

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 20 May 2004.

PRESENT: Councillor J Jones (Chair), Councillor J Brunton (Vice Chair); Councillors McIntyre, Mrs B Thompson, P Thompson and A E Ward.

OFFICIALS: J Cooke, C Kendrick, S Little, D Sands, G Watson and J Willis.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Thomas Tolmie (Young Persons Representative).

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brady, Hubbard, J Taylor, B Taylor and Mr Simpson (Foster Carer).

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2004 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

Canning Judgement

The Head of Children and Families' Services updated the Board with regard to the Canning Judgement in that the Service was currently half way through the second stage of the review of cases. Some cases dated as far back as 18 years, however, to date, no cases had been found in need of review.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – REPORT ON ACTIVITY: APRIL 2003 – MARCH 2004

The Children's Participation Officer submitted a report to the Board presenting a summary of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the year 2003-2004.

The report acknowledged that the Corporate Parenting Board had been in operation for four years and had gained a national reputation for its work during that time. Corporate parenting was a core statutory responsibility with clear targets and performance indicators set by the Government in respect of children looked after by local authorities.

In July 2003, the Inspection of Children's Services in Middlesbrough carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate, highlighted that "Councillors showed a clear understanding of and commitment to address issues that affected children's services." The Inspection Report also recognised that "an active Corporate Parenting Board was in operation that had good links with young people."

It was acknowledged that the Board's success had been recognised by the Audit Commission and information relating to the Board had been included in the Joint Review 'Making Ends Meet' web-site as an example of good practice.

During the course of the year the Corporate Parenting Board had considered a range of reports and received information in relation to family placement services, residential care services, education and health. Subsequently, a number of recommendations were made to the Executive, all of which were accepted.

An appendix to the report provided a detailed overview of the Corporate Parenting Board's activities during April 2003 to March 2004, including the key issues considered by the Board. Particular reference was made to the Family Placement Service and the proposals for developing a Tees-wide Adoption Service in partnership with the four Tees unitary authorities.

It was recognised that the Corporate Parenting Board had continued to make significant progress in addressing the needs of children looked after by the authority.

RECOMMENDED that the contents of the report be noted.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – PROFILE AND TRENDS

The Children's Participation Officer submitted a report informing the Board with regard to the profile and statistical trends of Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council.

It was crucial that information on the profile of children becoming looked after and trends in demand for services was analysed in order to plan services most effectively in partnership with other agencies.

The appendix to the report set out the current situation with regard to children looked after, including the numbers of children looked after in foster placement, those subject to Care Orders, ethnic origin, age, gender and reasons for becoming looked after.

G Watson, Social Services Planning Officer, was also in attendance at the meeting and provided a short presentation in respect of specific statistical trends and the following key areas were highlighted:-

- Number of children looked after at 31 March 2004 - 239.
- Reduction of children looked after from March 2003 of 7%.
- A breakdown of children looked after placement types as at 31 March 2004 was provided as follows:-
 - With Foster Carers – 73%
 - Placed for Adoption – 7%
 - M'bro Children's Homes – 3%
 - Placed at Home – 9%
 - Out of Area residential placements – 6%
 - Independent Living – 2%
- Majority of children looked after in the age group 10 – 15 years.
- Most notable decrease of children looked after was in the age range 1-4 years.
- Ethnic origin – the majority of children looked after were white, followed by mixed race – currently 24, then Asian or Asian British – currently 12.
- Children with three or more placements reduced to 12.1% in 2004 compared with 14.3% in 2003.
- Children who were adopted reduced to 19 in 2004 from 24 in 2003.
- There was a slight upward trend in the percentage of children who were continuously looked after for four years plus and had been in their current placement for more than two years. In 2004 the figure stood at 63.7%.
- In 2003/04 87.8% of children looked after had undergone health checks compared with 97% the previous year.
- 40% of children leaving care gained at least one GCSE at grade A-G, or GNVQ, in 2004. This again showed an upward trend.

- The number of children looked after who missed 25 or more days schooling had steadily reduced from 16% in 2000/01 to 5.3% in 2003/04.
- The number of young people aged 17 engaged in education, training or employment at the age of 19 years was 30% in 2003/04 compared with 90% in 2002/03.
- The number of children looked after aged 10 or over with final warnings and convictions was estimated to be less than 16.1% in 2003, however, the final figure was awaited and the Board would be advised at a future meeting.

During the ensuing discussion the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to Modern Apprenticeships and the Board was in general agreement that such schemes should be welcomed. A recent Government announcement on the 14-19 agenda would allow provision to be made for young people from the age of 14 to engage in modern apprenticeships two days a week. It was recognised that the Leaving Care Team worked closely with the Learning Skills Council and other agencies to present as many opportunities as possible to young people leaving education.
- Members were advised of a newly formed group of young people called NEET, Not in Education or Employment Training, who were part of the Kick Start branch of Connexions who would be working closely with the Leaving Care Team in the future.
- It was acknowledged that Middlesbrough's figures reflected the national picture. The trends were encouraging and it was hoped that as jobs were created and the area became more prosperous the number of children at risk and children looked after would continue to reduce.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Board support further development of corporate working and multi-agency partnerships to reduce the numbers of children looked after by the Local Authority.

OVERVIEW OF EDUCATION OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

D Sands, Support Manager, Inclusion Service, was in attendance to provide Members with a verbal report on the key priorities for 2003/04 for the education of children looked after.

The priorities were detailed as follows:-

- That all children should be placed in school – Currently a low percentage of school days lost.
- To increase the number of children with Personal Education Plans (PEP) – In January 2004 46% of children looked after had a PEP compared with 4% in 2002.
- To increase the number of young people gaining accreditation – Last year, 66.6% gained a GCSE or similar qualification. More recently a group of young people had established a group named "It's Class" that met up socially after school and invited guest speakers on education issues. The group helped to raise pupils' self-esteem.
- All schools to have a designated teacher for Children Looked After – A senior teacher from each school had been designated and termly meetings were held.
- Social Exclusion Unit Report (5 local priorities identified) – including: PEPs, harmonisation and simplified data collection systems, bursaries for children looked after, extra support for children to catch up with education.
- Information Sharing – Social Services and Education Services were key areas for information sharing.

- Guide for Governors – Circulated to every Middlesbrough School Governor.
- Foster Carers with PCs in their homes – Currently 98.1%.
- Team part of North Regional Network – Regular meetings held to discuss children looked after issues.

The Board recognised the commitment shown by all those involved in supporting children looked after to reach their full potential and felt they should be congratulated for their hard work.

RECOMMENDED that the information provided be noted.

OVERVIEW OF HEALTH OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Head of Children and Families' Services presented a report to Members advising of the arrangements for the Health of Children Looked After and local procedures to promote the health needs of those children and young people looked after by Middlesbrough Council.

The Department of Health published a guidance document in October 2002, 'Promoting the Health of Children Looked After' which advised Councils with Social Services responsibilities and the NHS of a model for best practice to ensure the health and health promotion needs of looked after children were met. The model moved away from the concept of medical examinations to more holistic health assessments of children and the production of a Health Plan for all children looked after.

In view of the evidence of high levels of unmet needs of the health of children looked after, the following key changes were made to the regulations in 2002:-

- An initial health assessment should be completed within four weeks of a child becoming looked after by an appropriately qualified registered medical practitioner.
- Review assessments could be carried out by an appropriately qualified registered nurse/midwife.
- Health assessments on children under five years should be undertaken twice yearly. For those aged over five years, an annual health review should be undertaken.

An example of the practice guidance note used by the Children and Families Service in respect of Health Assessments and Plans for Children Looked After was appended to the report.

It was reported that Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust (PCT) had a Designated Doctor for Children Looked After. Doctor Phyu was the Medical Advisor to the Family Placement Panel and co-ordinated the health assessments of looked after children. Doctor Phyu's role included production of reports on the health assessments and Health Plan and, where appropriate, taking the decision to devolve the health review to a named health visitor, school nurse or midwife, thus retaining only children who had ongoing health needs requiring her oversight.

It was also reported that in July 2003 Middlesbrough PCT created the post of Nurse Co-ordinator for Looked After Children with administrative support. Chris Nugent had subsequently been appointed and was based at the Leaving Care/Independence Network Building and offered a practitioner and development service linking into the broader health promotions service. The post was considered crucial in promoting health needs of looked after children, working in partnership with Social Services.

In addition, a multi-agency group comprising of Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Social Services and Middlesbrough and Langbaugh PCTs was established to develop the new procedure from promoting the health of children looked after. The group continued to meet to review the implementation of procedures and consequently improve service delivery. The group produced a hand held record for children looked after entitled 'The File with a Smile', enabling children to

keep a record of their health appointments as well as offering guidance and advice on common health matters.

The report provided details of the Looked After Children's Service (LACS) which had been developed in 2003 by the Middlesbrough and Langbaugh Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The key areas of service delivery were as follows:-

- Direct therapeutic work with looked after children.
- Advice, support and guidance to foster carers.
- Consultation to staff and carers.
- Training on mental health issues for staff and carers.

The Board commented that the information contained in report should be welcomed and considered that the move towards a more holistic approach to health was a positive step.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Board endorse the continued work of Middlesbrough Council and PCT in developing services to promote the health of looked after children and young people.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS – VERBAL REPORT ON PROGRESS

The Head of Children and Families' Services provided Members with a verbal update on progress made in respect of 'Every Child Matters'.

It was reported that following consultation and Executive approval, the development of a Children and Families' Learning Service had been agreed.

The Board was advised that regular staff briefings were held regarding the transition to the new Service which involved the merger of certain Social Services and Education Services Sections. A number of activities were planned between the present time and the summer aimed at building relationships and getting to know one another.

Reference was made to the newly appointed Executive Member for Early Years, Councillor Brunton, who would be involved in leading on the changes to children's services.

RECOMMENDED that the update provided be noted.