

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 10 December 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Biswas, Budd, Carr, Dryden, Rooney and B Thompson.

OFFICERS: J Catron, A Dawson, S Harker, C Kendrick, S Little, G Watson and J Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: B Simpson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were 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 held on 29 October 2009 were taken as read and approved as a true record subject to the following amendment:

The Exclusion of Press and Public clause prior to the item on Children Missing from Placement April 2008-September 2008 was removed.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

The Deputy Director, Achievement, presented a report to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with statistical information relating to the educational outcomes of Looked After Children (LAC), as measured against the key performance indicators linked to educational attainment. A progress report of actions taken to enhance the 'Enjoy and Achieve' dimension of the Every Child Matters agenda for LAC was also incorporated into the submitted report.

In spite of clear improvements in GCSE outcomes at grades A*-C for LAC since 2000 (from 7% to 14%), the educational attainment of children in care remained low and the pace of change meant that the gap between those in care and all other children had in fact widened, with children in care underperforming significantly compared to their peers at all key stages of the education system. Given this background, care leavers were more than twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) at age nineteen.

Details of the numbers of Middlesbrough LAC who were eligible to be included in the DCSF returns at Key Stages 1, 2 and GCSE level and the results achieved, were given in the submitted report. Although the results attained were below the national and Middlesbrough averages, at all Key Stages, all children had achieved their expected attainment levels as recorded in their Personal Education Plans (PEPs).

In 2008/2009, 24.2% of Middlesbrough LAC had a Statement of SEN, with a further 19.3% being at the School Action Plus stage of the SEN Code of Practice, making a total of 44%. Looked After Children were significantly more likely than others to require additional support in class.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were a statutory requirement for all children of compulsory school age who were expected to be in care for more than 28 days. PEPs allowed social workers and teachers to find out what children wanted from their education and for children to raise any issues affecting them. Regional audits of PEPs had been undertaken to assess their effectiveness and the findings of the audit were summarised in the submitted report. For some of the most disaffected young people who received a lot of support, the PEP could be reviewed termly rather than six monthly to ensure that support could be changed if necessary.

Personal Education Allowances (PEAs) had been introduced in 2008 to provide an amount of up to £500 for those children identified as being at risk of falling behind their peers in their education. Allowances had been used to pay for a variety of activities and resources to support a child's learning and development, including one-to-one tuition, out of school learning, additional educational trips and visits or vocational training. Additional funding was also provided through National Challenge and the School Management Forum. It was highlighted that expenditure of such funding could be monitored through the School Improvement process.

Welfare Call had been commissioned by Middlesbrough to monitor the school attendance of LAC. For 2008/2009, 8.7% of LAC who were continuously looked after for a period of 12 months plus, were reported as missing 25 days plus education, which was a marked improvement on the 12.8% recorded the previous year. Holidays taken in term time continued to be an issue and was discouraged. However it was acknowledged that there were occasions where the impact was disproportionate for the children. The independent fostering agencies did not allow carers to take holiday in term time and in future the Foster Carers' Agreement would state that children would not be taken on holidays during term time without the agreement of the Deputy Director of Children, Families and Learning. Foster Carers continued to receive annual training updates on issues relating to education and helping children learn.

Middlesbrough had recently appointed a School Adviser for Vulnerable Children to assist with individual pupil tracking and championing the education of LAC as well as taking on some of the responsibilities of a 'virtual headteacher'. There was an expectation that there would be an enhanced level of understanding and communication between professionals involved in supporting the educational achievement of LAC. Other agencies providing additional support included Connexions, the Educational Psychology Service and a Designated Nurse/Health Co-ordinator for LAC.

In discussion, it was explained that children classed as living out of area included children placed with Middlesbrough foster carers in the Teesside area. In relation to the Personal Education Allowance, it was noted that £500 per year equates to approximately 15 hours one-to-one tuition.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the educational achievements of Looked After Children.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER PROFILE AND WARD DATA

The Children's Planning Officer gave a power-point presentation to provide the Board with an analysis of the needs of vulnerable children and young people in Middlesbrough. Vulnerable children and young people were those who would benefit from extra help from public agencies to optimise their life chances and minimise the risk of social exclusion.

Middlesbrough had significantly higher numbers of Looked After Children and children subject to child protection than its statistical neighbours and national averages. Whilst the numbers of Looked After Children were expected to stabilise, there was likely to be an increase in child protection orders. The Wards of greatest need were identified as Gresham and Thorntree. Data was provided in respect of the key areas of need and the steps being taken to address the issues.

In discussion, it was explained that many referrals come from the Police and from schools and that Teesside University had been asked to undertake research into the issues underlying the statistics.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information provided.

FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL ACTIVITY REPORT

A report was presented to advise the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the activity of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel during the period 1 April 2009 to 30 September 2009. The Family Placement Panel met on 19 occasions during that period and the number of items considered in each category during the 6 month period were detailed on page three of the submitted report.

For comparison purposes, a table showing items considered by the Panel over the previous eighteen month period was shown on page four of the submitted report. The table showed the increase in the workload of Panel since April 2009, with a 62% increase in the number of items considered compared with the previous six month period. The number of meetings had also increased and many of them had been lengthy and demanding for Panel members. It was anticipated that the Panel would meet weekly until April 2010.

It was noted that one foster carer had been de-registered and the reason for de-registration related to concerns about the standard of care provided.

The number of new Foster Carers approved during the last eighteen months was low. Recent recruitment campaigns had resulted in an increased number of applications which were currently being processed and it was anticipated that these would result in some new approvals in the next few months.

The option of splitting the Panel into two separate Panels for Adoption and Fostering had been explored but there had been nothing to suggest that this would reduce the workload and the administrative workload would probably increase.

Members of the Board acknowledged the commitment of Panel Members and the increase in productivity.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information in relation to the Family Placement Panel.