

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 10 March 2005.

PRESENT: Councillor J Jones (Chair); Councillors P Thompson and A E Ward.

OFFICIALS: J Cooke, D Johnson, C Kendrick, S Little and J Willis.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: T Tolmie – Leaving Care Service.

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brady, Brunton, McIntyre and Mrs B Thompson, also Mr B Simpson – Foster Carer.

DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point of the meeting.

** MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2005 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

5 RIVERS ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Vulnerable Children presented the Annual Report of 5 Rivers Project, which had been prepared by Carol Perkins, Regional Manager. The 5 Rivers project managed and operated children's residential provision within Middlesbrough.

The partnership between 5 Rivers and Middlesbrough Council provided 11 residential places for young people in three houses. It was noted that the Partnership Board met on a quarterly basis to oversee operational activity, service quality and finance issues.

The Annual Report provided a detailed overview of progress during the past year.

It was reported that the three homes currently operating were:-

- Holly Lodge (Cambridge Road) – offered placements to four young people aged 11 – 16 on admission.
- Rosecroft (Croft Avenue) – Offered placements to four young people aged 11 – 16 on admission.
- Fir Tree (Marton Avenue) – offered placements to three young people aged 9 - 14 on admission.

Each of the above homes offered placements on a medium to long term basis and had been fully occupied throughout the year. There were no plans to increase the numbers of residential homes.

It was reported that of the 11 young people living in the three homes, three were in full time mainstream education. One attended Ashdale full time, one attended the Princes Trust and one attended part time education in a mainstream school awaiting progression to full time. Two young people had complementary education ranging from two hours to three days per week and one young person attended college. Education was being actively sought for the other young person.

Members were advised that there had been a marked improvement in the behaviour of several young people and one young person had returned home. Another young person was in the transition process of a possible return home.

There had been no formal complaints made by the young people during the year and any issues raised were dealt with in the home.

In terms of staffing, the Board was informed that there was currently 32 permanent staff including management, administration and staffing of the units. Intensive training covering health and safety, CSCI, legislative requirements and staff development ensured staff were equipped to respond to the needs of young people.

From 1 April 2005, in line with Regulations, staff would no longer be called Residential Social Workers unless qualified. Staff would be known as Residential Support Workers.

Members were advised that each of the homes had been inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI), with one announced and one unannounced inspection. There were no significant issues arising and the overall view was that the quality of childcare was excellent.

In addition, Regulation 33 Inspections were carried out by independent social work consultants on behalf of Five Rivers on a monthly basis. Elected Members were involved in rota visits to the homes supported by the independent social workers.

It was noted that community complaints had reduced and any issues raised were dealt with swiftly, keeping community relations good. During the year there had been fewer complaints from neighbours relating to Fir Tree House, two relating to Holly Lodge and several relating to Rosecroft (usually relating to vehicle damage).

During general discussion it was noted that work was currently being undertaken to explore the feasibility of offering complementary education packages to Looked After Children and that a proper funding stream should be established to support it.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Five Rivers Annual Report.

ROTA VISITS AND REGULATION 33 REPORTS

The Head of Vulnerable Children submitted a report providing a summary of comments and issues raised in Rota Visits and Regulation 33 reports, since the previous report in September 2004.

Residential accommodation for children and young people was highly regulated under the Care Standards Act 2000 and the key areas covered by the regulations were as follows:-

- Fitness of the organisation, management and staff to operate the residential accommodation (including financial details, training, etc).
- Physical state of the accommodation.
- Views of children, young people and families (including complaints, compliments).

To fulfil the regulations, the premises must be visited monthly by someone independent of the immediate management of the home, following which a report was sent to the CSCI, the home itself and those responsible for its overall management.

It was noted that in Middlesbrough, Regulation 33 visits were carried out at Gleneagles Resource Centre and the houses managed by 5 Rivers. Rota visitors were appointed to each establishment in accordance with the Middlesbrough Corporate Parenting Policy (May 2001) and included four Elected Members.

The report provided details of the Regulation 33 Reports during the period September 2004 to February 2005 in respect of Gleneagles, Holly Lodge, Fir Tree and Rosecroft. The reports included issues raised and addressed, general commentary on staff morale and response. The Regulation 33 visits were reported to the Middlesbrough Council/Five Rivers Partnership Board. Inspections of Gleneagles identified a very high quality of service. In relation to Five Rivers there were a few issues but overall the quality of service was very good.

A Member of the Board referred to the Rota Visits undertaken by Elected Members and requested that the possibility of Member Rota Visitors visiting various homes rather than continuing to visit one home be explored. In response, it was felt that a balance was required between getting to know a particular home well and the need to be independent. Middlesbrough had, therefore, opted to have one Member visit a particular home with a view to change over on an annual basis.

A query was raised as to whether it would be possible for additional Members to be added to the list of Rota Visitors. Members were advised that a letter seeking interest in becoming a Rota Visitor was sent to all Members of the Council in 2003 and the interest received formed the basis of the current Rota Visitors and reserve Members. However, anyone wishing to become involved would be kept informed of future opportunities.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to note the information relating to Regulation 33 and Rota Visits.

FUN DAY FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Children's Participation Officer submitted a report to advise Members of a recent Fun Day held on 16 February 2005 for Looked After Children.

Members were informed that the Children Looked After Social Work Team was keen to engage with young people in a variety of ways and the Fun Day had been arranged to kick start the process.

A report on the Fun Day was attached as Appendix 1 to the submitted report and outlined planning aspects, activities included and feedback in relation to the event.

Approximately 100 children aged between 5 – 11 years had been invited to attend the event the purpose of which, as well as having fun, was to share the redesigned consultation document used for Looked After Children Reviews. A total of 22 children actually attended and a number of them provided their views in relation to the document. The overall view was that the document was greatly improved.

'PERCY' had been engaged to assist with arts and crafts activities and helped the children to make dream catchers. It had been intended enter the completed dream catchers in a Looked After Children Art Exhibition in August, however, all of the children had wanted to keep them.

Members raised the possibility of older Looked After Children taking part in some kind of residential weekend. Despite reservations being expressed with regard to the possible perception that the Looked After Children were being treated differently to other groups of children, general opinion was that any residential for Looked After Children would be for their own self development and for consultation work to be undertaken with them. Similar events had been held for vulnerable groups. Officers were asked to give consideration to arranging a residential weekend for LAC following consultation with those young people who would be involved.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That Officers explore the possibility of arranging a residential weekend for older Looked After Children.
3. That the Executive be advised to support the provision of a residential weekend for older looked after children.

EXCLUSIONS – PRESS – PUBLIC

ORDERED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following agenda item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER WHO HAD MISSED AT LEAST 25 DAYS SCHOOLING TO DATE THIS ACADEMIC YEAR

The Team Manager for Education of Children Looked After submitted a report to present the Board with information relating to Children Looked After who had missed at least 25 days schooling in the 2004/05 Academic Year to date. The information included those currently not receiving full time education.

The educational achievement of children in care had become an increasing cause for concern, particularly at a national level, and was part of the Government's focus on social exclusion. The Children Act 2004 placed a new duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievements of Children Looked After.

The Board was advised that the Government had introduced a range of initiatives, targets and guidance aimed at improving the life chances of Children Looked After. One of the introduced Performance Indicators involved monitoring the number of children in care who had missed at least 25 days schooling, for any reason, during an academic year, which would form part of the Council's assessment during inspection. Middlesbrough had performed well in relation to this indicator, however, the situation had changed since September 2004 with an increase in those not in full time education.

The Appendix to the report provided details of those children/young people who had missed 25 days of school to date and those not currently receiving full time provision.

There were currently 23 young people in total who had missed 25 days of school to date, not all were educated in Middlesbrough but remained Middlesbrough's responsibility. The 23 children represented 13% of the total number of current Children Looked After. Of those 23, 17 had been in care continuously for 12 months plus, nine had Special Educational Needs (equating to 39% of CLA missing 25 days or more school). Work was currently being undertaken in primary schools to prevent children from becoming excluded.

During discussion the following issues were raised:-

- General concern was expressed at the increase in numbers of young people missing 25 days or more school.
- It was confirmed that the Education Children Looked After Team was involved in following up each of the children listed in the report.
- Members recognised that the report contained some positive points, in that the majority of children were accessing education but felt it important to ensure that they were receiving a full programme of education.

- In response to a query it was noted that the admissions criteria for Middlesbrough's schools gave priority to Looked After Children although it was usually more difficult to secure places in secondary education, particularly where children had returned from another area.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to note the issues relating to children looked after who had missed at least 25 days schooling in the current academic year.