

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 25 June 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors P Rogers and Rooney.

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

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: B Simpson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brunton, Biswas, Dryden and B Thompson.

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

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD ANNUAL REPORT 2008-2009

A report was presented to provide Members with a summary of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the year 2008-2009.

A key focus had been the development of a Pledge for Children Looked After (CLA) in line with the White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change'. The Pledge was awaiting approval by the Executive and would then be implemented. The Board also received a number of reports in relation to specific issues to comply with requirements under regulations and guidance. The recommendations of the Board were submitted to the Executive for approval and had been implemented. The submitted report described the work of the Board in more detail.

There were eight meetings of the Board between June 2008 and April 2009. Members considered reports and information provided by services within the Children, Families and Learning Department, the Primary Care Trust, the Five Rivers Project, South Tees Youth Offending Service, the Sport and Leisure Service and the Strategic Housing Service. During the year, the Corporate Parenting Board considered a wide range of issues and advised the Executive on a range of decisions and issues, details of which were included in the submitted report.

The development of the Local Authority Pledge had involved Members of the Corporate Parenting Board working with children and young people to agree the content of the Pledge. This entailed discussions about the nature and significance of making a promise; Members and officers responding to questions from children and young people; explorations of the issues of concern to children and young people; and the final drafting of the Pledge for approval by the Executive. Once the Pledge had been approved, further work would be required to ensure that it was implemented via each child's care plan. In addition, it was hoped that children and young people would be willing to establish a Children in Care Council that would complement the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

The recruitment and retention of foster carers, in the face of competition from independent fostering agencies, continued to be of concern to the Board. A review of payments to foster carers had not yet been finalised.

The Corporate Parenting Board continued to express concern about the availability of suitable accommodation for young people looked after by the Authority who were moving into independence. Members welcomed the development of the 'Crash Pad' in partnership with

Community Campus, to alleviate the problem of short-term placements in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Crash Pad had been used twice within the first month of it being available. In relation to the residential accommodation provided in partnership with Five Rivers Members had noted the positive views of young people and commented on the positive benefits of the partnership.

Despite some improvements in outcomes, the educational attainment of children in care remained low in comparison with their peers at all key stages of the education system. In 2007-2008, just 13% of children in care achieved five A*-C GCSE (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. The Corporate Parenting Board was keen to ensure that the role of the Virtual Head was robust in relation to supporting the educational attainments of CLA.

In relation to employment, the Board re-emphasised the importance of all services providing work experience placements to CLA and the need to ensure there was a wide range of training opportunities available.

The Corporate Parenting Board was committed to ensuring that the local authority continued to enable CLA to achieve the best possible outcomes.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the issues relating to corporate parenting.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STATISTICAL UPDATE

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with statistical information regarding Children Looked After (CLA) by Middlesbrough Council.

At 31 March 2009, there were 276 Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council. This compared with 272 CLA at 31 March 2008, representing a 1.47% increase. Details of the placements of children at March 2008 and March 2009 were given in the submitted report. Since March 2009 there had been a further significant increase to 293 CLA at the present time. The number of CLA in Middlesbrough as a proportion of the population was still above the national average of 54 per ten thousand 0-17 year olds at 86.8 per ten thousand.

External placements had been purchased in order to meet the increase in CLA since March 2009. The Local Authority's preferred provider was SWISS and efforts were made to try and obtain local placements. A lot of negotiation was taking place to reduce payments as using external agencies was a significant financial pressure for the Authority.

A recent campaign to encourage more people to become Foster Carers had been very successful. An additional thirty carers had been recruited and would hopefully be approved in three cohorts in September 2009 and March and September 2010.

The number of children and young people placed with foster carers had decreased by approximately 0.5% which equated to 1 child/young person. The majority of foster placements were with Middlesbrough foster carers but an increasing number were in agency foster placements particularly out of area.

The number of children placed for adoption had decreased by 3.5% since 2008, however it was anticipated that the number of adoptions would increase over the next year. The number of children in Middlesbrough Children's homes remained at 11 children and young people which was the maximum capacity in Middlesbrough children's homes. The number of children and young people placed at home or with extended family had increased from 17 to 22 which equated to a 30% increase. The number of children in a specialist residential placement outside of Middlesbrough had increased by 6% compared to 2008, which was one young person.

Of the 7 children/young people recorded as being in independent living/lodgings/other, 4 were in independent living or supported lodgings, one was in a Mother and Baby Unit and a further two were in secure units.

The prevalence of parental drug misuse, mental health difficulties and domestic violence continued to present a challenge to all agencies providing services to children and their families. The numbers of CLA were unlikely to fall significantly in the short term.

In March 2008 there were 232 children on the Child Protection Register and this had risen to 258 by March 2009. At the time of the meeting, there were 278 children on the Register and there had been 21 referrals during the last week. It was noted that heightened public awareness regarding child protection issues had had a significant impact.

In discussion, Members were informed that young people are usually moved into independent living as part of a planned process. The process for dealing with child protection referrals from members of the public was also explained.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the statistical update on Children Looked After.

KEY ISSUES IN CORPORATE PARENTING

The Assistant Director Intervention gave a power-point presentation in relation to key issues in corporate parenting. The key responsibilities of a corporate parent were outlined along with details of the Pledge.

The importance of ensuring that other organisations such as Health Trusts, schools and Police were involved in order to supplement the work being done by the Local Authority was highlighted.

Following approval of the Pledge by the Executive, the next stage was to embed it in planning and ensure that it was used to develop individual children's Care Plans. Guidance for staff would be issued and training provided for front-line Social Workers.

The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer had been strengthened in relation to children's Care Plans and six monthly reviews. Children would have opportunities to raise any concerns with their Social Worker or the Independent Reviewing Officer if they did not feel the Pledge was being met.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information in relation to the key issues in corporate parenting and the Pledge.

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REMIT AND FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

The Children's Participation Officer presented a report to provide Members with an updated remit for the Corporate Parenting Board and to highlight issues that Members might wish to include in the Board's forward work programme.

The Corporate Parenting Board maintained a focus on achieving the best possible outcomes for Children Looked After by considering new legislation and guidance, monitoring performance and identifying issues of concern. The role and function of the Corporate Parenting Board had been consistently recognised as 'good practice' in external inspections and performance assessment processes.

The Corporate Parenting Board currently used the Every Child Matters outcomes framework as a focus for considering the support provided to Children Looked After. This made Members aware of the actions taken and services available to support children and young people for whom they had corporate parenting responsibility. It was proposed that this approach would be maintained for the forthcoming year. A number of regular reports submitted to the Corporate Parenting Board enabled the Authority to comply with statutory regulations and recommended good practice.

The proposed key issues to be addressed by the Corporate Parenting Board in the forthcoming year were as follows:

- Ensuring sign up to the Pledge by all Council services and supporting its adoption by partner agencies.
- Monitoring the development of policies and procedures to ensure full implementation of the Pledge.
- Supporting the development of a Children in Care Council, in a form to be identified in partnership with children and young people.
- Any other issues identified by the Corporate Parenting Board.

In discussion, Members commented on the value of meeting with children and young people in the process of developing the Pledge. The importance of sticking with children and young people, particularly those with challenging behaviour, was highlighted. Members suggested that the revised remit of the Corporate Parenting Board, together with a copy of the Pledge (once the Executive approved both), should be circulated to all Elected Members. In addition, Members asked Officers to supply information on numbers of children looked after, children on the child protection register and children in need on a Ward basis.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to approve:

- a) The proposed changes to the remit of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- b) The issues identified for inclusion in the Corporate Parenting Board forward work programme.