

## **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**6<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2008**

<b>SURVEY ON VISITS AND INVOLVEMENT</b>
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### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with the outcome of a survey in which children and young people were asked their views on visits by social workers and involvement in decision-making processes.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. In June 2000, as a response to the Waterhouse recommendations, a practice guidance document was issued to all social workers and managers giving the standards to be followed when visiting children looked after. The main requirement of these is for weekly visits during the first 4 weeks of care and a minimum of monthly visits after that. There are also requirements in relation to:
  - talking to the child alone
  - making unannounced visits
  - seeing the child's bedroom from time to time
  - visiting at a time when all members of the household are present
3. In March 2005, the procedures were amended to allow for a reduced, minimum visiting frequency to children and young people who have a plan for permanence. This means that, where appropriate, children and young people with social workers from the Looked After Children Team or the Pathways Team could be visited every 8 weeks and, in exceptional circumstances, visits could be extended to once every

12 weeks. When this change was implemented, it was agreed that there would be a follow up of its effects, including consultation with children and young people.

4. In 2007, the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change', included the proposal that all local authorities should establish a 'Children in Care Council' and develop a 'Pledge' setting out the services and support that children can expect to receive.
5. As previously reported to the Corporate Parenting Board (20<sup>th</sup> September 2007), the Council has a number of mechanisms in place to enable children and young people to get involved in decision-making processes. The overall aim is to help children and young people to get involved in all aspects of decision-making, including decisions about their own life; decisions about planning and improving services; and decisions about policies.
6. In October 2007, a survey was developed to seek the views of children and young people in relation to visits by social workers and involvement in decision-making processes. The survey was distributed in October to 195 children and young people aged between 5 and 18.
7. In addition to the children and young people's survey, a separate file audit was carried out by managers between April and November 2007. Any issues arising from this process were dealt with via existing management processes.
8. It should be noted that, as with any survey, participants respond according to their feelings and recollections at the time of completing the survey.

## FINDINGS

### Response

9. 33 survey forms were returned but some children did not complete all of the questions so the numbers do not always match. 14 children and young people chose not to identify themselves. 19 children and young people did so and the age breakdown on those children was:

Age 7	1	Age 8	2	Age 10	4
Age 11	2	Age 12	2	Age 13	3
Age 15	2	Age 16	2	Age 17	1

### Visits by Social Workers

10. 25 out of 33 respondents said that their social worker visited between every 2 weeks and every 2 months, of whom 15 said they were visited monthly. 31 respondents commented on what they thought of their social workers visits and of those, 13 were positive (e.g. 'I like them'), 14 were neutral (e.g. 'They are ok.') and 4 were negative (e.g. 'poo').
11. 6 respondents said that their social worker always sees them on their own and 19 that this happens 'sometimes'. 7 said they never see their social worker on their own.

12. 12 respondents said that their social worker sometimes asks to see their bedroom but 19 said this never happens.

### **Statutory Reviews**

13. 18 respondents said that their social worker always visits them before their review and 8 said this sometimes happens. Only 4 said that this never happens. 16 respondents always attend their reviews and 9 sometimes do so. 6 never attend.
14. When asked if anything would make it easier for them to attend,
  - 8 said 'no' (or variations, e.g. no thank you)
  - 2 said they did not want to attend
  - 1 said, "If it was at my school"
  - 1 said, "Not in school time"
  - 1 said, "Not really because you always get told what has been said"
15. 16 respondents said that their social worker always helped them to have their say in their review; 8 said this sometimes happened and 6 said their social worker never did this.
16. 25 respondents said their foster carer helped them to have their say and 6 mentioned parents or other family members; 2 mentioned the Reviewing Officer.

### **Complaints and Advocacy**

17. 12 respondents said their social worker often reminded them that they could complain, 10 said this happened 'sometimes' and 9 said 'never'. 11 were often reminded about access to advocacy; 4 sometimes reminded and 15 said they were never reminded.
18. 26 respondents chose not to detach and keep the information provided on what to do if they are unhappy about services. This included information on advocacy and on the complaints process.

### **Children in Care Council and the Local Authority Pledge**

19. In addition to questions about visits from social workers, questions about a children in care council and a local authority pledge were included on the survey form. 7 respondents were interested in being involved in both the pledge and the council. They are aged between 8 and 17. 4 live in Middlesbrough, 1 in Hartlepool, 1 in Stockport and 1 in Orpington (Kent). 1 respondent, aged 12 and living in Middlesbrough, was interested in being involved only in the council. 4 respondents were interested in being involved only in developing the pledge. They are aged between 7 and 12. 2 live in Billingham, 1 in North Yorkshire and 1 in Nottingham.

### **Conclusions**

20. The return rate of 17% is within normal limits (15-20%) for a small-scale survey of less than 200 participants. Overall, the feedback in relation to visits by social workers and involvement in decision-making seems reasonably positive. In relation to complaints and advocacy, it is worth noting that 26 of the 33 respondents did not feel it was necessary to keep the information provided.

## **FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS**

21. There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. The systems and mechanisms that were the subject of the survey enable the Council to fulfil some of its legal obligations to involve children and young people in decision-making. As children looked after come from across the whole of Middlesbrough, this report will be of interest to all Members.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

22. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advises the Executive to note the findings of the survey on visits by social workers and involvement in decision-making.

## **REASON**

23. To ensure that the Members are aware of the views of children and young people looked after by the local authority with respect to this important aspect of their lives.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- Report to Corporate Parenting Board on Involving Children and Young People in Decision-making, September 20<sup>th</sup> 2007
- Care Matters: Time for Change, DfES, 2007

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