

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 9 June 2005.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair): Councillors Hubbard, P Thompson and A E Ward.

OFFICIALS: H Booth, J Cooke, M Cooper, D Johnson, C Kendrick, S Little, G Watson, J Wilson.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: B Simpson (Foster Carer).

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors McIntyre, B Taylor, J Taylor and Mrs B Thompson and T Tolmie (Young Persons' Representative).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 April 2005 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – WORK PROGRAMME – 2005/06

The Executive Director of Children, Families and Learning submitted a discussion paper relating to various approaches to a work programme for the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) during the year 2005/06.

The Board had been operating for five years and a great deal had been achieved during that time. However, in order to ensure that the work was clearly focussed on achieving the best possible outcomes for Children Looked After it was important to review and refresh the work of the Board on a regular basis.

An appendix to the report set out the issues and options for discussion as follows:

Issues

- How to make the CPB more child-focussed and more interesting.
- How to encourage more active advocacy of children's needs to all elected Members?
- For Members to consider the needs and progress of individual children with a view to identifying issues of concern to all children.

Options

- Allocate responsibility for particular aspects of a child's life to Members of the CPB including where they live, family and friends, education and health to identify gaps in service provision and implement improvements..
- Hold 'themed' meetings based on the "Every Child Matters" outcomes: Enjoy and Achieve, Stay Safe, Be Healthy, Make a Positive Contribution, Achieve Economic well-being.
- Identify issues that the young people would like the CPB to address, hold structured meetings with young people and elected Members based on those issues. Young people would need to be supported to participate.

Members were also asked for any additional proposals for action but none were suggested.

During discussion reference was made to the following:

Achievements had been made to date by the Board but there was a need for increased effort.

The recent participation of Children Looked After in a Regional Football League competition. Leisure Services had supported this initiative and had provided a football Coach and a venue without charge. It was hoped that this would become an annual event.

Reference was made to the ongoing discussions by officers in support of the suggestion by the Deputy Director of Children Families and Learning that it should become a future requirement for all Service Areas to include something in their Performance Plans relating to Children Looked After.

Members expressed their support for the second reported option that future meetings be based on the five themes of "Every Child Matters" with the young people being encouraged to make a contribution. Their concerns would be identified and any gaps in service could then be investigated by the appropriate Scrutiny Panel. It was agreed that the themes would be taken in the reported order with Enjoy and Achieve being the first focus.

RECOMMENDED as follows:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board be based on the five "Every Child Matters" outcomes with the first meeting focussing on the "Enjoy and Achieve" theme.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD – REPORT ON ACTIVITY: MAY 2004-APRIL 2005

The Children's Participation Officer submitted a report presenting a summary of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the year 2004/05.

The report provided historical information on the development of the Board together with details of the work carried out during the year and the key issues considered by the Board in connection with Education, Family Placement Service, Leaving Care, Residential Care, Sport and Leisure and Corporate Parenting. It concluded that the Board had considered a wide range of issues, had identified a number of areas of concern and continued to monitor progress on these issues and to press for further improvements.

During the year a number of recommendations had been made to the Executive, all of which were accepted and were being implemented. It was noted that two young people attended meetings of the Board, one of whom had attended seven out of eight meetings. Young people had also shown a DVD of a play that they had written and performed.

Throughout the year the Corporate Parenting Board had maintained a focus on improving services for children and young people looked after in the most cost-effective way.

RECOMMENDED as follows:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to note the issues relating to Corporate Parenting.

POLICY AND GUIDANCE RELATING TO SUBSTANCE MISUSE

The Executive Director for Children, Families and Learning submitted a report to present the Board with a Policy and Guidance relating to Substance Misuse for staff working within Middlesbrough's Children Looked After Service.

The Policy explained the need to focus upon substance misuse issues within the Looked After Children population, whilst the Guidance aimed to offer practitioners a clear, safe and consistent approach to addressing specific issues.

These documented procedures would provide a framework from which practitioners could work. It would be read in conjunction with the Screening Protocol which had been produced by the Drug Action Team. A member of the Drug Action Team was in attendance to present this Protocol and answer Members' questions.

The Policy and Guidance and the Screening Protocol were attached as appendices to the report.

During the ensuing discussion Members highlighted issues in connection with the definition of the Policy and the Guidance and the perceived differences between the purposes of the two documents. A concern was also expressed at the lack of reference to alcohol issues.

It was felt that the Policy statement should be strengthened to include reference to partnerships between Education services and Health services, and to the overall approach to be adopted by the Council. The document was seen to be primarily an operational Handbook. Members considered that alcohol should be given a higher profile throughout the Policy and Guidance document and in the Screening Protocol. The officer from the Drug Action Team suggested that the reference to drugs and alcohol in the document could be transposed giving alcohol a greater prominence.

It was also suggested that, due to changes in placement, education on drug and alcohol awareness provided in school was sometimes missed by Children Looked after. It was proposed that in future the Personal Education Plans of children Looked After should be amended to record whether this education had been received or not. Bespoke education on alcohol and drugs could be provided for children who had missed it in school.

RECOMMENDED that Members had some issues in connection with the content of the report and recommended that the document be revised to strengthen the Policy section and to increase the emphasis on alcohol misuse.

1. That the information presented be noted.
2. That the document be revised to strengthen the Policy section and increase the emphasis on alcohol misuse to enable its use as a toolkit by practitioners for dealing with all forms of substance misuse.

ANALYSIS OF AGENCY PLACEMENTS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

A report of the Deputy Director of Children Families and Learning was presented on behalf of the Agency Placement Manager to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with information relating to the current use of agency residential placements and agency foster-care placements in respect of Looked After Children.

Background information and details of external consultation was provided on the following:

- The role of the Agency Placement Manager appointed to in 2002.
- A Best Value Review of Agency Placements, completed in January 2004, which had led to a reduced reliance on residential care provision in distant placements and a shift to making better use of local resources, particularly Agency Foster placements.
- A Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children produced in April 2004.
- The Children's Agency forum (a monthly multi-agency forum)
- North East Contracting and Commissioning Group initiative.

This management activity highlighted above had resulted in a significant reduction in the number of children placed in agency residential provision outside the area, a more appropriate use of agency foster care and most importantly enabled the majority of Middlesbrough Children Looked After to live within their home area.

An analysis of Agency Placements was attached as an appendix to the report. Of the 245 Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council 61% were placed within Middlesbrough's

foster care service. Agency placements provided care for 48 children and the remaining 20% were accommodated with family or in independent living options.

It was noted that the significant reduction in the number of children placed in out of area Agency Placements had created substantial budgetary savings.

During discussion it was explained that 'specialist placements' were those providing a package of more intensive support for children and young people with particular difficulties. Reference was made to the potential savings which could be effected by providing these placements in-house. It was pointed out that there was a need to look at the development of EBD provision in Middlesbrough. It was emphasised that children should not be brought back from settled placements and that as some children were likely to be in placements for as long as five years, then some pump-priming would be required to develop a local service.

It was noted that work was ongoing on a South Tees fostering service which would take on some of the principles of the Treatment Foster Care model. The draft was scheduled for completion at the end of July and a further report would be brought to the Corporate Parenting Board.

RECOMMENDED that the information presented be noted.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – PROFILE AND TRENDS – STATISTICAL INFORMATION

The Children's Planning Officer gave a presentation of statistical information relating to those children and young people looked after by Middlesbrough Council as at 31 March 2005.

The information provided included total numbers since 1996, types of placement, ethnic origin, age, numbers adopted, health and other stability indicators. It was pointed out that performance in relation to Children Looked After now impacted directly on the Corporate Performance assessment.

Discussion ensued on the information provided on the percentage of Children Looked After who missed 25 days or more schooling and it was pointed out that this information was termly data and as such difficult to collate. It was agreed that there was a need for this to be recorded more accurately, however, overall this figure had improved for the year 2004/05.

It was noted that other regions and Nationally there was a slight upward trend which was mirrored in this region. Members were assured that thorough examination of the reasons for children becoming looked after had ensured that children were only looked after if it were absolutely necessary. However, there was a growing trend for the Courts to place children looked after at home, which had cost implications for the Authority.

The Chair thanked the officer for the informative presentation.

NOTED