in subsequent legislation.

In some circumstances we share parental responsibilities for these children in care and care leavers. Some of the duties and responsibilities on local authorities are for planning, safeguarding, promoting health, wellbeing and life chances. Duties to care leavers extend to at least age 21. A lot of what was done was measured by performance indicators.

Councillors need to be aware of the corporate parenting role and the shared responsibility for ensuring that the needs of children are met. They also need to understand the impact of council decisions on children in care and care leavers and to ensure that action was taken to address any shortcomings.

There were two main categories of public care, 'Accommodated' at the request of parents and/or young person; or subject to a Care Order (by order of a court under section 31, Children Act 1989). At 16 or 17 young people can ask to go into care or to come out off care and this would override the wishes of parents. The courts would have to decide on any Care Orders made.

There were various reasons why young people were in care, the primary reasons being abuse or neglect, followed by problems in the family such a family being acutely stressed or absent parents or a parent's illness or disability. Last on the list of reasons and accounting for only a small percentage (2%) of looked after children, would be a child's socially unacceptable behaviour.

The cost of getting this wrong would result in poor educational performance, contact with the criminal justice system, poor physical and mental health, homelessness and/or unemployment. All at a huge cost financially to the state.

Children in care need someone who cares for them and believes in them; they need stability, security and continuity of support. The support services need to promote resilience and not just fix what was broken but nurture what was best. They should ensure that young people become employable and that on leaving care have access to safe, permanent, suitable accommodation. Essex County Council aimed to provide early, targeted help, effecting change to enable children to be brought up safely and healthily in their own families. However, they also wished to provide and commission high quality substitute care within family settings, as near to home as possible, maintaining links with the birth family whenever this was in the child's best interest. Also, where it was appropriate to provide high quality residential care. They also aimed to support children in care and care leavers and to work respectfully with children and their families and involve them in the future design and improvement of their services. They would like EFDC and key partner agencies to help and

support the development of work experience opportunities for young people in care and care leavers within the EFDC area. They would like them to support the development of apprenticeships and employment opportunities, support requests for foster carers being seen as a priority housing group, provide free access to leisure facilities to children in care and care leavers and to promote fostering for Essex CC at a local level. Councillors should champion children and care leavers at every opportunity. They should also remember that when corporate parenting clashes with other responsibilities, councillors should remember the principle "if this were my child".

The meeting was then opened out to questions from members.

Councillor Wixley commented that the Children's Centre in Lawton Road, Loughton did excellent work with young families in a deprived area. Were you hoping to provide an alternative service in future with reduced funding?

Ms Boyd replied that the services had been absorbed into another children's centre. She did not have the details with her but she would provide a more detailed response after the meeting. Councillor Wixley asked if she could also describe the services provided in her response. Councillor Murray asked if she could also indicate exactly where this alternative provision was being provided.

Councillor Lea said that 'Homestart' was a highly valued service working, she believe, nationwide. Our local service had helped many young families, often single parents without any other means of support, to turn their lives around. 'Homestart' has had County and District Council support in the past but was also heavily dependent on volunteers and local fund-raising. Evidence was that demand for such help was increasing at an alarming rate. Failure to provide that support would lead to more intervention being required from Social Services, Housing Services and the welfare system which would probably prove even more costly. Can we be re-assured that support for 'Homestart' would continue?

Ms Boyd said that she would get a detailed response back to this meeting. She understood that money had been made available but that 'Homestart' had not applied for this. This was because they would have to widen their terms of reference to include the over fives, which they were working on now.

Councillor Kane asked that in contrast to 'Homestart' could you confirm that the 'Surestart' centres will continue to be funded to an adequate level.

Ms Boyd noted that they had children centres in place and they would continue to be funded. She would provide a fuller reply at a later date.

Councillor Rolfe asked how did her services relate to those with those of the Youth service and Education. Did she work collaboratively? Whilst the needs of various age groups were different, was there an overlap in provision at a particular age, or alternatively a gap in provision, and were you able to share resources?

Ms Boyd replied that they did work collaboratively and wanted to share resources in a climate when funding was becoming more constrained. In terms of Children's Social Care a lot of the work was going on including youth and health and education. Also there was a new Family Solutions Service that was coming on stream in October, when Children Social Care were setting up an early family intervention service. That will be a multi-disciplinary service working on providing early help to families in this district as well as Brentwood.

Councillor Mitchell asked how she saw the future of Children's Services in a climate of reducing budgets.

Ms Boyd said that they had a responsibility to look at the services they provided. They have no choice but to provide a lot of their services. Essex County Council was currently reviewing their services in this period of budget reduction over the next three years. She added that their relationship with all the district's were crucial in the regard of partnership working.

Councillor Girling said that the Loughton Centre for young people would like a base for office space so that they could offer more services; how would ECC view this? Ms Boyd said she did not know but would find out and would get back to the councillor.

Councillor Lion asked if Ms Boyd could relate Corporate Parenting to something more practical and how this would work in practice. Ms Boyd said the basic responsibility to keep in mind was that children being looked after was something that you could affect and do something for them. Look for opportunities to help care leavers. Keep them in mind all the time. Raise your awareness of them and pass it on to others you deal with.

Councillor Murray said that he may have misunderstood but thought that the council had a scheme to provide a number of units around the district for secure one bedroom accommodation. Ms Boyd agreed that there was a scheme in place , but she was talking about access to long term accommodation. Councillor Stallan, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, said that they had a new housing allocations scheme which had these people as a priority. Ms Boyd replied it was fine to have them as a priority but they would have to complete with the other priority groups. She would like to see them have three allocations per year in this district as standard. Councillor Stallan asked that she email him so they could look at this.

The Chairman thanked Ms Boyd for her interesting presentation ad hoped that she could come back in a years time and update the Committee.

*\*Please note that subsequent to the meeting Ms Boyd had supplied fuller answers to some of the questions that she could not answer at the meeting. These are attached to these minutes as an appendix.*