
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 2 March 2006.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Brady and Mrs B Thompson.

OFFICIALS: D Johnson, S Little, I Nicholls, S Robinson, A White and J Young.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: B Simpson (Foster Carer)
T Tolmie (Young Persons' Representative)
J Smith (Young Person)

PRESENT BY INVITATION: L Gunn (Five Rivers Project Ltd)

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors McIntrye, B Taylor, J Taylor, P Thompson and A E Ward.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

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

****MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 12 January 2006 were approved as a true record.

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION

The Head of Community Education and the Children's Participation Officer gave a joint presentation on the 'Make a Positive Contribution' Every Child Matters Outcome. It was noted that this was the last in a series of presentations on the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

The Board was advised that 'making a positive contribution' enabled young people to develop life skills that helped to equip them to become successful and independent adults who could make a positive contribution to their communities. It was indicated that this outcome linked with the Youth Matters Green Paper published in 2005, which identified four challenges: Engagement, Volunteering, Services for Vulnerable Young People and Guidance. The effect of the desegregation of the Tees Valley Connexions Service by 2007 was also noted.

The Joint Area Review Inspection Criteria for this outcome were outlined. Particular reference was made to ensuring Children Looked After were helped to make a positive contribution. Statistics illustrating young people's views were given, including a national survey on how children and young people should be involved in Council decision making and local data on what teenagers would like to be involved in and how they would like to be consulted. Local data relating to Children Looked After was also given; it was noted that 98% of Children Looked After communicated their views to their Statutory Reviews.

Information was then provided on the National Outcomes that had been identified for all children in Middlesbrough and how these related to Children Looked After in particular.

Engage in decision making and support the community and environment

It was anticipated that an accountable and representative youth parliament would develop during 2006. Young people were also able to participate in School Councils, Youth Groups and specialist projects, such as the Prissick Plaza Skateboard Group. Children Looked After were able to engage in their own assessment, care planning and review processes, as well as staff recruitment, training for staff and carers and discussions of service developments.

Be law abiding – in and out of school

A range of schemes and activities intended to support all young people in being law abiding were outlined. It was stated that where possible, Children Looked After used existing services; however, individual support was also available. Staff and carers underwent training to enable them to identify issues and make best use of the services available.

Develop positive relationships and choose not to bully or discriminate

A range of relevant services was available from the Youth Service, although these were not specifically targeted. This Outcome was also supported by school policies and actions. Children Looked After were encouraged to work through personal feelings with staff and carers and were supported by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service's Children Looked After Team. Staff and carers were trained and supported to tackle bullying and discrimination.

Develop self confidence and deal with changes and challenges

It was considered important that children and young people were able to cope during periods of change and instability. Low expectations were highlighted as an issue, particularly in education. Schools and the Youth Service provided support for young people, as well as organised activities held at various venues in the town designed to improve self-belief. Children Looked After were supported by staff and carers and could access a special youth service session at The Manor Youth Centre.

Develop Enterprising Behaviour

The Connexions service provided guidance to young people and developed their potential and ability alongside schools. Specialist projects were also run by Excellence in Cities. Children Looked After and care leavers also had access to support from specialised Connexions Personal Advisors.

The Chair noted that information had now been given on the all five of the Every Child Matters Outcomes and Middlesbrough's progress towards achieving them for Children Looked After. It was suggested that the Board discuss the action that should be taken by Members at the next meeting.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Executive be advised to note the information provided on 'Making a Positive Contribution'.

SUMMARY REPORT – MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL/FIVE RIVERS PARTNERSHIP

The Service Manager, Children Looked After presented a report to provide Members with a summary of the issues considered by Middlesbrough Council and the Five Rivers Partnership Board during 2005.

Members were advised that Five Rivers (Project) Limited and Middlesbrough Council had been working in Partnership since December 2001 to provide residential care services for children and young people looked after by Middlesbrough Council. The Partnership Board had been established in January 2002 and met on a quarterly basis; its remit was attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

It was reported that the Partnership Board had met on four occasions during 2005 and had received detailed quarterly reports from the Five Rivers Regional Manager. The reports had given details of staffing, progress of young people and the outcomes of inspections, rota visits and Regulation 33 visits.

It was noted that there had been numerous admissions and discharges during the year. These were considered by Operational Managers, who took a range of factors into account. As a result, there had been vacancies during the course of the year.

There had been no significant community issues during 2005. This was considered extremely positive and was attributed to the interaction of staff with neighbours.

Members were asked to note the Council's purchase of two additional properties. As a result of this, a revised contract had been agreed and completed on 31 January 2006. Education for young people within Five Rivers had also been discussed by the Partnership Board and was being closely monitored at separate operational meetings.

The work of the Partnership Board in dealing with concerns acknowledged and it was stated that this was much appreciated.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Partnership Board activity.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL LEAVING CARE SERVICE – ANNUAL REPORT

The Team Manager, Leaving Care Service submitted a report introducing the Leaving Care Service's Annual Report, which was attached at Appendix 1.

Members were informed that the report gave information on the aims and objectives of the Leaving Care Service, the services and facilities provided, staffing and other developments that had taken place in 2005. The report also outlined issues and priorities for 2006.

It was indicated that the Leaving Care Service had had a successful year, having established the Supported Lodging scheme, secured additional support from Connexions and increased the scope for leisure activities. It was anticipated that further progress would be made in assisting care leavers to secure employment and it was hoped that Service Areas would be willing to provide support in relation to work placements.

Board Members were reminded of the corporate parenting responsibilities placed on all Members of the Council and the duty to respond positively to the needs of Children Looked After.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Leaving Care Service.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL LEAVING CARE SERVICE – FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE POLICY AND GUIDANCE

The Team Manager, Leaving Care Service, submitted a report presenting new Policy and Guidance relating to Financial Assistance for Care Leavers. The Policy and Guidance were attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

It was noted that although the Policy and Guidance were intended as a stand alone document, they supported the Leaving Care Team's Performance Plan and the aims of the Leaving Care Service as outlined in the Annual Report. The Policy and Guidance would clarify what financial support was available to care leavers and give additional details of the arrangements for Children Looked After attending university.

It was intended that the existing scheme of financial incentives for Eligible and Relevant young people be extended to support and motivate young people up to 19 years of age in accessing Education, Training and Employment. This was part of an overarching strategy to reduce the number of young people not engaged in Education, Training and Employment and related to a key Performance Indicator where the Council's performance was currently causing concern. It was also anticipated that the Financial Assistance Policy and Guidance would encourage and support young people to go to university in the future.

The financial implications of the additional support outlined in the proposals were indicated. The maximum additional cost possible in 2006/2007 would be £21,100; however, only a small proportion of the eligible young people were in a position to take up the incentives. Members

were advised that additional expenditure would be off-set against a non-recurring cost within the Leaving Care Team's existing budget. As such, there would be no pressure on the existing budget and no additional resources would be required. It was noted that the level of support proposed compared favourably with that offered by other authorities.

Members noted the need to ensure support was provided for young people leaving care and that individuals were made aware of the assistance available. It was considered important that support for care leavers was aspirational.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be advised to approve the Policy and Guidance relating to Financial Assistance for Care Leavers.

****EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

FIVE RIVERS ANNUAL REPORT

The representative from Five Rivers submitted a report relating to The Five Rivers (Project) Ltd Annual Report, which was attached at Appendix 1.

It was noted that Five Rivers and Middlesbrough Council had established a partnership which provided residential places for young people looked after by Middlesbrough Council. The Partnership Board met quarterly to oversee operational activity, service quality and financial issues.

The Annual Report was then outlined and information was given on:

- the current situation at each home;
- young people;
- staffing;
- training;
- feedback from inspections;
- community relations.

Reference was made to the five Every Child Matters outcomes. A presentation was given outlining how Five Rivers achieved each of those outcomes, including the opinions of young people.

Members noted the importance of young people being encouraged, feeling cared for and feeling safe.

RECOMMENDED:

That the Executive be advised to note the information provided.