

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 23 November 2006.

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

OFFICIALS: J Cooke, C Kendrick, S Little, I Nicholls, S Robinson and A Smith.

PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER: B Simpson (Foster Carer).

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brady and B Thompson.

****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 October 2006 were approved as a true record.

STAY SAFE AGENDA

The Service Review and Development Manager presented a report to update Members on the key issues affecting Children Looked After under the Stay Safe agenda of the Every Child Matters Framework. This followed on from a presentation given to the Board in September 2005.

It was stated that since September 2005, the Council's Fostering Service had been inspected on two occasions and the Adoption Service on one occasion. An extract from the Fostering Service's Inspection Report in December 2005 was included in the submitted report. It was noted that the feedback had been very positive and the issues raised had been resolved. Both services had been inspected in October 2006 and feedback reports were awaited.

Reference was made to the Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) Regulations 2004, which had strengthened the role of Independent Reviewing Officers. It was indicated that in Middlesbrough, performance indicators relating to looked after reviews were improving, as there had been a push towards reviews being held within timescales and children's wishes and views being provided at the meeting.

Members discussed the issues surrounding private organisations establishing care facilities within Middlesbrough. It was confirmed that whilst homes had to register with the Commission for Social Care Inspection, meet standards and undergo inspections, if the home accommodated four children or less, the local authority did not have to be informed. The local authority became aware of children from outside the area when it was notified of their need for education, health care and other services. Whilst this placed demands on Middlesbrough's resources, it was noted that this was reciprocal, as children from Middlesbrough were also placed out of the area. Clarification was given on the procedures for reporting and dealing with child protection issues.

RECOMMENDED that

1. The Executive be advised to note the information provided relating to the staying safe agenda for children looked after.
2. The Executive be advised to endorse continued work with children looked after to ensure their safety and protection.

ENJOY AND ACHIEVE – CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER BY MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

The Education Children Looked After Team Manager presented a report to give Members an overview of the Enjoy and Achieve element of the Every Child Matters Framework in relation to children looked after. Members were advised that the Care Matters Green Paper, released in October 2006 had identified the education of children in care as particularly important to ensuring their well being.

Members were informed that consultation on education had been carried out with young people during the 2005/2006 academic year. It was reported that young people recognised the importance of receiving a good education, but that being in care made them susceptible to being bullied and that school was an important place for making friends. The young people involved in the consultation had produced a DVD to demonstrate the findings and it was suggested that this could be shown at a subsequent meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Key Stage SATs and GCSE results for 2005/2006 were detailed in the report. It was stated that overall there had been an improvement on the previous year's results. Although educational achievement of children looked after remained low compared to local and national averages, this could be explained in part by the complex needs of the individuals concerned. It was confirmed that each individual's results were shared with their social worker and followed up to ensure they were achieving to the best of their ability. Reference was also made to the proportion of children who had Statements of Special Educational Needs and the impact this had on education provision.

The statutory requirement for each looked after child to have a Personal Educational Plan (PEP) was outlined. Following a recommendation by the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel, PEPs were audited regularly to ensure they were completed and kept up to date. The most recent audit had found that that 71.5% of eligible children looked after currently had PEPs in place and it was stated that all outstanding PEPs would be followed up. Local Performance Indicators relating to PEPs had also been introduced for 2006/2007, requiring that 100% of children looked after had an active PEP and an identified school placement within 20 school days of becoming looked after.

Members were advised that even when they had a good school placement, children looked after often missed a significant amount of education. In response to this, a private company had been contracted to monitor school attendance and notify the Social Worker and the Education Looked After Children Team Manager when children were absent from school. Individual pupil achievement was also monitored via the School Advisory Service each term and any potential areas of concern were followed up. It was noted that Middlesbrough Schools had both designated teachers and governors for children looked after and guidelines had been distributed to each school. These guidelines included a Children Looked After policy; however, it was not yet clear how many schools had adopted this.

Information was then provided on the support that had been received by children looked after from the following sources:

- A Connexions Personal Advisor worked with the Education Children Looked After Team for two days each week and had taken on a Personal Advisor Role to the majority of the children looked after being educated in Middlesbrough. The current focus was on ensuring effective transition plans were in place for all Year 11 pupils.
- Since September 2006, additional support for children looked after had been offered by the Educational Psychology Service. A referral form had been devised and distributed to social workers and 3 referrals had been received to date.
- Middlesbrough was currently taking part in the national 'What Makes the Difference' project, the education element of which had £30,000 attached to support looked after young people in Year 11 upwards succeed. This money had been allocated and there had been a high demand for funding. Individual packages of support had been developed, as well as a homework club for all Year 11 looked after children to access.
- 10 young people from Middlesbrough had participated in a motivational visit to Teesside University, organised in partnership with the university and other local authorities.

- Following a successful bid to the Big Lottery Fund, £7,000 had been received to develop Out of School Learning Activities for children looked after. Following consultation with young people, it had been decided to expand the current provision at Coulby Newham Youth Club on Tuesday evenings. This was to be co-ordinated by the Youth Service.

There was an opportunity for discussion and the following points were raised:

- At Key Stage 1, results for Maths and Science were higher than those for English. It was considered to be particularly important that children were encouraged to read.
- It was felt that information regarding children looked after could be provided by schools directly, rather than through a private company. However, in future it was hoped that a direct link with schools' databases could be established.
- Teesside University's involvement with children looked after was welcomed, as was the support given by the Youth Service.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information provided within the report.

SPORT AND LEISURE INVOLVEMENT WITH CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Children's Participation Officer presented a report to inform Members of the activities delivered to children looked after by the Sport and Leisure Service during 2006.

Members were reminded that representatives from the Sport and Leisure Service had previously presented a report to the Board in April 2005 and following consultation, it had been decided that holiday activities and football coaching exclusively for children looked after could be provided. £3,300 had been secured from a Big Lottery Fund administered by Children Families and Learning for these activities, as well as a local football festival for children looked after.

It was stated that all the events had been successful, particularly the Tees Valley Ignite Football Festival held on 3 September 2006. Reference was also made to the following outcomes:

- 41 children looked after had taken part in the Easter and summer holiday activity programmes
- 34 children looked after from Middlesbrough, Stockton and Sunderland took part in a soccer skills event, largely organised by Middlesbrough Council's Sport and Leisure Team
- Around 20 children took part in multi-sports and football coaching at the Looked After Children Youth Club in Coulby Newham.

It was recognised that the activities had been challenging for young people, particularly when they were asked to work as a team. However, positive feedback had been received from both social workers and a survey was being carried out to assess the children's views on the activities.

Members were informed that the Sport and Leisure Service was keen to continue supporting children looked after by providing recreational use of facilities and developing more structured programmes. Funding would be required for these initiatives and it was stated that attempts would be made to secure this from external sources.

A number of ideas for future development were outlined in the report. Where possible, these would complement the activities provided by the Youth Service and it was noted that regular meetings were now being held between the relevant teams.

Members discussed the information provided and noted that the recent Care Matters Green Paper recommended that children looked after had free access to sport and leisure facilities. It was suggested that the Youth Opportunities Fund could be used to gain further funding where appropriate. Members recognised the work the Sport and Leisure Service had put in to supporting children looked after and indicated that they hoped it would continue.

RECOMMENDED that

1. The Executive be advised to note the information provided regarding the successful programme of activities delivered for children looked after during 2006, which had been possible as a result of external funding
2. The Executive be advised that uptake of further activities would be beneficial and was possible, but would require additional funding to avoid a revenue budget pressure on the Sport and Leisure Service budget

FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL ACTIVITY REPORT - APRIL TO OCTOBER 2006

The Service Manager for Children Looked After presented a report to provide the Board with an overview of the Family Placement Panel's activity during the period 1 April 2006 to 30 September 2006.

Members were informed that the Family Placement Panel had met on 12 occasions during this period and had considered a total of 82 items. A breakdown of the number of items considered in various categories was included in the report. The report also contained data from the preceding 18 months for comparison purposes. It was highlighted that the number of children whose adoption plans had been approved had increased, whilst the number of prospective adopters approved had decreased. In addition to this, the number of Foster Carers approved had decreased and two foster carers had been de-registered during the period.

It was stated that a Foster Care Preparation Group was being established and work would be done in partnership with SureStart, who had access to marketing and publicity resources.

Members acknowledged the hard work of all those involved with the Family Placement Panel.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Family Placement Panel.