

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 4 December 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Carr, Carter, J Hobson, Dryden, and Kerr.

OFFICERS: S Harker, C Kendrick, J Kochanowski, S Little and J Yielder.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Majid.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Councillor P Rogers.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 23 October 2008 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

MIDDLESBROUGH PLEDGE - UPDATE

The Children's Participation Officer presented a report to update the Board on progress made in relation to the development of Middlesbrough's Pledge to Children Looked After.

A development event had taken place at the Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre on 30 October 2008. The event ran from 10 am until 7 pm with separate sessions for different age groups.

Members of the Corporate Parenting Board met with a total of twenty-six children and young people and a variety of Managers from a range of services and agencies. The event had provided an opportunity for participants to discuss what should be included in the Pledge. The ideas generated at the development event were currently being written up and would be reported to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Members were thanked for their attendance and participation. It was noted that the children and young people had asked some challenging questions and many of the things that they had asked for were intrinsic to being young rather than to being looked after.

In order to try and capture a wider range of views, since not all children and young people were able to attend the development event, or were placed outside of Middlesbrough, a questionnaire had been sent out. Information and views from completed questionnaires would contribute to the development of the Pledge. A separate piece of work was being undertaken to ascertain the views of children and young people with disabilities.

NOTED

ENJOY AND ACHIEVE – CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER BY MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

The Education Children Looked After Manager presented a report to provide information to Members on the educational outcomes of Children Looked After (CLA), as measured against the key performance indicators linked to educational attainment.

The Local Authority had a statutory duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of every looked after child for whom they were responsible and to promote their educational achievement. Education was often the key for determining success in later life.

Information was provided in relation to the attainments of children and young people who had been looked after continuously for a period of more than 12 months, during the academic year 2007-2008.

Overall in 2007, only 13% of children in care achieved five A*-C GCSEs (or equivalent) passes compared to 62% of all children. 36% of children in care did not achieve any GCSE passes, compared to 1% of all children. Care leavers were more than twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) at age nineteen.

Whilst the cause of this disparity in attainment levels could be partly attributed to the emotional trauma and disruption suffered by the children's life experiences, the current level of performance was not a true reflection of the abilities of these children. Children in care were less likely to fall behind at school if every professional associated with their care and education attached the same importance to their education as any parent would, to enhance their life chances.

It was highlighted that 51% of children and young people were educated outside of Middlesbrough. This was a growing trend that had implications for monitoring and supporting education and was attributed to the lack of suitable foster care placements in Middlesbrough at the current time.

At Key Stage 1, of nine children in this category, the two children who were educated in Middlesbrough had not achieved the national standard in English Reading, English Writing or Mathematics. Of the seven children educated outside Middlesbrough, six had achieved the national standard in English Reading and Mathematics, and four achieved the standard in English Writing.

At Key Stage 2, of twelve children in this category, one child was educated in Middlesbrough and had not achieved the national standard in English, Mathematics or Science. Of the eleven children educated outside Middlesbrough, four achieved the national standard in English and Mathematics, and six achieved the standard in Science.

At Key Stage 3, of twenty-seven children in this category, eight pupils were educated in Middlesbrough and two of those had achieved the national standard in English, three achieved the standard in Mathematics and one achieved the standard in Science. Of the nineteen children educated outside Middlesbrough, eight achieved the national standard in English, five achieved the standard in Mathematics and four achieved the standard in Science.

At Key Stage 4, of fourteen children in this category, seven pupils were educated in Middlesbrough and five of those were entered for GCSEs, one achieved 5+ A*-C grades and four achieved 5+ A*-G grades. Two young people educated in Middlesbrough did not sit GCSE or GNVQ equivalent examinations. Of the seven children educated outside Middlesbrough, one achieved 5+ A*-C grades and two achieved 5+ A*-G grades. Six of the fourteen young people did not sit GCSE or GNVQ equivalent examinations for relevant reasons, however, one of them had been successful in achieving accreditation at entry level and was currently attending college.

The School Management Forum had allocated £50,000 to target Key Stage 3 and 4 pupils in need of additional support. The cost of providing additional vocational learning was high. However, schools could match-fund finance provided by the School Management Forum in order to offer vocational learning for these young people.

The children's Social Workers had been alerted to the availability of up to £500 of grant funding to support each child's learning and schools had also been contacted directly. This funding was a new grant which it was anticipated would be available for three years.

Through the Care Matters Agenda there was a drive to ensure that pupils in Years 10 and 11 did not change schools unless there were exceptional circumstances. An analysis undertaken the previous year had shown that only four Middlesbrough pupils had changed schools whilst in Years 10 and 11. Three had moved within the Tees Valley and one to Northumberland. The cost of maintaining these pupils in Middlesbrough would have been £42,750 and it was noted

that there were major funding implications for sustaining children's education within the Local Authority.

Some underachievement of CLA could be explained by the particularly complex needs of the young people, with 30.5% being identified as having a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN), compared to approximately 3% of all children. This was a slight decrease of 1.3% on the 2006-2007 reporting data.

Poor performance could also be attributed to other factors such as problems in the child's home, family circumstances or poor school attendance. Eighteen young people had been identified as missing twenty-five days or more education, which equated to 12.8%. This figure had shown an improvement of 4.7% from 17.5% reported in the academic year 2006-2007. The number of young people who had been permanently excluded had also decreased from five in 2006-2007 to three.

Members were assured that alongside the results achieved there were many individual success stories in Middlesbrough. Outcomes for some CLA were improving but for others they had not kept pace and although this reflected the national trend, the gap was unacceptable.

It was noted that CLA in neighbouring authorities such as Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland generally fared better in achievement, although they did have lower numbers of CLA. Members were keen to ascertain whether anything could be learned from neighbouring or statistically similar authorities to help improve attainment for CLA in Middlesbrough.

It was highlighted that a high proportion of Middlesbrough's CLA were educated out of the area. This was generally related to where the foster carers lived and particularly for primary school aged children it was often more practical to live within the community. In some cases, safety issues had led to out of area placements. There was also the issue of availability of placements as there were not enough foster carers in Middlesbrough to take Middlesbrough children. Socio-economic background was another important factor in achievement, with the majority of CLA coming from deprived areas.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to:

1. request that the Lead Member for Children's Services reported to the full Council on actions taken to improve educational outcomes for looked after children.
2. request that a report on practices and processes employed by statistical neighbours in relation to the education of CLA and outcomes in terms of achievement, be submitted to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Service Review and Development Manager presented a report to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an annual update on the issues for Children Looked After (CLA) against the Stay Safe agenda.

It was the duty of the Local Authority to ensure that CLA were protected against child abuse and neglect and received a high standard of care.

The report contained updates on:

- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).
- Advocacy and support.
- Inspection of Care Services.
- Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).
- Social Work Visits.
- Bullying.
- Missing from Placement or from Education.
- Placement Stability.
- Moving into Independence.

- Information Sharing and Data Monitoring.

The Service Review and Development Manager highlighted several sections of the report.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) had an independent monitoring role in respect of the review of children's care plans and the proper implementation of those plans. IROs also ensured a child's access to advocacy services and the complaints procedure. IROs were responsible for the monitoring the reviews of all child care placements, including those under Care Orders, voluntary accommodation, short breaks and Secure Orders .

In relation to dealing with allegations against people who work with children, a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role had been established to co-ordinate all activity around allegations. This encompassed those made against staff and volunteers of any agency in Middlesbrough, including those in the Voluntary and Community Sector. The LADO provided advice and guidance on the procedures and training to raise awareness of this issue.

The Missing from Placement guidance was being updated. It was noted that the Review and Development Unit was reporting to the stay safe themed group on information relating to all children and young people who are missing from home, in addition to those missing from care placements.

Middlesbrough's procedures on Children Missing from Education or at Risk of Missing Education had been revised. The Local Authority had robust measures in place to identify quickly when a child was missing and follow through with tracking and enquiry systems.

The Bullying Policy had been updated recently and commissioned services were expected to comply with the Policy. It was noted that adults sometimes felt that an issue had been resolved whilst a child's perception might be that the bullying had not stopped. Members commented that young people had raised this issue with them as an area of concern.

In relation to social work visits to children looked after, it was clarified that there were minimum standards for the frequency of visits, irrespective of where children lived. There was scope for some negotiation between the child and the Social Worker, in conjunction with the Team Manager, as to how often they were visited. A survey and file audit reported to the Board earlier in the year had identified that most children were visited at least monthly. Concern was expressed that the increased numbers of children placed outside Middlesbrough might impact on the frequency of visits.

It was highlighted that in the Annual Performance Assessment of the Every Child Matters Outcomes, Middlesbrough had been assessed as 'good' in all aspects, with the exception of Safeguarding which had been assessed as 'adequate'. It was clarified that an Action Plan had been drawn up to ensure that the 'adequate' grading would be improved upon.

NOTED

**** EXCLUSION – PRESS – PUBLIC**

ORDERED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that, if present, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 6 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

CHILDREN MISSING FROM PLACEMENT APRIL 2008-SEPTEMBER 2008

The Family Placement Development Officer presented a report to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with information relating to Children Looked After (CLA) by Middlesbrough Council who had been missing from placement between 1 October 2007 and 30 September 2008.

In discussion, Members noted that it was not possible to afford any leeway in the application of the procedures.

NOTED