

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 17 April 2008.

PRESENT: Councillors B Thompson (Chair), J McPartland, and P Rodgers

OFFICIALS: S Little, T Moody, S King

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE BY INVITATION: S Kershaw Pathways, J Young

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted by Councillors J Brunton, S Carter, Kerr and P Thompson

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

It was noted that some new members had been appointed to the board for the forthcoming year.

The Service Manager for Children would be leaving the authority and thanks were given for her hard work and the contribution that she had made over many years.

****MINUTES**

It was noted that the foster carer recruitment campaign launch had been a success, the personalities were a good choice and the event was well organised. There had been an initial wave of interest in foster caring.

WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE PEER RESEARCH FINDINGS

Jane Young, Team Manager for Pathways Team informed the Board of the feedback that the Pathways Team received on its contribution to the 'What Makes the Difference' (WMTD) Peer Research Project, gave a summary of the findings of the peer research and showed the Board the associated DVD.

The Project ended in March 2008 and worked across four themes – Preparation and Planning, Empowerment, Education, Training and Employment Opportunity. The overall aim of the project was to ask 250 young people from across the country 'what made the difference?' and 'What could have made the difference?' for them while they were in, and leaving care. The key messages were the importance of having stability of placement and living with people who care about you.

In discussion, the issue of the 'Pledge' that has been proposed in the Care Matters White Paper was raised. Members were keen to ensure that the whole Council takes ownership of the pledge and that it is seen as a real promise between the Council and individual children looked after. The need to be inclusive was emphasised, as was the need to reflect individual needs, as set out within care plans.

Members congratulated the officers and young people who had been involved in the project on their hard work.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be advised to:

- a. note the positive feedback received by care leavers from Middlesbrough, and the Pathway Team, for their contribution to the 'What Makes the Difference' Peer Research Project'.
- b. note the findings of the research project.

FIVE RIVERS 6 MONTH REPORT

The Service Manager for Children Looked After presented a report to provide the Board with an update on the Five Rivers Project, who manage and operate children's residential provision within Middlesbrough.

The report provided an update on the current situation and included information on the young, staffing, training, inspections and community relations.

The three homes in Middlesbrough; Holly Lodge, Rosecroft and FirTree continued on full occupancy apart from short interim periods awaiting referrals or during pre-placement planning and preparation (usually over a two-week period).

With 100% occupancy, there were currently eleven young people living in the three homes.

Education had improved but there were still young people for whom it was difficult to engage in any form of education, however continued partnership work was ongoing supporting young people's educational placements.

Five Rivers currently had 30 permanent staff in Middlesbrough. The recruitment and training process had been developed and pay scales had been evaluated to try and attract people into a career in childcare.

All staff had either completed their NVQ or were working towards it and the main aim of the year would be to support staff in completing NVQs at levels 3 and 4. All staff had now completed training on Every Child Matters and Restorative Justice. In March all staff either revisited or completed a Managing Challenging Behaviour course to ensure they had a valid certificate.

All three homes now had Ofsted Inspections and scored as providing a 'good' service. All managers and their teams were looking to improve their service to the target score of 'excellent' at their next inspection.

The regulation 33 visits continued to be positive with no significant issues being raised, and the reports now cover Every Child Matters. Overall standards of care were felt to be very good and any minor issues that have arisen had been dealt with within required time scales.

In discussion, it was noted that Five Rivers offered a permanent placement for some young people. However, lack of an educational placement can have an adverse impact on the success of placements. It was also noted that Cllr J Rostron had been identified to act as the Community Liaison person for Holly Lodge.

RECOMMENDED

That the Executive be advised to:

Note the information relating to the Five Rivers Project.

JOINT AREA REVIEW – VERBAL UPDATE

The Assistant Director, Intervention & Safeguarding explained that the report on the Joint Area Review would not be available until July 2008. However, informal feedback had identified some areas of great strength and some areas for development that were already known to the department. The Chair of the Board commented that the process had been very intense and that there had been very positive feedback about corporate parenting.

NOTED

SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP POLICY & PROCEDURE – VERBAL UPDATE

The Assistant Director for Intervention & Safeguarding presented the Board with a verbal update on the development of a new policy and procedure in relation to special guardianship. Provision for special guardianship was introduced to provide an order that was mid way between being looked after and being adopted. Special Guardianship would enable the guardian to become the child's next of kin, which would help not only emotionally but also with the court process. The benefits to children are that special guardianship creates a sense of belonging and takes children out of the looked after system. There were already some carers who were interested in taking on guardianship of children that they have on long-term placement. The guidance suggests that financial support should be provided for 2 years but it is important to ensure that finance does not prevent carers from taking this step.

NOTED

WORK EXPERIENCE FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning noted that with regards to work experience for care leavers, she would remind the Executive about the importance of ensuring that the Council provides appropriate work placements for our children and young people.

NOTED

ELECTED MEMBER'S IMPACT ON OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER DISCUSSION PAPER

The Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning presented the Board with a discussion paper informing Members of their obligations to make a difference for children looked after.

It was reported that all elected Members should be aware of the Every Child Matters (ECM) Outcomes Framework. The framework was developed as a result of the Victoria Climbié enquiry, which identified the need to improve the systems in place to safeguard and support all children and young people. The framework was based on the Concept of 'Outcome-based Accountability'. Which has been described as the 'So What?' approach to performance management. In other words it poses the question 'How does what you do impact on outcomes for children and young people?'

Elected Members had a responsibility to all children and young people as residents of Middlesbrough to enable them to achieve the ECM outcomes. As Corporate Parents, elected Members have additional legal and moral responsibilities towards children who are looked after by the local authority to ensure that they are able to:

- Be healthy
- Stay safe
- Enjoy & achieve
- Make a positive contribution
- Achieve economic well-being

It has been suggested that the Corporate Parenting Board should issue a challenge to all elected Members to say how they have supported this process. Members would be asked to reflect on their work over the previous year and to complete the attached form. The purpose of the exercise would be to identify any areas for improvement and to help the Board to develop its work programme for 2008-2009.

NOTED