

CHILDREN'S CHAMPION

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines recommendations to develop the role of Children's Champions across Argyll and Bute.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members agree the need for Children's Champions.
- 2.2 Members consider whether four Champions, one for each geographical area would better support the needs of looked after children population in Argyll and Bute.
- 2.3 Members accept the principle of establishing a Corporate Parenting Board which will report to the Council annually to support and drive activity for looked after children. A further report on the membership and remit will follow.

3. DETAIL

Argyll and Bute Council is seeking to improve the outcomes for looked after and accommodated children/young people in care through the development of four Children's Champions across each geographical area. The role developed in 2010 in Argyll and Bute had a single champion to enhance the lives of looked after and accommodated children through greater opportunities and the removal of barriers. Whilst the role was important to establish an Elected Member leading on Children's Rights there was a need to explore how to expand the role and lift the profile of looked after children. In consultation with looked after young people at an event on 23 November 2012 they indicated they would like an Elected Member for each of the four geographical areas so that they are able to build relationships with them.

Focus

- 3.1 One way of focussing on the needs of looked after children/young people is to review what is currently being achieved and what still needs to be done. The Getting It Right For Looked After Children Plan outlines all agencies' roles in improving services however, the Council also has a responsibility as a Corporate Parent to ensure that every child/young person has the opportunity to meet their full potential. For

that to happen, the Council needs to bring all its available resources to bear to meet these children/young people's needs in terms of their socialisation, well being, education, health and overall welfare.

- 3.2 Currently their needs are met through a multi-disciplinary focus of Social Work, Police, Education and Health. However as a Council we have embraced the role as corporate parent through the signing of the Give Me A Chance Promise by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive on 30 October 2012. Argyll and Bute have pledged to reduce stigma and promote positive opportunities for all looked after children.

Corporate Parenting and the role of the Children's Champion

- 3.3 Corporate Parenting relates to all children/young people who are looked after by the authority. It means that formal partnerships and actions are established by local authorities, departments and associated agencies that are responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children/young people.
- 3.4 The notion of a local authority acting as a parent recognises the legal and social responsibilities of public bodies to children/young people who become looked after. It recognises that those children/young people for whom the local authority has a particular responsibility are significantly less likely to achieve good outcomes not only throughout their childhood but throughout their lives.
- 3.5 Whilst there has been progress regarding Corporate Parenting at both a national and local level more needs to be done to promote the wellbeing of our looked after children/young people. This is reinforced by the report produced by the Scottish Government '*Looked After Children; We Can and Must Do Better*' which highlighted the need for local authorities to strengthen their approach to Corporate Parenting.
- 3.6 Corporate Parenting is essentially the same as being a good parent and wanting to achieve the same good outcomes for our looked after children/young people that we would want for our own children. To improve and make Corporate Parenting a reality depends upon drive, ownership and leadership at the highest level of the organisation. Children's Champions play an important role in promoting the rights of looked after children.
- 3.7 Who Cares? Scotland have been contracted to provide direct support to the Children's Champions. It is their intention to help us establish a Corporate Parenting Board where the Champions would act on behalf of the looked after population to drive forward changes.

Role and Remit of a Children's Champion

3.8 The role and remit of a Children's Champion is to champion the rights of looked after and accommodated children/young people. There are several areas the Champion will focus on:

- (i) Providing further leadership and standards that recognise the Council's statutory obligation as a Corporate Parent to the looked after and accommodated child/young person and further provide impetus for change and improvement in service delivery.
- (ii) Promoting and safeguarding the rights of the looked after and accommodated child/young person ensuring that the services they require to remove barriers which are obstacles to progress are in place.
- (iii) Identifying in association with recognised service providers at all levels the additional provisions required to ensure that the needs of looked after and accommodated children/young people are best met.
- (iv) Communicating with these children/young people by consulting with them and their service providers to ensure that the looked after and accommodated child/young person receives the support, security and stability they require to achieve their individual potential.
- (v) Support the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Board with Community Planning Partners and young people to ensure Argyll and Bute drive the improvement required for the looked after population.

6. CONCLUSION

This proposal for Children's Champions across four areas is a unique opportunity to develop the role within the Council further. Champions will lead and drive future development of all looked after and accommodated children/young people within Argyll and Bute through their understanding of children and young people's needs.

The Children's Champion will enhance the work already in place through existing services in working towards the future wellbeing of each accommodated child and young person's. They will be supported by Who Cares? Scotland and contribute to the Corporate Parenting Board. These developments will ensure we make significant improvement to how young people who are 'Looked After' experience your services.

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1	Policy	Contributes to the development of the Corporate Parenting Policy
7.2	Financial	None
7.3	Legal	It will assist and fulfil the Council's statutory responsibility to looked after children and young people.
7.4	HR	None
7.5	Equalities	The Champions will assist to reduce stigma and discrimination faced by looked after children and young people.
7.6	Risk	None
7.7	Customer Service	None

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