

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 8 June 2006.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (Chair), Councillors Davison, McPartland and P Thompson.

OFFICIALS: D Johnson, S Little, I Nicholls and C Kendrick.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: B Simpson (Foster Carer)
T Tolmie (Young Person)

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Jones and A E Ward.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

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

****MINUTES**

The Minutes of the informal meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 27 April 2006 were approved as a true record.

CORPORATE PARENTING OVERVIEW

Due to the unavoidable absence of Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning, the Children's Participation Officer gave a presentation providing an overview of corporate parenting and the Corporate Parenting Board.

It was stated that local authorities had a collective responsibility to safeguard Children Looked After and promote their life chances. Local Authorities' responsibilities included ensuring Children Looked After were the primary focus for resources, providing a fully rounded set of support and care services, and supporting children moving into independence. In practice, this meant keeping children safe and healthy, ensuring they lived with people who cared about them, providing them with opportunities to grow and learn and making sure they had decent homes as they became independent.

Members were advised that children were defined as 'looked after' when they had been 'in the care of' the Local Authority, or accommodated by the Local Authority for more than 24 hours. It was noted that children became looked after for a range of reasons, but this was always a last resort as children's 'life chances' and educational achievement were usually higher when they remained in their own families.

Statistics illustrating the numbers and ages of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough were given. It was noted that there had been a steady increase in the number of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough over the last 10 years. Of the 240 children currently looked after, the greatest proportion were aged between 10 and 15 years. The vast majority of Children Looked After were placed with foster carers; however, around half of these placements were with external providers due to the difficulty of recruiting foster carers.

Information was then given on the Corporate Parenting Board. It was confirmed that the Board had been established in 2000 and currently functioned as an Executive Advisory Body. The Board's responsibilities included ensuring that the needs of Children Looked After were met, developing corporate responses to corporate parenting issues, raising awareness and listening to children. Rota visits were also made to local residential homes and the respite care facility.

Members considered it important that corporate parenting was uppermost in the minds of Councillors and senior managers and it was confirmed that there was an ongoing focus on this.

NOTED

REPORT ON ACTIVITY MAY 2005 – APRIL 2006

The Children's Participation Officer presented a report summarising the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board from May 2005 to April 2006. Detailed information regarding the Corporate Parenting Board's activity during this period was attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

It was stated that throughout the year, the Corporate Parenting Board had focused on improving services for Children and Young People Looked After and ensuring those services were provided in the most cost effective way. It was indicated that two young people had attended meetings of the Board during the year.

Particular attention had been given to the five Every Child Matters outcomes and how these related to Children Looked After in Middlesbrough. The key issues for Children Looked After were outlined in Appendix 1 of the report. The Board had also considered reports on a number of topics in order to comply with statutory requirements and had made recommendations to the Executive on a wide range of corporate parenting issues. This had included recommending the Executive approve five new or updated policies.

Concerns had been raised regarding the education of children looked after, the declining recruitment of foster carers and the housing needs of care leavers. It was noted that particular attention had been given to the recognition of the hard work and commitment of the Officers and carers involved in corporate parenting.

It was confirmed that the Every Child Matters outcomes had provided a useful framework for Corporate Parenting Board meetings. They had also proved valuable as common language that allowed many different service areas to become involved.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be advised to note the issues relating to corporate parenting.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS – WHAT NEXT?

The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board gave a presentation on the five Every Child Matters Outcomes which had been considered by the Board over the course of the year. It was confirmed that using the 5 outcomes as a framework had provided a useful focus for the Board and had encouraged and enabled participation by a range of services and organisations.

Information was provided on the issues that had been discussed in relation to each of the 5 Every Child Matters outcomes as follows:

- **Stay Safe**
The Board had considered a range of mechanisms designed to safeguard children looked after, measures taken to ensure stability in placements and, assessments and protocols followed to ensure health and safety. It was noted that feeling safe was particularly important for children looked after.
- **Be Healthy**
Members had noted the need to ensure Children Looked After were healthy. This included physical health, emotional and mental health, and adopting a healthy lifestyle. Particular reference was made to the input Leisure Services had had in this area.
- **Enjoy and Achieve**
The importance of enjoying and achieving in education had been noted, taking both the home and school environments into account.
- **Achieve Economic Wellbeing**
Members had received information on importance of supporting Children Looked After in education, training and employment and of ensuring they had decent housing when they left the Council's care.

- Make a positive contribution
Members had noted the work done to involve Children Looked After in decision making and the importance of developing self-confidence and positive relationships. Reference was made to the support provided by the Youth Service in this area.

NOTED

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair asked Members to consider whether the Board should continue to use the Every Child Matters outcomes as a framework for the work programme. Members were also asked to contribute other pertinent issues for discussion.

Discussion ensued and the following points were raised:

Housing for Care Leavers

- Housing for Children Looked After leaving the Council's care was identified as an important issue, particularly as the Council no longer controlled social housing in the town. It was considered important that all housing providers were included in any discussions regarding this.

Every Child Matters Outcomes

- It was suggested that the Every Child Matters outcomes continue to be used as a focus for meetings. It would be particularly useful to reflect on what had been achieved in relation to each outcome over the past year.

Corporate Parenting Member and Officer Presentations - Attendance

- It was considered important that corporate parenting was uppermost in the minds of Councillors and senior managers. It was suggested that a seminar be organised to ensure Councillors were aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities. Presentations had been given to the Corporate Management Team and some senior managers, and it was suggested that Members of the Corporate Parenting Board attend future presentations, to emphasise the importance of the issue.

Educational Achievement

- The educational achievement of Children Looked After was identified as an issue for consideration, particularly as the Board had previously expressed concerns in this area.

ORDERED that the above topics be approved as the work programme for the Corporate Parenting Board for 2006/2007.