

Information

for County Councillors

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From:	Karen Kral - Group Manager Children's Social Care
Date:	18th November 2013
To:	All County Councillors

Request for members to visit Somerset County Council children's homes as Corporate Parents

Introduction

More members are urgently needed to take part in independent monthly monitoring visits to children's homes.

The visits are a statutory responsibility and give Councillors a chance to speak to children and young people to ensure that they are safe and well cared for, as part of Corporate Parenting responsibilities. Support and training is available to undertake this role, and members can jointly visit homes with managers until they feel confident.

There are currently seven SCC homes across the county for looked after children and young people, some of whom are disabled and spend short breaks at the homes, away from their families.

Children and young people living in residential care are the most vulnerable, and have complex needs. They may have experienced abuse and neglect, and suffered additional trauma through previous placement breakdowns. There are huge challenges for the staff in building relationships with children and young people who may have suffered rejection and find it very hard to trust adults.

Legal requirements

It is the responsibility of local authorities to improve the life chances of children they look after. Regulations require that quality assurance arrangements are in place and that monthly unannounced visits are undertaken to each home.

Aims of the visits

- To observe the care of the children and young people.
- To observe the practice of staff.

- To check that accurate records are kept about:-
 - Any children missing from the home;
 - Use of physical intervention;
 - How complaints are handled.
- To inspect the quality of the environment – state of repair, cleanliness, homeliness.
- To be satisfied that the home has an effective approach to managing behaviour.

Discussions during the visit

In order to form an opinion of the standard of care, visitors are required where possible to:

- Speak to children and young people in private
 - How safe do they feel?
 - Are they supported to get the most out of education and take part in leisure and community activities?
- Speak to staff in private and gain their views on how the home is managed to promote the wellbeing of the children and young people;
- Where appropriate speak to parents and carers.

Reports of the visits

A summary of any findings from the visit both positive and negative is sent to the manager in order for them to respond and take any actions necessary. The report, including the manager's responses is then sent to Ofsted, and the information forms part of the evaluation of the home at the next inspection.

Can you help?

We would very much like to hear from elected members willing to carry out these visits. Any members involved in the visits will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check – previously known as CRB checks. For more information and to discuss further what is involved, please contact Karen Kral.

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