
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 8 September 2005.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Brady, J Taylor and B Thompson,

OFFICIALS: C Arbuthnot, M Cooper, S Kitching, S Little, S Robinson, A Smith.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: B Simpson and T Tolmie

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hubbard, B Taylor, P Thompson and A E Ward

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point of the meeting.

MINUTES

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

STAY SAFE PRESENTATION

A presentation was made by the Service Manager for Children Looked After Services and the Review and Development Unit Manager entitled "Every Child Matters: Staying Safe".

The following five outcomes of Every Child Matters were highlighted:

- Staying Safe
- Be Healthy
- Enjoy and Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well-being

The purpose of the presentation was to advise the Board of the key issues affecting Children Looked After under the Stay Safe Agenda as follows:

1. Safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation.
2. Safe from accidental injury and death
3. Safe from bullying and discrimination
4. Safe from crime, anti-social behaviour both in and out of school
5. To have security, stability and to ensure they are cared for.

These issues had been identified as a result of the National Agenda and consultative reports issued by the Government such as the Utting Report "People Like Us" 1997, the Warner Report 1992 "Choosing with Care", and the Waterhouse Report 2000 "Lost in Care".

It was stated that the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) had been established to regulate the Council's Children's Services, Foster Care, Children's Homes and Adoption Services.

The presentation provided information on the following

- The issues for children and young people identified by the "Safeguarding Children" report of the Joint Chief Inspectors 2005
- The needs of Children Looked After, including procedures for child protection
- Local arrangements including thresholds and procedures for child protection
- The recently strengthened role of the Independent Reviewing Officer

Information was also provided on Government Performance Indicators relating to placement stability and security performance for 2003/4 and 2004/5.

Developments and initiatives to assist placement stability were outlined including a support care/respite care scheme, a dedicated manager for out of area placements, a banded payment scheme for foster carers based on skills and competence and the development of a South Tees Specialist Fostering Scheme providing intensive support and inclusive care.

Finally various initiatives and protocols developed to ensure safe from crime and anti-social behaviour, bullying and discrimination and accidental death and injury were also reported.

Although the views of the young people had not been reported the Board was advised that a Workshop for Children Looked After was to be held later in the year and it was intended that a video of this event would be brought to a future meeting of the Board.

A Member also referred to the ongoing problems associated with recruitment and retention of foster carers and it was suggested that an advertisement should be placed in the next edition of Middlesbrough News.

In response to a Member's query, further information was provided on the requirement to determine both long term and short term plans for Children Looked After, the Review of Care Plan procedures and the need in some cases for a plan to return to Court. The Board was advised that Review meetings were held at three and six monthly intervals and were attended by officers from education, health, foster carers and a children's advocate.

Reference was made to concerns in connection with past measures which ten years ago had failed to adequately protect Children Looked After from harm. However, the safeguards now in place, together with the enthusiasm of officers, were impressive. The responsibility of all Councillors to accept the role of a Corporate Parent was emphasised.

The Chair added that it was considered that all measures were now established to prevent any loopholes in the procedures and protocols to ensure the safe care of Children Looked After.

Officers were thanked for the informative presentation and the favourable comments made at the meeting would be relayed to the staff concerned.

NOTED

SUMMARY OF ROTA VISITS AND REGULATION 33 REPORTS

The Service Manager for Children Looked After Services submitted a report to present the Board with a summary of the process and findings of Rota visits and Regulation 33 reports in relation to residential care facilities in Middlesbrough.

The report outlined the local arrangements put in place by Five Rivers which met the requirements of Regulation 33 of the Children's Home Regulations under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Two independent social workers were commissioned by the organisation to carry out the Regulation 33 inspections at all three houses. The inspections were carried out on a monthly basis, sometimes unannounced, and always followed up by a report.

Where possible at least one child/young person would be interviewed during an inspection to seek their views on living in the house.

Copies of the inspection reports were sent to the Head of Vulnerable Children's Services and the Service Manager, Children Looked After and to the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The houses would also receive a copy of the report in order for the teams to devise action plans in relation to any issues raised by the inspection.

The report confirmed that generally the findings of the inspections were positive. The submitted report provided details of the issues and recommendations resulting from the Regulation 33 process over recent months in respect of Holly Lodge, Fir Tree and Rosecroft.

It was also reported that Regulation 33 visits in relation to Gleneagles Respite Care Services for children with disabilities were undertaken by managers within Children, Families and Learning, with no line management responsibility for the service. These were then circulated to the relevant managers and CSCI.

It was reported that five Elected Members had been trained to undertake rota visits on the three homes in conjunction with an agreed timetable. A visit sheet was completed and then forwarded to the Deputy Director, Head of Vulnerable Children for comment and recommendation. Issues of concern were discussed with the appropriate managers.

It was confirmed that the Executive Member for Children's Services and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board received copies of these reports.

RECOMMENDED as follows:

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to endorse the processes and procedures that ensure that residential care in Middlesbrough meets prescribed minimum standards.

REGIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE LOOKED AFTER

The Children's Participation Officer presented a report to inform Members of recent developments in regional activities for children and young people looked after by local authorities.

Background information was provided on external consultation initiated by Government Office North East and supported by a regional practitioners' group combining children's rights, participation and involvement workers. The overall objectives were to strengthen the voice of children and young people looked after at regional level and enable them to influence decision making more effectively.

The report detailed the following recent events/initiatives:

- Kelly Cup - a five-a-side football competition (one young Middlesbrough player awarded "Best Team Player" trophy)
- Ignite NE05 – a regional arts festival for Children Looked After
- The North East Regional Commissioning Unit – a regional initiative for children and young people in specialist and complex needs placements

Information was also provided on a "Celebration of Achievement" event where young people were given certificates of achievement for making personal progress in relation to a wide range of activities eg. doing well in their SAT's, raising money for charity, settling well into a new placement, winning sports competitions etc. The event had also been used to enable the children to do some artwork that was included in the regional arts festival on 22 August at the Sage. The Executive Member for Social Care and Health confirmed that she had been most impressed by the display and the opportunities afforded to these children.

Reference was also made to a future event to be held on 19 September 2005 in the Civic Reception area to celebrate the involvement of Middlesbrough's Children Looked After in the regional arts festival and the regional Kelly Cup competition.

Members were asked to note that the development of regional activities for Children Looked After had acted as a catalyst for activity in many authorities throughout the region. Awareness has also been raised among services such as Culture, Sport and Leisure of their role in enabling local authorities to fulfil their Corporate Parenting responsibilities. New activities have been prompted and work generated.

It was pointed out that although local authorities were not required to participate in regional activities there were clear benefits for children and young people in this action. An opportunity was also provided for sharing knowledge and experience with other services which would assist more effective preparation for the introduction of the Joint Area Reviews. These Reviews will inspect all services, universal and targeted, in a specific geographic area with a key focus on the provision of vulnerable children, including Children Looked After.

Discussion ensued and the Chair referred to the enthusiasm and hard work of the staff involved with these functions. It was noted that the same members of staff were always involved and that by their efforts life was made more enjoyable for Children Looked After. The appreciation and thanks of the Board was extended to those officers for their high level of commitment to these Children Looked After.

RECOMMENDED as follows:

- 1 That the recent developments in regional activity for children and young people looked after be noted.
- 2 That the Executive be advised to encourage active participation by all relevant services in regional activity for looked after children and young people.

CARE PLANNING FOR CHILDREN – RISK ASSESSMENTS AND PACKAGES OF SUPPORT ARISING FROM PROBLEM PARENTAL DRUG USE

The Acting Team Manager from the Neighbourhood Enabling Team (NET) presented a report on the work of the Team that focused on the impact of problem parental drug use upon children.

NET was funded by Neighbourhood Renewal Fund and was set up in March 2003, continuing until 31 March 2006. It was operating in a deprived area of central Middlesbrough and covered 113 streets. The focus of the work was early intervention and prevention, collaborating with partner agencies, to hold cases at a high level of child protection.

The aims of the project were stated as follows:

- To reduce the number of children Looked After
- To reduce the number of children on the Child Protection Register
- To promote healthy living and social inclusion
- To develop close links with community services.

The project had been evaluated over an 18-month period by the University of Durham and a promotional event was planned for 18 September to publicise its findings. During the period of examination, the work had increased with substance misusing parents and where referred problems coincided with drugs.

It was submitted that Middlesbrough had built up a good working practice between Health and Children, Families and Learning in the development and implementation of a multi agency protocol for professionals involved in the care of substance using parents, by early identification of these parents. A further initiative facilitated a Pre-Birth Assessment to aid planning prior to birth.

The Team had seen an increase in referrals under this protocol. This was recognised as happening across Redcar and Cleveland, but the Middlesbrough team received 26% of all of Middlesbrough's cases within 12 months which was significant due to the small geographical area. The nature of these referrals was of chaotic and chronic problematic drug users. Consequently a significant proportion of these resulted in alternative permanency plans via extended family or adoption.

NET had responded to these issues by developing intensive assessment and family support packages for high-risk families.. Due to the fact that the majority of these children would be either unborn or newly born, the assessments of the children and parenting capacity had to be linked to

clear and effective care planning involving 'Twin Tracking' and 'Concurrent Planning' to achieve successful outcomes.

The purpose of the project was to provide some of the more problematic families an opportunity to make and sustain the changes necessary to enable them to care for their children, whilst NET recognised that they could not help all the children and that some of them might need to be "rescued".

The key findings and recommendations of the Hidden Harm Report issued by the Home Office in 2003 were reflected by the work of the Team as follows

- Parental problem drug use causes serious harm to children at any age
- Reducing harm to children from parental drug use should become a main feature of policy and practice
- By working together services could take many practical steps to protect and improve the health and wellbeing of affected children.

Further information on the Hidden Harm Agenda was set out in paragraph 17 of the submitted report.

Financial and legal implications were also outlined and reference was made to the fact that whilst the NET Team was based in Central Middlesbrough covering Gresham Ward some common features could be found across other areas of Middlesbrough where problematic drug use was characteristic. The number of children on the Child Protection Register by Ward reflected this fact. It was therefore pointed out that the report would be of interest to all Members of the Council.

Discussion ensued and the following issues were highlighted:

- In future it should be made clear that substance misuse included alcohol.
- There were problems associated with housing and accommodation
- Work had not commenced on the development of a multi-agency service - there were resource implications and the need to look at the broader picture
- It was hoped that the Executive would express interest in this initiative which was a good example of multi Agency working
- A query was raised at what point the decision was made to remove a child from its parents

RECOMMENDED as follows: -

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Executive be advised to consider the development of a multi agency service incorporating adult services and specialist professionals across Health and Children, Families and Learning to offer a comprehensive assessment, drug treatment and family support package to parents with problematic drug use where there is a likelihood of the baby/children being removed with the aim of enabling parents with significant problematic drug use to make and sustain the changes necessary to care for their children.
3. That the Executive be advised to consider that a model of practise developed by the NET team be applied across different agencies and effectively co-ordinated in line with good practice and established protocols.