

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 31 January 2008

PRESENT: Councillors Brunton, Dryden, Kerr, P Thompson

OFFICIALS: S King, C Kendrick, S Little, T Moody, J Young, S Robinson

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE BY INVITATION:

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors B Thompson, McPartland

****DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

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

****MINUTES**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 13th December 2007 were submitted and approved as a correct record

CARE MATTERS: TIME FOR CHANGE – PRESENTATION ON ‘TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD’

The Leaving Care Service Team Manager presented a report on the key proposals in the Care Matters White Paper regarding transition to adulthood for young people in care and the situation in Middlesbrough with regard to these proposals.

In Care Matters, the government aimed to encourage an approach that continued to support care leavers as long as they need it and to regard 'leaving care' as a gradual process not an event. Middlesbrough Council had been committed to that approach for some time.

The White Paper proposed that young people should be enabled to remain with their foster carer or in their residential home post 18 and the government would legislate to amend regulations if necessary. Middlesbrough had achieved 12 extended foster care placements since the supported lodging scheme was introduced. However, it was noted that placements with Independent Fostering Agencies were expensive.

It was proposed that as good corporate parents, local authorities should use their contacts to help children into work. Local authorities, their partner agencies and all public sector organisations should offer training or apprenticeships to young people in care. The Leaving Care Service had developed the Employability Scheme as part of the national 'What Makes the Difference' project. There had been commitment from a range of departments and agencies, however, there were capacity issues in supporting the work. A bid was to be made to the National Lottery to fund a member of staff to undertake the work. Opportunities to access voluntary work had been supported by developing good links with voluntary organisations.

The transition of young people from school to further education should be supported by good information exchange. It was proposed to improve the sharing of data on children in care, via the Managing Information Across Partners project so that participation, progression and attainment could be tracked. In Middlesbrough a draft partnership agreement and support plan had been developed with Middlesbrough College to be implemented from September 2008. Links were also being developed with Teesside University. It was stressed that information could be shared only with the consent of the young person concerned.

A national minimum bursary of £2,000 would be introduced for all young people in care who went onto higher education. The Corporate Parenting Board had previously approved the Leaving Care Service Financial Assistance Policy (2/3/06) which makes a clear commitment to supporting young people who go on to higher education. At present, only one young person was accessing higher education.

Further choice was required regarding supported accommodation. The Government intended to commission good practice guidance on housing and children's services working together to meet the needs of young people in care. In Middlesbrough, the Leaving Care Service had worked with Erimus Housing to develop a protocol on roles and responsibilities and support plans.

It was noted that young people leaving care, like all young adults needed to be able to access appropriate health services. The 'You're Welcome' quality criteria had been established, setting out a minimum standard for health care settings to ensure they were young person friendly. One of the minimum standards was that Primary Care Trusts should have in place local strategies to promote access by marginal groups including care leavers. In Middlesbrough, the co-location of the Children Looked After Nurse with the Leaving Care Service had been very positive for young people. There were some problems in relation to the transitions from CAMHS to Adult mental health services.

In discussion, the following points were raised:

- The Leaving Care Service had developed a 'Preparation for Independence' guide for young people.
- There was no national package of support for young people going into higher education but some universities were developing their own support systems. A question was raised about what impact would informing the university have on the young person from care. They would be known by the university, which would entitle them to further help and support, and could help with their entrance. It was noted that the decision to inform the higher education establishment had to be the choice of the young person.
- A Member expressed concern that young people leaving care were put into Bed and Breakfasts, as they were dangerous places for vulnerable young people, and asked whether use was made of Community Campus. It was explained that the Council had a service level agreement with Community Campus but that moving on was an issue because there was a shortage of places to move to.
- A question was posed as to how often Night Stop was used. It was noted that the service was rarely used, and then for only 1-2 nights at a time.
- A question was posed about the relationships between the Leaving Care Service, Job Centre Plus and New Deal. It was explained that good links had been developed and some arrangements were in place with New Deal linked to the Employability Scheme but there were no formal agreements with Job Centre Plus.

It was asked whether regeneration initiatives had impacted on the availability of accommodation. The lack of available properties had been a problem, as had the age limit on allocations to high rise buildings.

- It was noted that most care leavers had been allocated accommodation in the Hemlington area. Work was underway with the Tees Valley Housing Group to make previously 'hard to let' properties on Marton Road available to care leavers. The Leaving Care Service also advocated young people living near to their former foster carers. Placing young people in hostel accommodation would be an absolute last resort. The primary need was for good quality supported housing.
- A question was asked about the use of 'Key Skills' projects whereby young people are trained to undertake renovation of properties that can then be let to young people. It was noted that accommodation was a problem for all young people as house prices had risen dramatically which limited the scope for buying and improving houses.
- Members raised the possibility of the Council stimulating partner agencies to develop appropriate schemes and the possibility of short-term options being available in regeneration areas. It was noted that there is a need to look at longer-term demand for accommodation suitable for young people with complex needs and the possibilities of adopting an innovative

approach. The Council's Housing Strategy was being revised and there was a focus on youth housing.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to:

- a). note the information relating to Transition to Adulthood.
- b). consider the issues relating to the provision of suitable housing for young people leaving care in greater detail.

LEAVING CARE SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2007

The Leaving Care Service Team Manager presented an annual report of Middlesbrough Council's Leaving Care Service 2007. The report gave information on the aims and objectives of the Leaving Care Service, the service and facilities provided, the staffing and developments and issues for 2008.

It was noted that the Pathway's Team under the duties of the Children Leaving Care Act 2000 would promote young people remaining in care until they were prepared and ready to leave and where possible beyond the age of 18. Once young people had left care, the service would actively support young people to lead positive lives as independent citizens.

The services provided included practical, financial and emotional support. Meeting the needs of young people in relation to emotional well-being had been identified as an area of concern and a group work package had been developed to address the issue. Difficulties often arose at times of transition, particularly when young people left school, and one aim of the work was to support and sustain placement stability. It was noted that many care leavers did not want 'therapy'.

It was noted that young people had been offered several opportunities for involvement in service developments. These had included involvement in staff selection interviews, the revision of health assessment processes, a peer research programme, and a national conference on the Care Matters White Paper.

One significant change was that the team had taken on responsibility for providing services to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) with effect from 1st January 2008. It was noted that there were currently 14 cases held by the designated UASC social worker and that there had been two referrals for age assessments since the beginning of January. Training on carrying out age assessments was to be provided by the Refugee Council.

The Vice-Chair acknowledged the hard work and commitment of the Leaving Care Service.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Leaving Care Service Annual Report for 2007.

CONNEXIONS SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Children's Participation Officer presented an update to the Board on the support provided by the Connexions Service to children looked after by the Local Authority.

Members were made aware that the Connexions Service made a dedicated provision for children looked after in Middlesbrough that directly contributed to the 'Achieve Economic Well Being' outcome of Every Child Matters.

The Connexions Service aimed to support children looked after in their progression into adult life. A successful outcome was that children looked after should be engaged in either employment or education until age 19 and economically independent by age 21.

The percentage of young people in care at the age of 17 and who were in education, training or employment at age 19 was calculated as a ratio of all young people in the cohort. The proportion had risen between 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 from 0.43 to 0.65. This indicated that whilst the proportion was generally improving, there were still insufficient children looked after engaged in training or employment at age 19 in Middlesbrough.

Officers considered that this measure was needed to form the basis of improving the outputs for children looked after with respect to the Connexions Service measuring its effectiveness in the 'Achieve Economic Well Being' outcome.

It was noted that Connexions had achieved 100% career progression plans in place for children looked after.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the support provided by Connexions to children looked after.

SUMMARY OF REGULATION 33 REPORTS MARCH – SEPTEMBER 2007

The Service Manager for Children Looked After presented a report to inform the Board of the outcomes of Regulation 33 visits relating to Five Rivers and Gleneagles Resource Centre, and to provide an update on the situation regarding Rota Visits.

The Care Standards Act 2000 provided the legislative framework for Rota Visits and Regulation 33 visits. The Act stipulated that:

- The home shall be visited by someone independent of the direct management of the home
- Visits shall be a minimum monthly and can be unannounced
- The person undertaking the visit must interview any child accommodated in the home and any staff present to form an opinion on the standard of care
- Inspect the premises; the daily log of events and any record of complaint
- Complete a written report

Five Rivers as the providers of residential childcare had commissioned two independent Social Workers to undertake the Regulation 33 inspections on a monthly basis.

Identified actions were progressed by the Manager and Regional Manager within Five Rivers. The outcomes of the reports were also discussed at the Middlesbrough Council/Five Rivers Partnership Board and operations meeting.

The report contained detailed actions and 'good practice' recommendations as appropriate. Overall the reports from April 2007 to September 2007 had been positive and reflected a high standard of care.

A sample of the recommendations/comments from Holly Lodge, Rosecroft, Firtree and Gleneagles was presented to the Board.

It was noted that the views of young people were generally very positive in relation to Five Rivers and that there had been very positive feedback from parents on the services provided at Gleneagles.

It was reported that following a review of the system for rota visits, Members had been invited to express an interest in undertaking rota visits. Seven elected Members had expressed an interest and had been asked to complete the Criminal Records Bureau process that was necessary before training would be provided and visits could be carried out. It was noted that there had been a delay in the CRB forms being distributed.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to Regulation 33 reports and the update on rota visits.

UPDATE REPORT ON CHILDREN MISSING FROM PLACEMENT

EXCLUSION - PRESS - PUBLIC

ORDERED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item on the grounds that, if present, there could be disclosure to them of exempt information falling within paragraph 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

The Service Manager for Children Looked After presented a report that provided the Board with information relating to children looked after who have been missing from placement between April and September 2007.

In February 2000 Middlesbrough Council and Cleveland Police agreed a joint protocol for 'Responding to Middlesbrough Children who are Missing from Placement'. The protocol outlined definitions and provided a clear procedure for the process of risk assessment and reporting a child missing from placement to the police.

A Member expressed their view that the high level of auditing of young people when they were missing from care for short periods seemed excessive. It was noted that unexplained absences must be recorded in order to safeguard very vulnerable young people who might be targeted, as highlighted by a case in Bradford.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to children missing from placement and to endorse the actions taken by officers to develop and implement the Joint Protocol.