

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 11 September 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors Brunton (Vice Chair), Carr, S Carter, Dryden, J Hobson, Kerr, P Rogers

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

PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER: B Simpson (Foster Carer)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE BY INVITATION: Councillor McPartland, K Wilson

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillor B 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 31st July 2008 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Chris Nugent the Health Co-ordinator for Children Looked After presented a report to provide a brief summary of the effects of Care Matters: Time to Deliver for Children in Care on the duties of health care bodies and local authorities to Children Looked After. The report also provided Members with an update on progress for the Middlesbrough Looked After Health Action Plan 2008/2009.

The aim of the Care Matters agenda was to 'secure improved and sustainable outcomes' for children in care and their families. The White Paper acknowledged the importance that local partners provided effective family support to enable a child to remain at home where appropriate, and where children do come into the care of the state, delivering good outcomes required excellent corporate parenting.

Care Matters stated that it was not just local authorities that had a parenting role; corporate parenting responsibilities must be shared by everyone involved in supporting children in care.

Middlesbrough Council's Children Looked After Health Action Plan for 2008/2009 included a number of Key Service Outcomes that included the following:

- All looked after children and young people are immunised and have regular health screening, dental and optical checks.

All looked after children and young people were offered annual or six-monthly health assessments as per government guidelines 'promoting the Health of Looked After Children (Department of Health 2002)'. As identified in the Health Action Plan, strategies were already in place to ensure all looked after children and young people were immunised, had regular health assessment, dental and optical checks. The latest figures provided by government for immunisations being up to date in Middlesbrough was 95%, and the percentage of Children Looked After having an annual health assessment in Middlesbrough was 92% (79.9% was the national average). The percentage of children looked after having a dental health check in Middlesbrough was 92%.

In Middlesbrough all children and young people who were aged 4-16 years and had been looked after 12 months and more would have a strengths and difficulties questionnaire completed. The questionnaire would be completed by the child's main carer, as part of the child/young person's statutory health assessment. This would provide government with further statistics and local information on the emotional health and well being outcomes of children and young people looked after to understand and improve the delivery of CAMHS.

- All looked after children and young people had an outcome based health plan in place that was regularly reviewed.

Included in the health action plan for 2008/2009 was that all looked after children and young people had an outcome based health plan in place that was regularly reviewed. After consultation with young people, the health assessment documentation and leaflets had been updated with support from the marketing manager from the Primary Care Trust. The health plan provided clear health objectives with review dates and health outcomes for each individual health issue.

- Looked after children are provided with guidance and support that promotes healthy living.

Another key service outcome was that looked after children were provided with guidance and support that promoted healthy living. Within the health assessment process, a continued provision of age appropriate health promotion information was delivered and recorded. This might include the delivery of age appropriate smoking cessation 'Kick the Butt' sessions for children and young people or provision of chlamydia screening as part of the health screening process.

A dedicated young person's health promotion unit had been developed at the Pathways' team base on Park Road North. Young people had been consulted on how the room should be decorated, furnished and what health promotion material they would like to be delivered from the unit. The room would be free interruptions and provide confidentiality whilst a health consultation was taking place.

In discussion, it was clarified that access to a dentist was relatively straightforward in Middlesbrough at present but that it may be more problematic for children placed out of area. It was explained that the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was sent out to foster carers one month prior to the health assessment taking place. The questionnaire was scored in conjunction with the health professional and the social worker and provided a measurable assessment tool. Support for children with mental health problems, who were based outside the area, was being provided via the Child and Adolescent Mental Health grant on an individual basis. It was acknowledged that children who become looked after have previous experiences that are likely to contribute to mental and emotional difficulties whilst being looked after. The aim was to minimise those effects.

A question came from the Board as to whether Council-owned leisure facilities could be used free of charge for children looked after and their carers. It was reported that foster carers had previously had a 'Leisure Link' card but these expired recently and had not been replaced. Some children looked after had been given the X4 card, which enabled users to access most facilities. At present this was limited due to budget concerns but the possibility that it could be made available to all looked after children would be looked into as a policy issue.

The value of the support provided by the Health Co-ordinator for Children Looked After was acknowledged.

NOTED

ELECTED MEMBERS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Children's Participation Officer presented a report to inform the Corporate Parenting Board of the outcome of the consultation exercise carried out with elected Members during May and June 2008.

The Corporate Parenting Board decided to ask all elected Members how they make a difference to the lives of children looked after (17/04/2008). The then Chair of the Board wrote to all Members asking them to reflect on their work over the previous year, in light of a briefing note on Every Child Matters, and to complete a form saying what difference they had made. The purpose of the exercise was to identify any areas for improvement and to help the Board to develop its work programme for 2008-2009.

The letters were distributed by the Members' Office on 8th May 2008, with a return by date of 2nd June and a follow-up reminder was sent out on 29th May 2008. Responses were received from five elected Members.

Further details of the exercise were presented to the Board under the headings Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy & Achieve, Make a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Well-being.

It was noted that whilst it was unfortunate that so few Members were able to respond, it was clear that some had a very good understanding of their role as corporate parents. There was also an understanding that improving services for all children and young people was a form of support for children looked after as they access universal services.

A Member noted that it would be useful to send the feedback to all councillors to help them understand what is expected from them as corporate parents.

NOTED

LOCAL AUTHORITY PLEDGE TO CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Deputy Director for Intervention & Safeguarding presented a report to inform the Corporate Parenting Board of the Government's proposals in relation to a pledge to be made by local authorities to children looked after and care leavers, and for establishing a Children in Care Council. It also identified the action taken to date and proposed a way forward in Middlesbrough.

The Care Matters Green Paper first introduced the idea of a pledge to be made by Local Authorities to the children that they look after (and of a Children in Care Council). The Pledge would clearly set out the services and support that all children in care can expect to receive. It should be regarded as a clear, specific commitment by the local authority to each child or young person - a contract that would be monitored through each child's care plan. Following extensive consultation, including with children and young people in Middlesbrough, the White Paper, Care Matters: Time for Change identified the core elements of a pledge, which included:

- A commitment to involve children in decisions which affect them and to take account of their wishes and expressed feeling about the services they receive
- A placement with carers who can meet their needs
- Contact with siblings and birth parents in line with their care plan
- Regular reviews in which children will be enabled to participate meaningfully (particularly for disabled children with communication difficulties)
- Access to advocacy services if children have a complaint
- An Independent Reviewing Officer to ensure children's rights are upheld
- A place at a good school
- Support to participate in positive leisure time activities

The government suggested that a 'Children in Care Council' should be made up of a rotating group of children in care, through which children's views would be collected and passed directly to the Director of Children's Services. The views collected by the Council would inform an annual stock take of services. The Director of Children's Services would work with the Children in Care Council to develop an annual feedback mechanism to ensure that every child has the opportunity to provide their views to the Director. The Children in Care Council was identified as a way of enabling regular, good quality dialogue about developing and delivering services.

Middlesbrough has had a Corporate Parenting Policy and Strategy in place since 2000 that was updated in January 2008 to clarify the links with the Every Child Matters outcomes framework and the new National Indicators. The policy and strategy provides a strategic framework for the development for the pledge. The document set out the local authority's intentions in relation to:

- Children's rights and children's involvement
- Assessment, care planning & review
- Placement
- Education & personal development
- Health
- Support into adulthood

A care leaver presented the views of some care leavers on the pledge. These included:

Stay Safe

- Help us to do a safety assessment of our houses (Provide smoke alarms)
- Ask us if we feel safe in our relationships
- Stop us being harassed, persecuted, intimidated, made to feel vulnerable
- Be there for us when we take risks & make mistakes

Be Healthy

- Free Gym pass up to the age of 25 (free access to X4) & provide the same for young people who don't live in Middlesbrough
- Fast access to counselling (different sorts) i.e. drug and alcohol, self-harm, sexual abuse, relationships
- Annual health checks post 18 (MOT). Up to 21.
- Tell us we look great everyday
- Believe in us & trust us

Enjoy & Achieve (Most important)

- Help us to make our dreams real, make us feel important & treat us with respect
- Help us to believe that we can be successful (start early so we have time to learn)
- Do things in small steps, let us start work or college gradually
- Tell us what we are entitled to so we don't have to be on benefits. Tell us in good time, not when it's too late.
- Help us to understand who we are & where we came from & to understand other people
- Provide activities that we enjoy, for each young person to be in a group with other young people in care, no awkward questions, like being part of a big extended family

Make a Positive Contribution

- Ask us to choose the staff (interviews) but ask well in advance & give us training
- Give us feedback that shows that you have listened to us
- Tell every young person that they can get involved and have their say
- Children in care council - need support from an adult, support for young people to take part (preparation)
- Have groups for different ages. Agree on ideas & issues before meeting the adults (one representative from each age range).

Achieve Economic Well-Being

- Contact with foster carers after you leave
- Provide free transport
- Extra support to decide what to do when you leave school (an extra push)
- Housing: better accommodation in better areas. Not being forced to move away, better condition, better state of repair, better decorated, homely, keep promises, practical help to do decorating, put up curtains etc
- A clothing allowance like a setting up home grant for young people on benefits (once or twice a year)

In discussion, the care leaver expressed the view that young people should be asked what they want to be and helped to achieve that. She explained that levels of maturity, timing and motivation were factors that affected the capacity of some young people to take on board the information and opportunities on offer. The need to persevere was emphasised and the importance of not giving up on young people and being patient.

The Board thanked the care leaver for her presentation and noted that it was very passionate and articulate.

NOTED