

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 23 April 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Carter, Dryden, Kerr, P Rogers and B Thompson.

OFFICERS: S Harker, C Kendrick, S Little, N Pocklington, G Rollings and J Watson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: L Gunn and C Lowe, Five Rivers.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Carr and J Hobson.

****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 5 March 2009 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Education Children Looked After Manager gave a power-point presentation entitled "Supporting the Educational Achievement and Aspirations of Looked After Children." A copy of the presentation had been circulated to the Board.

In Middlesbrough there were 198 looked after children of compulsory school age, 116 of whom were in secondary education and 82 in primary education. One hundred and six of these children were educated within Middlesbrough and 92 were educated outside of the Authority. Of the 92 educated outside Middlesbrough, 73% were educated within the other Tees Valley Authorities.

A programme was in place to try to bring children back within the Middlesbrough Authority to be educated. This programme was particularly aimed at Year 10 pupils. One of the priorities in the Care Matters Agenda was that pupils in Years 10 and 11 should not change schools unless there were exceptional circumstances.

It was highlighted that 30.5% of Middlesbrough looked after children of compulsory school age had a Special Educational Need (SEN) statement as compared to less than 3% of all children. At the current time 49% were identified as being at some stage of the SEN Code of Practice.

The presentation gave an overall analysis of Looked After Children who achieved the national attainment levels at Key Stages One to Four over the past three years. Comparisons with statistical neighbours were given for 2006-2007. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) statistical release on outcome indicators for Looked After Children for the twelve months up to 30 September 2008 would be released on 30 April 2009. It was noted that the DCSF does not publish statistics where there are fewer than 10 children in the cohort.

The stated aim of Middlesbrough's Education Looked After Children (ELAC) Team was to advocate on behalf of all Looked After Children to ensure they received the best possible support available within the education system to enable them to achieve their potential. Details of the composition of the ELAC Team and the support available to Looked After Children were also provided in the presentation.

In discussion, it was clarified that the School Improvement Service provides advice to school on how to improve attainment, using a mixture of support and challenge. In response to a question, it was explained that a detailed analysis of outcomes was undertaken two years ago. This

demonstrated that the key factor in children doing well is a clear commitment by parents and carers to prioritise education. It is also essential to maintain a belief in each child's capacity to achieve.

NOTED

SUBSTANCE MISUSE TREATMENT PLAN – IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Substance Misuse Strategy Co-ordinator presented a report to update the Board regarding the key findings of a Needs Assessment completed in relation to young people's substance misuse in Middlesbrough and the 2009-2010 Treatment Plan. A power-point presentation accompanied the report.

With effect from January 2008 the National Treatment Agency (NTA) required that each local authority area submitted a Needs Assessment to identify the needs of young people in relation to substance misuse.

In the context of the Plan, treatment was seen in its widest sense and was categorised into four tiers. Tier 1 involved preventative work, Tier 2 provided brief interventions, Tier 3 included specialist treatment and Tier 4 related to physical dependency in a secure hospital setting.

National statistics suggest that approximately 45% of Children Looked After over the age of ten years would be likely to need brief interventions at Tier 2 level. Brief interventions were conducted by staff in universal and targeted services to prevent young people who had started using drugs and/or alcohol from becoming problematic users. It was noted that no Children Looked After had required Tier 4 support during the last six years. A screening tool designed by Platform was used to assess the tier level of support needed by a young person.

It was noted that the referral rate for Children Looked After was relatively low given that the majority of these young people came from homes where drugs and alcohol were a problem. During the 12 month period April 2007 to March 2008 only one young person had been referred directly to Platform from the Looked After Team and four from locality based social workers. There were a number of other Looked After Children already in specialist substance misuse treatment, having been referred by other agencies.

Platform and FRANK were two organisations that offered support to young people and a need to market the services offered across the 10-18 years population of Middlesbrough had been identified. Only 26.9% of 16-24 year old drug users had said they had heard of Platform and only 38.8% said they had got helpful information from FRANK.

The NTA required that the assessment informed the Treatment Plan which identified the local priorities in order to reduce the levels of drug and alcohol use by young people. The Plan detailed what action would be taken under each priority, how it would be achieved and details of how various grant, and other funding, would be used. Parts 1 and 2 of the Treatment Plan were attached to the submitted report at Appendices A and B.

Both the Needs Assessment and the Treatment Plan had been completed through a full multi-agency approach with extensive consultation across a wide range of stakeholders and were very comprehensive. The Treatment Plan had been developed in light of recent Government strategies on drugs and alcohol and reflected the increased emphasis on a family approach to these issues.

The key findings highlighted in the Needs Assessment were detailed in the submitted report and there were seven priorities in the Treatment Plan all of which were underpinned by key objectives and detailed actions.

The Chief Medical Officer's (CMO) advice on young people's use of alcohol was published in January 2009 and a wide consultation process was due to close on 23 April 2009. The CMO had advised that being alcohol free until the age of 18 was the healthiest option. Young people should not drink until the age of 15. Females should never drink any more than 2-3 units and males not more than 3-4 units on a single day, and not on more than one day per week. This

was a major culture change for many young people, parents, carers and professionals and would affect the way in which education, guidance and brief interventions were delivered to young people regarding alcohol use. It would also influence the guidance professionals gave to parents and carers, including foster carers, regarding the advice they should give to their children.

The Needs Assessment and subsequent work by a Consultant identified several issues for Children Looked After which included education and prevention, identification, brief interventions, referrals, data and staff training. Details of these issues were given in the submitted report. It was highlighted that the Alcohol and Substance Misuse Policy and Guidance for staff needed to be updated and a revised policy would be submitted to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

In discussion, it was clarified that joint commissioning arrangements are in place via the Children's Trust using a specific grant. In relation to referrals, it was clarified that work was underway to improve staff confidence in the use of the screening tools and that children looked after were referred by a number of different agencies.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information in relation to the Substance Misuse Treatment Plan and the implications for Children Looked After.

FIVE RIVERS ANNUAL REPORT

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with the Annual Report of the Five Rivers Project, a copy of which was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report. A power-point presentation accompanied the report. The report provided an update on the current situation and included information on the young people, staffing, training, inspections and community relations. The report also reflected the focus on Every Child Matters as a tool to improve outcomes for young people.

Five Rivers and Middlesbrough Council had an established Partnership that provided eleven residential places for young people in three houses. The aim of the Partnership was to establish and work together to continuously improve residential child care services within Middlesbrough to facilitate the best possible outcomes of children and young people receiving those services. An updated remit for the Partnership Board was attached at Appendix 2 to the submitted report.

There were three homes in Middlesbrough: Fir Tree, Holly Lodge and Rosecroft, offering eleven short to long term placements for young people aged between 9 and 16 years on admission. At present there were seven young people living in the three homes. This reflected the process underway at Rosecroft to change from its current remit to providing short-term assessments to respond to needs identified by the local authority. The homes were maintained at a high standard with living environments that were warm, friendly, caring and provided structured boundaries for young people and ensured they were enabled to feel safe.

Five Rivers currently had thirty permanent staff and was committed to improving its workforce and their skills by making working with children a more attractive and valuable experience in line with the recommendations made in Every Child Matters and by the Children's Workforce Development Council. All staff were either qualified to NVQ 3 or were working towards it. It was highlighted that there was a low turnover of staff with some staff members having over twenty years' service.

The service was regularly monitored and evaluated by OFSTED and all three homes continued to score as either 'good' or 'average' services. All Managers had been set the task of improving their service with the aim of achieving a score of 'excellent' at their next inspection. Regulation 33 visits continued to be positive with no significant issues raised and overall standards of care were very good. Any issues that arose were dealt with within required time scales.

The Partnership worked closely with Health, Education, Criminal Justice Services and Voluntary and Community organisations to ensure that young people were supported to overcome barriers to attainment and make the transition into adulthood.

Members agreed that the young people's comments about living in Five Rivers homes, as stated in the presentation, were of great interest to the Board. It was suggested that it would be helpful if the Board was able to gain further insight into the Five Rivers homes from the young people themselves. It was noted that there is very low staff turnover and Members commented on the positive benefits of the partnership with Five Rivers.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information in relation to the Five Rivers Annual Report.

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 copy of the draft Pledge was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. The draft was based on the priorities identified by children, young people and adults at a joint session held on 18 February 2009 and with reference to the outcomes of previous consultation on the Pledge.

The aim was to keep the Pledge as simple as possible whilst clearly reflecting the priorities identified by children and young people. Additional guidance for staff would be required to ensure that the intention behind each promise was clearly understood and implemented appropriately. Additional information would also be needed to ensure that children and young people were clear about exactly what level of support they could expect from the Local Authority. The intention was to link the Pledge to the development of each child's care plan and this additional information and guidance would support that process.

A further session for children and young people had been arranged for 20 May 2009. The Children's Participation Officer suggested that a further joint session for children, young people and adults should take place in the week commencing 1 June 2009.

AGREED that the Children's Participation Officer would organise a joint meeting and advise the Corporate Parenting Board of the time, date and venue.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the progress made in developing the Middlesbrough Pledge.