

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 12 January 2006.

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

OFFICIALS: J Cooke, D Johnson, C Kendrick, I Nicholls, S Little and A White.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: D Coates (Connexions Service)

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Brian Simpson, Foster Carer.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

Councillor B Thompson declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in all matters relating to the Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust.

Councillor P Thompson declared a personal and non-prejudicial interest in matters relating to the Connexions Company Tees Valley.

****MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 1 December 2005 were approved as a true record.

ACHIEVE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OVERVIEW

The Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning gave a presentation on the Every Child Matters outcome 'Achieve Economic Well-being'.

It was stated that children's economic well-being was directly related to that of their parents and carers, and in the future, their educational achievement and ability to become successful, independent adults. This had particular implications for Children Looked After. National progress made in improving children's economic well-being between 1997 and 2004 was outlined. It was felt that although progress was being made, this had not always been at as fast a pace as had been expected.

National outcomes for all children were listed as follows:

- Engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school
- Be ready for employment
- Live in decent homes and sustainable communities
- Have access to transport and material goods
- Live in households free from low income.

Due to the situation of Children Looked After, it was considered necessary to be creative when working towards these outcomes. It was also noted that the Joint Area Review Inspection criteria included children and young people who were looked after being helped to achieve economic well-being.

Statistics illustrating the economic situation of young people in Middlesbrough were presented. It was indicated that Children Looked After were often particularly disadvantaged because in addition to being Looked After they came from situations where achievement was not high. Numerous bodies had consulted young people regarding achieving economic well-being and a summary of the findings was given. Young people's concerns and aspirations were very similar to those of older people and they were often well aware of wider issues. Transport was identified as an issue that caused young people particular problems.

The present and future economic well-being of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough was then considered in terms of national outcomes as follows:

- Engage in education, employment or training
Statistics illustrating the proportion of Children Looked After who were in employment education or training between 16 and 17 and at 19 were given. The Leaving Care Team and the Education of Children Looked After Team were working with individuals to improve engagement and achievement.
- Ready for employment
It was stated that support was provided by both the Preparation for Independence Programme, which gave both information and developed practical skills, and Connexions Personal Advisors.
- Live in decent homes and sustainable communities
The Board was advised that the majority of Children Looked After lived with foster carers or were placed for adoption although some children lived with family members. The Supported Lodgings Scheme had enabled some young people to continue living with foster carers after they had left care.
- Have access to transport and material goods
Transport was identified as an important issue for foster carers. Children were also unwilling to use transport methods which made them different from others.
- Live in households free from low income
It was stated that foster carers received an allowance that covered each child's basic needs.

In conclusion, a survey of the views of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough conducted in 2003 was outlined, demonstrating their dreams and aspirations.

Discussion ensued and reference was made to the following:

- It was stated that the economic situation of foster carers varied, with some carers being in employment and some not.
- The Preparation for Independence group covered a wide variety of topics, catering for all needs. It was confirmed that a bank account was established for each child and they were encouraged to manage their own finances.
- Unless they were particularly vulnerable, children were encouraged to travel to school independently and most walked. This was sometimes difficult however, especially when children were continuing to attend a particular school whilst other changes took place.
- Transport was recognised as an important issue for young people and information on bus pass schemes in other areas was submitted. It was confirmed work in this area was ongoing and it was suggested that this was included in a recommendation to the Executive.
- Children Looked After were able to undertake work experience at the Council, either through school work experience or by special arrangements designed to ensure that Children Looked After did not miss out because of their circumstances.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive note the information presented and consider implementing a scheme to assist Children Looked After with transport.

CONNEXIONS

The Head of Community Education submitted a report to update the Board on the support offered to Children Looked After in Middlesbrough by the Connexions Service. The Board was advised that the Connexions Company would be disaggregated by April 2007, with some parts being integrated into Children, Families and Learning.

A representative of Connexions was present at the meeting and explained the changes which had occurred over recent months. In October 2005, the Local Management Committee of

Connexions had asked that a comprehensive liaison system be established and the level of resource be examined to ascertain whether it was sufficient to meet the demands of Children Looked After. As a result of this, the resource had been increased from one day a week to two.

The Board was advised that two named Personal Advisors (PAs) had been allocated to work with Children Looked After aged over 16 years. As well as attending case reviews and sharing information during regular meetings, the PAs contributed to the Independent Living Programme run by the Leaving Care Team and met with the young people on a regular basis. It was felt that this built up trust and continuity, which was particularly important for Children Looked After.

A PA played a co-ordinating role ensuring the Connexions Service was aware of all Children Looked After aged under 16 years in Middlesbrough schools and that a PA was involved in developing Personal Education Plans. It was indicated that although Children Looked After aged under 16 were currently seen by PAs within their school, a dedicated Personal Advisor for all children in this group could be appointed.

It was reported that the Leaving Care Team and the Connexions PAs had undertaken joint working in numerous areas. This had included joint training and development, input into programmes and a carer's event, and working closely together at Middlesbrough Independence Network.

Members discussed whether school based or specialist PAs would be most beneficial for Children Looked After aged under 16. It was felt that a specialised PA would ensure support was accessed if necessary and resources were available, however much of this would be a co-ordination function. It was also acknowledged that provision needed to be tailored to individuals. It was suggested that young people should be consulted and a further report be submitted to the Board.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive note the content of the report.

HOUSING ISSUES FOR CARE LEAVERS

In the absence of the relevant officer, the Children's Participation Officer presented a report to advise Members of discussions taking place between the Leaving Care Team and the Strategic Housing Service, and the intention to submit a more detailed report on housing issues for young people leaving care to a subsequent meeting of the Board.

The Board was advised that Erimus Housing had recently introduced a Choice Based Lettings Policy; however, issues had been raised regarding young people's ability to access the new system. This situation affected all young people in Middlesbrough and was being addressed by the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership. It was noted that the Leaving Care Team had appointed an Accommodation Officer who was developing a Supported Lodging Scheme and was exploring options for service users.

Members were informed that a report detailing the issues around Erimus Housing's Choice Based Lettings Policy and other suitable housing options and housing providers would be presented at a subsequent meeting.

In response to a query, it was noted that officers were aware of Supporting People Grants and had made bids using that system.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive note the information relating to housing issues for care leavers.