



REVIEW OF CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES
IN TORBAY

Corporate Parenting Policy for Torbay Council

Report to the Executive

March 2004

Adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Board
on 17th March 2004



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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This Report sets out the Guidance for the Roles and Responsibilities of Councilors as Corporate Parents.

It is recommended to the Executive:

- 1.2 That the Guidance for the Roles and Responsibilities of Councilors as Corporate Parents (as set out in Appendix 2 to this Report) be adopted and circulated to all Councilors.
- 1.3 That, in line with the recommendations of the previous report, all Members of the Council be required to attend training on their role as Corporate Parents by October 2004.
- 1.4 That the Monitoring Framework within the Guidance be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on a six-monthly basis (together with a contextual covering report) and that the Framework be circulated to all other Members of the Council for their consideration.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Child Protection Review Panel was established in 2003 to undertake a review of Child Protection Services in Torbay in light of the recommendations of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry. As part of its review, the Panel considered the role of the Council as a Corporate Parent to all children who are looked after by the Council.
- 2.2 The Panel presented its report to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in October 2003. Arising from consideration of the Report, the Board agreed that the Panel should reconvene to develop the Council's Corporate Parenting Policy in consultation with key stakeholders.
- 2.3 The Child Protection Review Panel comprised Councillors Burridge, Killick, Pentney, Stocks and Turnbull. Councillor Stocks, as the Scrutiny Lead Member for Social Services and Inclusion, chaired the Panel.

3. Process

- 3.1 The Panel met formally on two occasions to discuss the Draft Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of Councils (in relation to looked after children) which had been prepared by Kim Merritt (Residential Services Manager).
- 3.2 Representatives of the Panel also discussed the document with a group of looked after children to ensure that their views were taken into account in preparing the guidance.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Council has the role of Corporate Parent to all the children who are looked after by the Council. Members and officers should view the needs of children and young people in public care and have ambitions for them as though they were their own. In some ways the Council has a greater responsibility towards these youngsters given that the Council has made the decision to intervene in the family situation of that person.
- 4.2 All 36 Councils act as Corporate Parents and there is a need to raise the profile of the issues amongst Councils.
- 4.3 Draft Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of Councils in relation to looked after children had been prepared by Kim Merritt, the Council's Residential Services Manager, for consideration by the Panel during its initial review. The document built on the Quality Protects initiative and set out the legislative and government guidance for local authorities in relation to Looked After Children.
- 4.4 The document includes a Policy Statement, checklists of key questions for Members, a monitoring framework and an action plan.
- 4.5 The Panel felt it was important to discuss the document with a representative group of youngsters who were, or had been, looked after by the Council and members of the Panel met such a group in January 2004. The youngsters were asked for their views on the guidance to ensure that it reflected their needs.

5. Recommendations

That it be recommended to the Executive:

- 5.1 That the Guidance for the Roles and Responsibilities of Councilors as Corporate Parents (as set out in Appendix 2 to this Report) be adopted and circulated to all Councilors.
- 5.2 That, in line with the recommendations of the previous report, all Members of the Council be required to attend training on their role as Corporate Parents by October 2004.
- 5.3 That the Monitoring Framework within the Guidance be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on a six-monthly basis (together with a contextual covering report) and that the Framework be circulated to all other Members of the Council for their consideration.

6. Monitoring Arrangements

- 6.1 Subject to the Constitution of the Council being amended, the Standards Committee will monitor the attendance of Councilors at the training sessions in relation to Corporate Parenting.
- 6.2 The Monitoring Framework will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board on a six monthly basis.

Acknowledgements

The Panel would like to thank Kim Merritt for preparing the Guidance on the Roles and Responsibilities of Councilors. It would also like to thank the young people who participated in the consultation exercise on the document.

Appendix 1

Implications of the Recommendations

Legal	Section 22(3) of the Children Act 1989 provides that it shall be the duty of a local authority looking after any child to safeguard and promote his welfare
Financial	The costs of training will be prioritised within existing budgets.
Human Resources	No implications
Property	No implications
Change Mgt Plan	No implications

The recommendations contained within this Report are in accordance with the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

The recommendations contained within this Report would not be a Key Decision

GUIDANCE FOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF COUNCILLORS AS CORPORATE PARENTS

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Torbay Council Corporate Parenting Policy

Torbay Council:

- i. is committed to raising the quality of life for looked after children and young people.
- ii. shares responsibility for looked after children and young people with family members, and recognises the continuing obligation of all involved.
- iii. ensures that all of its services maintain high standards to encourage, protect and support looked after children and young people in line with their needs, the local community and national objectives.
- iv. consults with and responds to the views of looked after children and young people about their needs, services available, and the opportunities to access them.
- v. provides a full range of support services, in partnership with all departments, including health, education, cultural and leisure services, and encourages access to all services.
- vi. encourages looked after children and young people to play an active part in the local community, its opportunities and activities as a whole.
- vii. shares and celebrates looked after children and young people's achievements, provides practical help and support in their growth to independence, and encourage communities to share in this celebration and support.

Policy Document Amendment

Corporate Parenting

We recognise corporate parenting as a corporate responsibility.

All councillors and directors should be informed of the progress of our looked after children and be regularly updated on the pressures faced by our child protection team.

We have the highest expectations of our looked after children and believe that they should feel valued and listened to.

In taking into account the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters', and the aim "*To ensure that every child has the chance to fulfil their potential by reducing levels of education failure, ill health, substance misuse, teenage pregnancy, abuse and neglect, crime and anti-social behaviour amongst Children and Young People*", the Council should:

- make arrangements to ensure that each Directorate plays its full part in realising its role as a corporate parent
- ensure there is a more coherent mechanism to promote corporate parenting across all Council Directorates

We must also ensure that the following outcomes are addressed:

- Being Healthy
- Staying Safe
- Enjoying and Achieving
- Making a positive contribution
- Economic well-being

Corporate Parenting: Role and Responsibilities of Councillors

The term 'looked after children' refers to children and young people who are in the care of the Authority, for example in foster care or in residential care homes. Responsibility for the health and well being of Looked After Children rests with Members within an Authority who are deemed to be Corporate Parents.

In order to better discharge this responsibility, elected members need to have access to a range of information relating to the general child population and the specific children looked after by their authority.

Legal Framework

The Children Act 1989 gives local authorities a legal and moral responsibility for children "in care". Local councillors, when elected, take on this duty of being "corporate parents" towards such children, the key responsibilities of which are:

- Children in the public care must be the primary focus for the resources and accountability of the local authority which has accepted a parenting responsibility for them
- Children who have spent a significant time being looked after by the local authority should afterwards be given the kind of support that decent and responsible parents would give to their own children

<http://www.hri.org/docs/CRC89>

Corporate Parenting

Elected councillors have a crucial role. It is the responsibility of your officers to manage services and resources in order to achieve those policy objectives and to advise your council on the best way forward.

As a councillor, you need to make sure you receive the right information so that you can ask demanding questions about the services and resources for children in your community. You need to know:

- How the overall needs of children in your community, and the likely demand for services, have been estimated
- What services are being provided and how much is being spent on them

LAC(98) 28

Following the formal launch of Quality Protects, Circular LAC(98) 28 issued on 11 November 1998 gave further information about the programme and its objectives setting out in detail the requirement for Management Action Plans (MAPs) to be produced by local authorities in England with responsibility for Social Services and Education.

<http://www.hoh.gov.uk/qualityprotects>

Recent Developments

Among the most recent and most appalling of these was the death of eight year old Victoria Climbié in February 2000 at the hands of her great aunt Marie Thérèse Kouao and Carl Manning.

Victoria Climbié's abuse and murder was so brutal that an independent inquiry, chaired by Lord Laming, was set up by the government to investigate and learn the lessons from it. Laming reported in January 2003 and made 108 recommendations for government, local authority social services departments, the health service and the police.

Lord Laming was scathing about the failure of the child protection system to act on these opportunities to save Victoria's life:

At the heart of these failings, according to Lord Laming, are issues of values and accountability. Children are part of local communities and local authorities must exercise their roles of community leadership.

"The single most important change in the future must be the drawing of a clear line of accountability, from top to bottom, without doubt or ambiguity about who is responsible at every level for the well-being of vulnerable children." (Laming 2003, par 1.27)

The Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' sets out plans to reform children's services in response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report. It establishes a clear framework of accountability with services for children and young people integrated under new Directors of Children's Services.

It proposes:

- Integrated teams of health and education professionals, social workers and Connexions advisors based in schools and Children's Centres.
- Sweeping away barriers to information sharing to create effective communication between all those with a responsibility for children.

- A Children's Director in every local authority, responsible for bringing all children's services together as Children's Trusts.

<http://www.doh.gov.uk/childrenstrusts>

- New duties on police, health and others to safeguard children.
- An independent Children's Commissioner to champion children's views.
- A lead Council member for children.

"Keeping Children Safe" is the Government's response to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry Report and Joint Chief Inspectors' Report "Safeguarding Children".

Community Corporate Parents

Looked after children are not the sole responsibility of Social Services. The Council as a whole is the corporate parent, and Councillors have a key role in that.

For these vulnerable children to thrive, the entire Council – members and officers – must play their part. Being a good corporate parent means we should:

- Accept responsibility for children in the Council's care
- Make their needs a priority
- Seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.

The Council as a whole is the "corporate parent", therefore all Councillors (whatever their specific roles or functions) have a basic level of responsibility for the children in their authority's care.

Key questions for Councillors:

1. Who are your children in need, children at risk, looked after children and care-leavers?
2. How well does the Authority look after them?
3. How well are they doing at school or college?
4. What are their health needs?
5. What are their housing needs?
6. What specific support is there when they leave your care?

Under these key headings, the kind of detailed information that Councillors will need to understand how children in their area are doing is set out below.

Who are your children in need, children at risk, looked after children and care-leavers?

- How many children are there in each of these categories?
- What is their ethnic and cultural background?
- Do they have any disabilities or other special needs?
- Are they involved in any offending behaviour?
- What trends are there in any of these figures?
- How can you hear the views of children and young people themselves?

One of the greatest problems identified as facing children in care is the upheaval caused by frequent moves from one type of care to another, between foster carers and even from one area to another. Each placement move may require the child – already traumatised by the events at home that have led them into care – to change schools, make new friends or develop new relationships with a different set of adults and professionals.

The Government has set local authorities a target of looked after children having no more than three placement moves in any one year. However, if a placement turns out to be inappropriate for the child, for whatever reason, they should not remain in that placement simply in order to meet a target.

If your authority does have children's homes, elected members can have the role of visiting and inspecting these homes. (See Action Plan 4)

It is important that all members who have this responsibility receive training first on how to interact with the children and young people you may meet there.

Education

The guidance on the Education of Children and Young People in Public Care was issued jointly by the DfEE and the DoH in May 2000. It contains five statutory elements;

- Each child and young person must have a Personal Education Plan;
- Every school must have a Designated Teacher for Children in Public Care;
- Local Authorities will develop a protocol for sharing information;

- Care placements will be made with educational arrangements already in place, except for emergencies;
- Education placements will be provided within 20 school days of the care placement.

Education Protects is driving educational improvements for looked after children, supporting the implementation of the Guidance and the Social Exclusion Unit's report recommendations.

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/educationprotects>

How well are your looked after children doing at school or college?

- Do they attend school regularly and how many are excluded from school?
- What progress are they making and how do they do in examinations and Standard Assessment Tests?
- How many have a statement of special educational need and how does this compare with average rates of statementing in the area?
- How many looked after children achieve at or above what they were predicted to achieve when they entered public care (the value-added approach – see below)?

Children in care do disproportionately more badly at school, at least partly because of the disruption that is likely to have occurred in their lives. Any good parent will want their child to do well at school, to get the best start in life, and as corporate parents, this is Councillors' responsibility for the children in the council's care. Ensuring close co-operation between Education and Social Services departments is crucial in this area of work.

Councillors will monitor Torbay Council's progress against the government's national targets:

- Increasing to at least 75% by 2003 the proportion of children leaving care at 16 or later with one GCSE or GNVQ qualification
- Increasing to at least 15% by 2004 the proportion of children leaving care at 16 or later with 5 GCSEs at grades A*-C
- Improving levels of education, training and employment outcomes for care leavers aged 19 to at least 75% of those achieved by all young people in the area by March 2004. (See Action Plan 5 & 9)

Care-leavers are over-represented in both the prison and homeless populations, indicating that spending time in care does not help prepare them for independent living when they leave. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 required the local

authority which last looked after a young person to draw up a Leaving Care Plan with their own adviser, to help the young person make the transition to adult life. This includes financial and other support into their twenties if they continue in further or higher education, recognising that parental support does not usually come to an abrupt end at the age of 16. (Action Plan 15, 16 & 17).

<http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000035.htm>

What are their housing needs?

- Is there enough affordable housing for foster carers, and / or are levels of remuneration adequate for the cost of living locally?
- What support is there for care-leavers in finding and living in their own accommodation, if necessary?
- If you are a member in a Local Council, what links are there with other Councils over housing provision?

What support is there when they leave your care?

- How many young people who left care at 16 are still in touch with their social worker, carer or other approved person at the age of 19?
- What sort of progress, for example in education, training, and employment, do young people make after they leave care?
- How have the provisions of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 been implemented in your area?

Councillors Checklist

1. Do you receive information on and know the answers to the key questions about children in your area?
2. Does Torbay Council provide training and information for you as corporate parents, about the issues for children in your area?
3. Does Torbay Council provide specific training for any councillors who may come into contact with looked after children, for example by visiting children's homes?
4. How do you know what issues concern the young people in Torbay Council's care? What communications mechanisms are there?
5. Is there an occasion at least once a year for Torbay Council to hear from looked after children and young people and foster carers and to celebrate their achievements?(Action Plan 3, 4, 8 & 9).

Corporate Parenting: A Whole Authority Approach

- Must provide children and young people Looked After by Torbay Council with a good experience of being corporately parented.
- Children and young people who are looked after must be the primary focus for the resources and accountability of Torbay Council who has accepted a parenting responsibility for them.

There is a need for an approach that looks at the Whole Child. Too often in the past the educational experiences and opportunities of children and young people have been neglected in children's services planning.

Local authority departments who work together are more likely to:

- Reduce drift and achieve targets within more acceptable timescales.
- Reduce underachievement and invisibility which many Looked After Children experience.
- Provide services that are preventative and cost effective.
- Prevent repetition of assessments and delivery and services.
- Benefit wider groups of children and services.
- Promote joint funding possibilities.

Elected members should:

- Develop structures that bring together the Education, Social Care and Health Directorates.
- Appoint an elected member to have responsibility for looked after children and young people.
- Develop a positive approach to joint protocols, joint working, and joint finances and improving educational outcomes.
- Ensure that the needs of looked after children are equally represented in all the local authority's policies, procedures and services.
- Be involved in the drawing up and setting of priorities and targets.
- Monitor the educational circumstances and achievements of looked after children and young people. Ensure that action is taken if targets are not met.

- Ensure that the local authority sets high aspirations for looked after children.
- Ensure that when looked after children's needs are not being met through current service delivery, consideration is given to prioritising their needs through specific services.
(Action Plan 1, 5, 8 & 11).

Elected members should receive:

- Ongoing information about the educational circumstances and outcome of the looked after children in the local authority.
- Information about the results of the regular audits of the education of looked after children.
- Details of service currently being provided, and any shortfalls.
- Relevant training about looked after children.
- Information on target setting, joint planning and joint policy developments.
- Newsletters concerning the education of looked after children and young people.
- Invitations to award ceremonies and other events, which promote looked After children and young people.
(Action Plan 3, 4, 8, 9 & 13).

Questions for Councillors - Answered

- 1. Do we have a process for assembling information about the needs of our looked after children? Does it enable us to work out how many and what kinds of foster carers we require?**

Information is passed by district social workers to the Fostering Service Placement Co-ordinator and through her to the Fostering Team. This is received in a set format (CFS1) with supporting reports e.g. BAAF Form E and discussed by team members throughout the working week, but more formally once a week in a Team Meeting. All this information is tabulated, as is the detail of available foster carers, in order to match needs to available carers.

- 2. Do we have a strategy for commissioning a range of services adequate to meet the needs we have identified?**

The Fostering Service contributes to an overall business plan. The Service itself has developed, in addition to a pool of mainstream carers, a Contract Care and Adolescent Support Service to provide placements to young people with the most complex needs. These schemes are also focussed on the age groups generating most demand. The A.S.S. offers a comprehensive package of care which includes outreach support and fast-tracking to therapeutic provision.

Other types of provision offer parent and child placements which enable risk assessment and parenting ability to be considered in a safe environment.

Provision of a social work post for Family and Friends placements under a Choice Protects grant has seen the commencement of work to achieve these placements. Respite is provided to all carers and children with disability.

Service development, including issues of recruitment and retention of carers, is discussed and progressed within the team but also within the Fostering Management Group, whose membership comprises professionals, carers and the Children's Champion Councillor Jenny Faulkner. It is the intention of the F.M.G. to develop a sub-group looking at the details of plans for recruitment and retention of carers in the light of current research. This is to ensure the provision of suitably matched carers, meeting a range of needs and reflecting diverse and relevant cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds and affiliations.

3. How many foster carers do we have? What is their profile in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and so on?

The total number of agency foster carers (apart from the ten providing temporary respite to special needs disabled children) is 112, of which 49 are male and 63 female. The total number of fostering households, singles and couples, are 69.

Age ranges are as follows:-

Under 30	1
30-39	19
40-49	40
50-59	38
60 and above	14

Ethnic backgrounds are solely white British; linguistic backgrounds are English and whilst significant numbers of carers draw on some Christian background, there are not large numbers of identifiable denominations or representation of other faiths.

4. How do we handle enquiries from potential foster carers? Do we have a trained team to deal with them? What information do we send out?

Enquirers initially speak to the Fostering Service Placement Co-ordinator. They receive a pack including general information from the Fostering Network on aspects of fostering, including tasks e.g. such as arise in placing children, enabling contact with parents, managing information, discipline, routine, education; there is also information about the terms and conditions for foster carers.

The Fostering Team provides an Information Evening , normally quarterly, to which enquirers are invited. What follows is a visit by a Team social worker to form an initial assessment which includes standardised Police, Social Service and Health Department checks for suitability.

Full assessment is completed by a qualified team social worker.

5. How much time elapses between initial enquiry and assessment? And between assessment and approval?

The interval between enquiry and full assessment commencing is normally no greater than 4 months and between commencement and completion of assessment normally 6 months. Time to consider aspects of the application and to self-prepare and receive training can be an important part of this period.

6. How are carers assessed? Is competency-based assessment used?

Prospective foster carers are assessed using standardised British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering report formats (BAAF 2000). These include competency-based references. These are often the work of one social worker but occasionally the product of collaborative work by two – or one social worker and an experienced carer.

7. Have previous recruitment campaigns been effective? If so, what has worked?

Previous recruitment campaigns have concentrated on developing interest through existing carers networks (word of mouth) and advertising in periodicals and newspapers supported by human interest stories. Additionally use has been made of the local authority vacancies bulletin.

8. How much is being spent on recruitment?

£2,000 per annum is currently allocated to recruitment.

9. Are we addressing the needs of disabled children, black children and children from other minority ethnic groups?

Disabled children benefit from the provision of 10 “Family to Family” carer households, supported by one social worker seconded to the Fostering Team from the Disability Services.

The needs of any black or minority ethnic child would not currently find their background mirrored in the make up of the carers. Training seeks to ameliorate the situation so that carers are sensitive to needs.

10. How many foster carers are leaving each year? Why are they leaving? Do we offer them exit interviews?

The number of carers leaving the service annually is low, about two a year.

Most usually, decisions to leave are shared with supporting social workers, and reasons are shared. There can be a variety of reasons for such a decision normally ones of health, lifestyle, relocation etc.

11. What systems are in place for supporting and retaining foster carers? For example, do we offer a helpline, respite services, group meetings, one-to-one support, training, loyalty payments, payments for skills?

There is access for each carer to an allocated social worker each day during office hours, backed up by a duty system social worker present in

the office to cover when these are out. Out of hours duty social workers are available and can be briefed by daytime staff.

Respite is possible for carers. There are ongoing monthly support groups for carers, a group for carers' children, and a men's group. There are opportunities for new carers to be linked to more experienced ones for advice and training programmes. Training programmes include access to NVQ qualification. Currently 19 have completed NVQ 3 and 13 are training. Payments reflect the needs of children and in that sense skills are acknowledged – there being an enhanced scheme for mainstream carers; the weekly allowance plus an additional supplement of £50 plus four enhanced payments to those qualifying for an Adolescent Support Service scheme and equivalent to salary rates for those acting as Contract Carers. Loyalty has been acknowledged through a special gathering where long standing carers were presented with certificates and bouquets.

- 12. Should an allegation against any of our foster carers need to be investigated, do we offer them independent support, as required by the National Minimum Standards on Fostering Services 2002?**

Carers subject to allegations are referred to the Fostering Network for support. Currently too, as a result of discussions within Fostering Management Group there are proposals to achieve enhanced membership for every carer which would entitle them to legal advice.

- 13. How easy is it for children in foster care and for their carers to obtain direct help from other professionals in relation to education, health and behavioural and other therapeutic matters?**

Children in foster care are each subject to a Personal Education Plan and within the Educational Department Suzanne Kleczkowski has a specific role in this regard. Children entering the care system are the subject of a medical which is repeated at regular intervals. Within child Guidance a CPN (Jude Coe) establishes an overview of mental health at the point of the one month (first) review. The young people accepted into the Adolescent Support Service or Contract Care scheme are fast-tracked to the Specialist Assessment and Therapeutic team and /or Child Guidance as needed.

- 14. Do we pay our foster carers the Fostering Network's minimum recommended rate – or above or below it? Do we pay enhanced allowances? Other fees?**

Mainstream basic allowances are below that of Fostering Network's minimum recommended rate – by age range;-

0-4	15%
5-10	25%
11-15	17%
16+	29%

- 15. Do our management information systems enable us to monitor and evaluate foster care service?**

Management information is available but not in as readily an accessible form as might be achieved. IT Approaches are being made to IT services in order to achieve a more responsive database.

Total Respect Training

Everyone accepts their responsibility

Listening to children and young people – and responding to what they say – is everybody's business. All adults who work in and for the care system can contribute to making things better. Foster carers and social workers can commit themselves to building respectful relationships with children and young people, and can actively support them in expressing their wishes and feelings. Managers can critically question policies and procedures, and create spaces for children and young people to advise and contribute to decision-making. Torbay Councillors and senior managers can pledge to regularly hear from children and young people about how the care system feels to them.

Young people will be able to participate if you:

- Understand your responsibilities as a corporate parent
- Know the facts about your local care system
- Recognise the need to listen and respond to children and young people using a variety of techniques
- Are committed to putting children and young people first

Listening Spaces

Listening Spaces are opportunities for corporate parents to listen to, hear and take seriously children's and young people's views about the way services are planned, delivered and evaluated.

Principles for Effective Consultation

- Be committed to listening to children and young people and to hearing and accepting what they say.
- Believe that children and young people are active contributors rather than passive recipients.
- Keep an open mind – explore ideas freely with no pre-conceived right or wrong answers.
- Develop an ability to empathise and put yourself in place of the children and young people who receive services.

Think About the Listening Spaces in Your Local Authority:

- What spaces do you have?
- What is your role in ensuring that listening spaces are developed?
- How do you provide listening spaces for children and young people who find it more difficult to be heard such as young people in secure

units, young people living out of your area, or children and young people who do not communicate using speech?

- What are YOU going to do about creating more listening spaces in your local authority?

Messages from Young People:

Social Services should involve children and young people in decision-making at all times because....

- It's our life
- It makes us feel respected
- We are the consumer
- We are the real employers – if we weren't here, people would be out of jobs.
- We are the experts
- To make services better
- They probably involve their own children in decisions at home
- We will feel some ownership for the service – to become enfranchised and valued as citizens
- We have a right – It's set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Children Act 1989.

http://www.legislation.hms.gov.uk/acts1989/Ukpga_19890041_en_1.htm

- Our involvement is fundamental to a more successful/positive/productive service for all in it – social workers, foster carers, residential social workers, managers etc.
- Repeated lack of control/influence becomes part of young people's behaviour and until these cycles are broken long term difficulties persist.
- Outcomes will improve – it affects our future and how we get on in fostering, education and health
- If we're not involved, positive changes will not be made
- If we're not listened to, we can be taken advantage of and treated badly
- Social Services are not meeting all our needs – they don't have the full picture
- We might not be happy or doing poorly in school
- Being ignored can affect our health and make us depressed

Social Services can involve us by....

- Involve us from the beginning in all decisions
- Talk to the children and young people – take their views forward

- Try to encourage children and young people to 'own' services, and see them as there for them
- Don't leave yourselves just as powerless as the young people
- You have to have some kind of in and after care group
- Give us a choice of where we live
- Produce local information – for example, an in care newsletter and guide
- Meet your objectives/duties – make it happen
- Use art and drama to get the views from young people at different stages
- Have a question and answer session – where children and young people can put questions to the Director, to Children's Service Managers and councillors for example
- Create something like an AGM for children and young people and Social Services every year
- Get rid of the 'us' and 'them' culture – we should all team up to make the care system better

Final Thoughts

Participation can only happen when the culture of our organisation supports and values children and young people as individual people with human rights. There are four principal factors needed to ensure our organisation is meeting its obligations to promoting children's and young people's effective participation:

- We have procedures for consulting with children and young people on an ongoing basis, taking into account their varied backgrounds and diverse needs.
- Children and young people can access information, people and processes to help them to express themselves in a range of settings.
- Decision-making genuinely takes account of what children and young people have to say.
- There are opportunities to complain and question decisions.

Children and young people will be able to participate if:

- They have access to enough information to help them to form an opinion.
- They are provided with opportunities to say what their views are and can look at different options.
- Their views are considered with respect.
- They are told exactly how their views will be considered.

A Young Person's View

What makes a good councillor?

This is taken from a presentation made to the regional Quality Protects conferences by Mari Piper, Adviser to the Ministerial Task Force, Children's Safeguard Review.

The Government has made it clear that councillors have responsibilities towards the children and young people in its care. We need to feel that this is true, that someone is aware of what is happening to us, and that they are answerable and responsible.

Very few children and young people I have spoken to were aware that Councillors had any responsibility for them. I did not know this until last year. None of the ones who did know, knew the names of any of the councillors. Tell us who you are!

What we want from good councillors is:

- the recognition that we are individuals
- the right to choose our own culture and friends
- to be listened to, treated as equal partners, and negotiated with
- more independence as we become teenagers, and more responsibility
- high expectations of us
- to have our achievements recognised
- to be supported in the transition to adulthood
- a safety net.

We hope and expect that Quality Protects will change things. We want caring councillors who oversee the services we receive. We want to know who our councillors are. When we have problems, we need them to listen and to understand that we are not the problem. We don't want excuses. We want things to be different.

(Action Plan 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 10, 12, 13, 14)

The Councillor's Role – Making a Difference

Taken from the Frank Dobson Report 'Think Child/Quality Protects'

Whatever the decision – *think child!* Consider how the decision will affect children.

Think child. More than that – *think 'my child'*. Would you be happy if a child of your own was moved to a new area and a new home, leaving friends and their familiar school behind? Are you happy that a child for whom you have corporate parental responsibility is to be moved in this way? There may be good reasons for your council to take this course – but *think 'my child'*, ask tough questions, and try to find out what the children themselves feel about it.

Children in your care have families too. Their links with their families are very important to them. For a child, frequent or long-distance moves can disrupt and even break family bonds.

Listening to children looked after by your council:

Hearing from children and young people in residential care is usually fairly straightforward but the majority of looked after children will be in foster care. Hearing from children in foster care can present a bigger challenge, but some councils have already worked out ways of hearing what fostered children have to say.

When you or fellow councillors wish to meet directly with young people, it is important to bear in mind that:

- this must be handled with care and organised using proper mechanisms
- you will need preparation and training, because listening to children is not necessarily easy – it's important not to intrude into personal matters
- it's also important to create an atmosphere in which young people feel free to say what they really think
- there are safety issues – all contacts with children and young people need to be organised with attention to normal safeguards (the LGA recommends confidential standard police record checks of councillors who are meeting children).

Young people are citizens too

Young people are citizens too, and many are constituents. Foster carers, and the families of children in need, are also voters and constituents. Young people need to know who their councillors are and how they can get in touch. That way you

can hear their views, on services and on issues that affect them. They may ask for your advice or help and you can act for them as you would for your other constituents.

Be a champion for children

'Think child' is an important motto, but integrating it with other priorities may pose a challenge. As you get to know more about the children in your care – who are *your* children in many ways – you may feel that their claims are a priority. But not everyone will share that view.

There are many prejudices about children 'in care'. Many people believe that all children are put into care because they have committed an offence. In fact this is true of fewer than 2% of children in care. Most children come into care because of family breakdown or because a court decided that they needed to be kept safe from abuse or neglect.

Being a champion for children will mean:

- making sure that children looked after by your council get a good deal – as good as any other child in your local community
- valuing diversity and ensuring that council services respect different traditions and cultures
- having high expectations, and making sure that young people and children achieve the best and that these achievements are recognised. It can also mean:
- campaigning for better family support in the community, to make sure that **fewer** children need to be 'looked after' in the future.

Leadership

Most of all, Quality Protects asks councillors to take a lead. Councillors and officers can get trapped in a narrow 'departmental' view and can lose the corporate vision. It is up to you and your fellow councillors to set out that corporate vision afresh – and to make sure it stays clearly in view as you work towards your council's Quality Protects goals.

A champion for children

- *Think child!* – whether you are looking at planning, the environment, transport, or any other area of council work.
- Work for a good deal for looked after children. Help them to achieve their full potential.
- Help change attitudes in your community in order to get more support for looked after children and children in need.

References:

If This Were My Child – LGIU

U.N. – Rights of the Child

The Children's Act 1989

The Children Leaving Care Act 2000

Guidance on the Education of Children and Young People In Public Care

Guidance on Promoting the Health of Looked After Children

Frank Dobson's Letter To All Councillors – September 1998

Every Child Matters

The Victoria Climbié Inquiry

Total Respect Training CPOA

Appendix 1

MONITORING FRAMEWORK – PROPOSED MEMBERS MONITORING FRAMEWORK

	At 31/03/2003	At 31/12/2000	31/03/2001 + TARGET	Comment
Number of children being looked after				
% Looked after by ethnicity				
% Foster Care				
% Residential Care				
% In Torbay				
% Outside Torbay				
% of children in care in adoptive placement				
% of children in care with an allocated social worker				
% of child care reviews held within statutory time limits				
7 year SAT %				
11 year SAT %				
14 year SAT %				
16 years and 1 GCSE or more				
Permanently excluded from school				
% Immunisations up to date				
% seen by dentist in last year				
% Annual Health assessment				

	At 31/03/2003	At 31/12/2000	31/03/2001 + TARGET	Comment
% Comprehensive health assessment				
In care and cautioned or convicted				
Care leavers still in touch at 19				
Care leavers in employment, education or training at 19				
Care leavers without suitable accommodation				
Numbers of complaints made by children in care.				
% of foster carers with computers				
% of LAC with access to computers in placement				

CORPORATE PARENTING ACTION PLAN

	WHERE WE WANT TO GET TO	ACTIONS TO GET US THERE	OUTCOME MEASURE	ACTION BY	DATE	RESOURCES
1	Executive Member Group set up to champion Corporate Parenting.	1. Membership agreed. 2. Schedule of meetings agreed. 3. 'Think Child' to be stamped on all Council headed paper.	Executive Member group set up and active	Cllr Faulkner. Cllr McHugh.	April 2004	Officer and member time.
2	Members role as Corporate Parent is defined.	Research and write definition.	Corporate Parent role is clarified.	Kim Merriott. Cheryl Owen.	January 2004	Officer and Children's Rights time.
3	Members understand their role as Corporate Parents and when making decisions appropriately take this into consideration.	1. Workshop is held to help members understand their role and to disseminate information accordingly. 2. Members attend Total Respect Training. 3. Consultation with Young People.	Decisions are influenced by Member understand of their Corporate Parent role	Kim Merriott. Cheryl Owen Young People Total Respect Training.	Ongoing. Workshop May Total Respect Training Feb.	Officer time and member time. Children's Rights time. Young People's expenses.
4	Initial training for all councillors followed by a rota of Member visits to front line teams, residential placements, family centres and PRU's is established.	1. Training and rota to be drawn up. 2. Pro-forma developed to assist Members.	Visits undertaken regularly and reported back to the Corporate Parent Group and Policy Advisory Group.	Cllr. Faulkner. Kim Merriott.	Ongoing.	Officer And Member time. Travelling expenses.
6	Appoint a member representative to the Torbay Children's Rights and Advocacy Service.	1. Jenny Faulkner – Children's Champion.	Appointed.	Cllr Faulkner. Children's Rights.	November 2003	Member time.

	WHERE WE WANT TO GET TO	ACTIONS TO GET US THERE	OUTCOME MEASURE	ACTION BY	DATE	RESOURCES
7	Councillor on Fostering Panel. Councillor part of Fostering Management Group.	1. Identify Members. Wendy Burridge. Jenny Faulkner	Members appointed.	Cllr Faulkner.	November 2003.	Member time.
8	Robust links are established CYPSP. (YP to be invited at least twice yearly)	1. Discuss with Assistant Director Children's Services. 2. Seek advice from Partnership. 3. Invites via Children's Rights.	Links developed and implemented.	Kim Merriott. Vince Clark. Siobhan Grady. Cheryl Owen.	March 2004.	Officer time.
9	Develop methods for sharing info. Yearly report to Overview and Scrutiny Board	Use monitoring format for Members.	Information is shared.	Kim Merriott. Cheryl Owen.	Ongoing.	Officer, Member time. Children's Rights.
10	Develop a forum for Member contact with those whom they are corporate parents.	To be agreed with Working Group.	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.
11	Review anonymously serious cases to raise awareness and understanding of the issues faced.	To be agreed with Working Group.	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.	To be confirmed.
12	Photos and info in newsletter and website on councillors.	Torbay Children's Rights to implement.	Newsletter published.	Cheryl Owen.	April 2004.	Children's Rights and Young People's time. Expenses.
13	LAC Forum established for consultation and participation.	Torbay Children's Rights to implement.	Group implemented.	Cheryl Owen.	April 2004.	Children's Rights and Young People's time. Expenses.
14	Review Complaints Leaflet for LAC and ensure "Child Proof".	Torbay Children's Rights to implement.	New Complaints leaflet published.	Cheryl Owen. Young People. Steve Keir.	March 2004.	Children's Rights and Young People time. Officer time.

	WHERE WE WANT TO GET TO	ACTIONS TO GET US THERE	OUTCOME MEASURE	ACTION BY	DATE	RESOURCES
15	Modern Apprenticeships and work placement tasters to be provided for Care Leavers and other Young People within Torbay Council.	1. Proposals for SMT. 2. Personnel included in process.	Scheme implemented.	Derek King. Personnel Department. Contracting Services.	Ongoing.	Officer time.
16	There should be a clear pathway for Care Leavers into accommodation, housing and benefits.	1. Housing strategy to meet these issues. 2. Task group set up to clarify address issues.	All Young People's housing needs are met.	Derek King. Simon Sherbersky. Checkpoint-all housing assessment.	Ongoing	Officer time.
17	Consistent service and charges by supportive lodgings, providers and agencies.	1. Housing strategy to meet these issues. 2. Task group set up to clarify address issues.	All young people's housing needs are met.	Derek King. Simon Sherbersky. Checkpoint-all housing assessments.	Ongoing	Officer Time