

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 8 November 2007.

PRESENT: Councillors B Thompson (Chair), Brunton (Vice Chair), Dryden, Kerr, P Rodgers

OFFICIALS: C Kendrick, S Little, T Moody, S Robinson, G Watson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE BY INVITATION: B Simpson Foster Carer, L Gunn Five Rivers, M McDermott Five Rivers

PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER: H Dryden

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted by Councillors McPartland, Taylor and P Thompson

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

****MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 2 August 2007 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

CARE MATTERS: TIME FOR CHANGE – DELIVERING A FIRST CLASS EDUCATION

The Service Manager Children Looked after and Team Manager Education Looked After presented a report that gave an overview of the key recommendations taken from the Government White Paper.

It was reported that a quality education provided the foundation for transforming the lives of children in care. To improve the education of children in care the government intended to: -

- Improve access to high quality early year's provision – The Government recommended the development of early years PEPs. These were in place in Middlesbrough and most children access early years provision from age 3+ and were supported to access out of school activities.
- Ensure children in care had access to the best school and that they would not move schools – It was noted that this had been a recurring issue. Children would only be moved if it was deemed in their best interest, and particularly not in years 10-11 if at all possible. Schools with strong academic records should not be assumed to be the best for children in care as other aspects of school life were equally important such as having a stable and nurturing environment.
- Put the role of designated teacher on a statutory footing – The role should be undertaken by a member of the school management team who would be given time for training. Issues then could be flagged up such as problems with attendance.
- Personalise the learning of children in care including financial provision for children at risk of not reaching the expected standards – The White Paper proposed £500 per annum for each child at risk of not achieving. It was noted that some neighbouring authorities had this in place at a level of £1000 per child per year.
- Improve support for reducing school absence and exclusion – It was noted that exclusion would only be used as a last resort and that finding the cause for the absence such as bullying would be key. New procedures on exclusion had been introduced with effect from September 2007 that made schools responsible for providing an alternative after the sixth day of exclusion.
- Pilot the role of the 'virtual school heads' – A virtual Head Teacher would be responsible for ensuring that children looked after received appropriate education and for advocating on their behalf. Training would be required, as it would be a challenging role.
- Improve support for carers to support children in their education. One to one support would aid carers.

In discussion, it was emphasised that exclusion from school should always be the last resort, particularly for children looked after. Concern was expressed about support for young people that were in college, i.e. past the age of compulsory education, as they are classed as young adults and information is not routinely shared with carers (or parents). Progression plans were in place that included discussions about information sharing but young people must consent to information about their looked after status being shared with colleges.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to Care Matters: Time for Change – Delivering a First Class Education.

FIVE RIVERS ANNUAL REPORT

Sally Robinson the Service Manager for Children Looked After and Carol Perkins Regional Manager for Five Rivers Project had submitted the Five Rivers Annual Report, which was presented by Lynn Gunn and Mick McDermott, Registered Managers with Five Rivers.

It was noted that Five Rivers and Middlesbrough Council had an established Partnership that provided 11 residential places for young people, in three houses. A Partnership Board met quarterly to oversee the operational activity, service quality and financial aspects of the Partnership.

The service was now monitored and evaluated by Ofsted who took over from CSCI in April 2007. The homes were maintained at a high standard, and the living standards that had been created were warm, friendly, caring and provided structured boundaries for the young people, ensuring they were made to feel safe.

The homes were currently on 100% occupancy, and at present there were eleven young people living in the three homes. In terms of placement stability, three young people had been in place for over two years, two young people for over one year and the remainder for less than a year.

It was noted that all staff had completed Every Child Matters training and there was training planned on Restorative Justice in November 2007. Staff were trained in Health and Safety and legislative requirements that built on existing skills and developed new ones.

Five Rivers used 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' to measure the outcomes for young people and had changed their own documentation to reflect the five Every Child Matters outcomes, which were: -

- Be Healthy;
- Stay Safe;
- Enjoy and Achieve;
- Make a positive Contribution;
- Achieve economic Well Being.

It was noted that one young person had been nominated for an award for 'Achievement in Adversity' and had progressed to the final 4 people, from 1500 nominations.

In discussion, it was noted that there had been changes in some of the homes, which could be unsettling. For example, if one young person did not have an educational placement, this impacted on the other young people with whom they live. It was clarified that links had been made with the Marton Avenue Residents Association and that this had been so successful that similar arrangements were being developed with other relevant residents associations.

The Chair of the board commended the hard work of the staff concerned and confirmed her willingness to meet with local residents if appropriate.

A further presentation, detailing the views of young people, would be made at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information regarding the Five Rivers Annual Report.

ENJOY AND ACHIEVE CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER BY MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

The Team Manager for Education of Children Looked After presented a report, which informed members of the progress of Middlesbrough Children Looked After, with specific reference to the performance indicators linked to educational attainment as reported to the Department for Children, Schools and Families. A broader analysis from the last 12 months would be presented to the Board at a future meeting.

It was noted that Children in care of the local authority had a right to expect the universal ambitions attainable for every child and young person, whatever their background and circumstances.

To achieve the outcomes for children in care, local authorities as their Corporate Parents should demonstrate the strongest commitment to helping every child they look after achieve to their full potential. That included their aspirations to achieve in further and higher education.

It was noted that alongside the duty placed on local authorities under Section 52 of the Children Act 2004, to promote the educational achievement of children in care the Government had made a good education for every child in care a priority.

Analysis of Key Stage 1 SATs results academic year 2006-07 were presented to the Board.

5 Middlesbrough Children Looked After (CLA) were eligible to be included in the DCSF returns at Key Stage 1, each child having been looked after continuously for a period of 12 months plus. 4 of the children were educated in Middlesbrough schools, one was educated out of area. Confirmation of the SATs results for the child educated out of authority were still being awaited. Three of the five children had achieved the national attainment levels at Key Stage 1.

Analysis was reported of Key Stage 2 SATs results academic year 2006-07.

17 Middlesbrough Children Looked After (CLA) were eligible to be included in the DCSF returns at Key Stage 2. 5 of these children were educated in Middlesbrough schools, twelve were educated out of area. Overall analysis of CLA who achieved the national attainment at KS2 was reported to the Board. There had been a clear improvement in performance at Key Stage 2 compared with the previous year, however performance was below the Middlesbrough average for all subjects.

Analysis of Key Stage 3 SATs results for the academic year 2006-07 was reported to the Board.

9 Middlesbrough Children Looked After (CLA) were eligible to be included in the DCSF returns at Key Stage 3. 2 were educated out of area, with 1 living in Scotland where they did not sit Key Stage 3 or equivalent tests. Performance had been poor and thus had been picked up by the School Improvement Service for action. Preventative work would be required to enable the young people to succeed at Key Stage 4 (GCSE/GNVQ).

GCSE (or GNVQ equivalent) results were reported to the Board.

23 Middlesbrough Children Looked After (CLA) were eligible to be included in the DCSF returns at Key Stage 4. 9 of these young people were educated out of area. Considerable support had been put into place and this had prevented the permanent exclusion of 6 young people. In addition, all young people in year 11 had progress plans in place and support from Connexions.

The number of CLA with a Statement of Special Education Needs was reported to the Board. Some under achievement could be explained by the particular complex needs of the young people, with 31.8% being identified as having a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN), compared to approx. 3% of all children. This showed an increase of 8.5% on the 2005-06 reporting data. Altogether, 59.7% of the cohort were under some element of the SEN code of practice.

27 young people had been identified as 'missing 25 days plus education' which equated to 17.5%, this figure showed an increase of 2.0% on 2005-06 data, with the number of young people who received a permanent exclusion rising from 3 to 5.

Despite some improvements in outcomes, the educational attainment of children in care remained low, with increasing numbers of young people disengaging from the educational system particularly at Key Stage 4.

The gap between those in care and other children would continue to widen unless all the practitioners involved, including schools, work more cohesively and effectively to overcome the barriers that children in care faced.

It was noted that the 'Care Matters: Time for Change' agenda went some way to addressing the complex issues which needed to be faced, however legislation alone would have little impact without the commitment of all the individuals involved in the children's lives.

In discussion, it was noted that academic achievement had been low but that many of the young people had achieved in other areas and acknowledgement of this was needed.

It was reported that the results at years 10 and 11 had been low despite the continued effort of the Team Manager Education of Children Looked After. It was explained that there were heightened difficulties in this age group because many of the young people had become too far behind, and that problems needed to be dealt with at a younger age.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information on the Enjoy & Achieve outcome for children looked after by Middlesbrough Council.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STATISTICAL UPDATE

The ICS/ISA Project Manager presented a report to provide the Board with published statistical information regarding Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council. The provision of services to children looked after was a core statutory function and corporate responsibility. This was reflected in the range of local government targets and performance indicators relating to children looked after.

Government guidance for elected Members on corporate parenting identified the need for Members to receive regular statistical updates on the numbers of children being looked after by the authority.

At 31 March 2007 there were 242 children looked after by Middlesbrough Council. That compared with 240 children looked after at 31 March 2006, representing a 0.8 % increase. It was noted that the number of children looked after as a proportion of the population was still above the national average of 54/10,000 0-17 year olds, Middlesbrough was 74/10,000.

As at 31st March 2007 the children were placed as follows: -

- | | |
|--|----------|
| • with foster carers | 188(78%) |
| • placed for adoption | 5(2%) |
| • in Middlesbrough Children's Homes | 12(5%) |
| • placed home on trial, or with extended family members | 24(10%) |
| • in specialist residential placements outside of the area | 12(5%) |
| • independent living/lodgings/other | 1(0.4%) |

Statistical information was presented to the Board, which were available in the Report from the following areas: -

- children looked after as at 31 March 2007;
- CLA per 10,000<18 population;
- CLA by age 31 March 2005 to 2007;
- ethnic origin of CLA other than white as at March 2005 to 2007;

- PAF A1 % of children with 3 or more placements;
- number of children who were adopted;
- D78: % Children who were continuously looked after for 2.5 years plus and had been in their current placement for 2 years plus or placed for adoption;
- % leaving care with at least 1 GCSE at grade A-G, or GNVQ
- health of CLA
- % CLA who missed 25 or more days schooling;
- % of young people aged 17 engaged in education, training, or employment at the age of 19 years;
- CLA aged 10 and above final warnings and convictions.

In discussion, it was reported that as a result of the decline in the number of NHS dentists, some issues had arisen in relation to paying for private dental care. This applied particularly, but not exclusively, to children placed out of the local area. A further report on this issue would be presented to the Board.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the statistical information relating to children looked after.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION GROUP

The Children's Participation Officer presented a report informing the Board on the strategic planning processes in place with regard to children looked after.

It was reported that overall responsibility for strategic planning in Middlesbrough rested with the Middlesbrough Partnership, which was developed in its current form in 2002. The partnership operated through a board that included senior representatives of key agencies from the public and private sectors. In addition there were places for representatives of the voluntary and community sectors and local residents.

The Middlesbrough Partnership had six themes (that formed the basis of the Community Strategy), one of which was Supporting Children and Learning. Within that theme there were two Action Groups, the Middlesbrough Learning Partnership and the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, which formed the basis for the development of the Children's Trust. The Children's Trust was made up of the key agencies placed under a 'duty to co-operate' by the Children, which included the Local Authority, Police, Probation, Youth Offending Service, Strategic Health Authority and Primary Care Trust.

It was noted that within Middlesbrough, the Children's Trust had adopted the Every Child Matters outcomes as the framework for the planning and commissioning of services. There were therefore five 'themed' groups, each lead by one of the partner agencies. Alongside the themed groups there were two additional groups, one that focuses on children looked after.

The Children Looked After Planning & Implementation Group (CLAG) was established many years ago as one of a number of planning sub-groups linked to the (then) Joint Commissioning Group. CLAG included representatives from a wide range of agencies whose services impacted upon the lives of children looked after.

The group's action plan was structured around the Every Child Matters outcomes and related directly to key local and national performance indicators and targets. Performance issues were identified and appropriate actions put in place. The key tasks from the following areas were identified within the current action plan, of which full details were available in the Report: -

- health;
- stay safe;
- enjoy and achieve;
- make a positive contribution;
- achieve economic well-being.

It was noted that the majority of the actions identified were completed or well underway although some issues, particularly in relation to major service developments, would require longer term

solutions. The existence of the strategic planning group would also assist in preparations for the forthcoming Joint Area Review.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the work undertaken to ensure effective partnership working and strategic planning in relation to services for children looked after.

EVERY CHILD MATTERS: STAY SAFE AGENDA

The Service Manager Children Looked After presented a report, which updated the Board on the key issues affecting children looked after under the Every Child Matters stay safe agenda as follows:-

Children and young people were: -

- safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation;
- safe from accidental injury and death;
- safe from bullying and discrimination;
- safe from crime and anti social behaviour in and out of school;
- had security, stability and were cared for.

It was noted that it was the duty of the Council as corporate parents to ensure that children looked after by Middlesbrough Council were safe, well cared for and protected.

Services for children in public care were highly regulated. Ofsted inspects services for children and young people and registers and regulates all children's homes, foster care and adoption services. The Council's adoption service was inspected on a three-yearly basis. At the last inspection in October 2006 the service was judged as good.

The Council's fostering service was inspected on an annual basis. The most recent inspections took place in October 2007 and the report was awaited but verbal feedback suggested the authority had maintained its grading of good. If the judgement was maintained the Council would move to a three-yearly cycle of fostering service inspections.

Following each inspection an action plan was developed, implemented and monitored to address any statutory and good practice recommendations arising from the inspection process. The report from the fostering inspection would be shared with the Board once it became available.

It was noted that where Middlesbrough Council commissioned placements for children looked after, Ofsted inspection reports were requested to ensure the safety of the provider and quality and standards of services provided. In the case of Five Rivers who were commissioned to provide residential child care services to the Council, regulation 33 reports on all the homes were received by the Head of Service and Service Manager on a monthly basis. The reports were also a standing agenda item on the Partnership Board, with details of the outcome of Ofsted inspections of the homes.

It was reported that Middlesbrough Council continued to contract with National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and Spurgeons Independent Visitors Scheme to provide additional services to children looked after. The work of NYAS had been reported to the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board (20/9/07).

The Independent Visitors scheme was available to children who had very little or no contact with their birth family. This was a befriending service and provided children with a trusted adult with whom they can spend time and share any issues they may wish outside of the professional arena. The White Paper, Care Matters: Time for Change outlined how independent visitors could potentially benefit a much wider range of children and young people, helping to support placement stability, and build constructive relationships and interests, encouraging children and young peoples ambitions and aspirations. The White Paper outlined the Governments intention to: -

- legislate to extend the opportunity to have an Independent Visitor to all children in care where they would benefit significantly from such a relationship and;

- revitalise the Independent Visitor Scheme by practically working with local authorities, in particular with voluntary and private sector organisations to increase the pool of volunteers who wish to become independent visitors.

It was noted that the Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) Regulations 2004 required each responsible authority to appoint an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). The IRO aims were recently strengthened to improve safeguards for children by ensuring effective care planning and implementation and monitoring outcomes. IROs could also ensure the child's access to advocacy services and the complaints procedure. The White Paper considered at length the future role of the IRO and whether it would be appropriate to externalise the service. At this stage, the Government was not seeking to follow this more radical course of action, but seek, in the immediate future, to significantly strengthen the role of the IRO so that each IRO was expected to fulfil their role with credibility and independence. The White Paper outlined the following actions to strengthen the role: -

- require each local authority to appoint a named IRO for each child;
- require IROs to spend time individually with each child prior to any review;
- strengthen existing guidance by defining a 'significant event' when a review must take place before any proposed change can occur;
- update guidance so that a referral by the IRO to CAF/CASS is no longer seen as a last resort;
- amend guidance to specify optimum caseloads for IROs.

Placement stability and security continued to form a key part of the Performance Indicator framework. A table of data in the report set out key indicators in relation to placement stability and the performance over the past 3 years.

It was noted that placement stability remained steady with a significant improvement in long term stability. With regard to children adopted during the year, the figure was low in 2006/07 but it was noted that this related to when children were placed for adoption. In 2006/07 18 children were placed for adoption. It was anticipated that they would be adopted in 2007/08 and the indicator would improve significantly in the year as a result.

Placement stability remained a key focus of the work of the looked after system. Current developments underway included: -

- review of foster care payments to ensure recruitment and retention of carers;
- plans to develop a mechanism to support children on the edge of care and placement at risk of breaking down;
- implementation of proposals in the White Paper around placement choice and commissioning arrangements.

It was noted that to ensure that children looked after were safe and protected, South Tees Local Safeguarding Children's Board has recently launched the revised Child Protection Procedures. In addition to this, the Council had a number of policies, procedures and processes for children looked after to address risk factors associated with their own behaviour or that of others, which include: -

- thresholds and procedures for child protection;
- procedures for allegations against staff and carers;
- whistleblowing policy;
- guidance on managing bullying and discrimination in the Foster Cares Handbook;
- health and safety regulations and assessments;
- missing from Placement Procedures (to be revised 2007/08);
- Information Sharing and Joint Working Protocol with the Youth Offending Service (revised May 2007);
- Bullying policies and procedures for residential care (A bullying policy for children looked after was currently in development).

Children were seen regularly by their social workers and the looked after service was currently in the process of undertaking an audit in relation to visiting frequency for children looked after. As

part of this piece of work a survey was being carried out with children and young people in care, the results of which would inform future policy and service planning.

Sharing of information across organisation and professional boundaries was a key element of ensuring the safety of children and young people and was an identified priority of the Children and Young People's Plan and Stay Safe theme group of the Children's Trust. Within Family Services the new Integrated Children System (ICS) database was in the process of being implemented. That facilitated the collection and monitoring of case information underpinned by I.T. systems and was part of the 'e-social care' record for children and young people. The introduction of the ICS framework was part of a range of information sharing measures being implemented by central government in order to reduce the risks surrounding the protection and safeguarding of children and young people. Within the looked after service area records were currently being updated retrospectively to ensure that the system was fully operational for records of looked after children.

It was noted that the protection and safety of children looked after remained a high focus for the looked after service and the independent reviewing unit. The children remained priority and developments within the services were implemented with their needs and best interests in mind.

In the resulting discussion it was reported that there had been concern expressed by foster carers in relation to proposed revisions to the banded payment scheme. Alternative mechanisms were being considered and further consultation would take place in December. The priority would be to recruit and retain foster carers whom were a precious resource and whose contribution was greatly appreciated.

RECOMMENDED as follows: -

- 1) That the Executive be advised to note the information relating to keeping children looked after safe.
- 2) That the Executive be advised to endorse the continued work of Middlesbrough Council with children looked after ensuring their safety and protection.