

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 22 April 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Budd, Dryden, P Rogers, Rooney, and Purvis (substitute for Councillor Carr).

OFFICERS: S Harker, S Little, N Pocklington, J Wilson and J Young.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: B Simpson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillor Carr.

****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 4 March 2010 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

CARE LEAVERS' CONFERENCE

The Interim Specialist Services Manager and Interim Family Placement Team Manager had attended a presentation by the Assistant Director of the Children in Care Division of the Department for Children, Schools and Families at a Care Leavers Conference held on 15 February 2010. At the request of the Chair, the Interim Family Placement Team Manager provided an overview of the presentation which was entitled 'Creating New Opportunities for Care Leavers in the North East', for the Board's information.

The main message from Government was that its aspirations for children in care should be no less than each parent would have for their own child. Outcomes for children in care should be a litmus test of how the ambitions set out in the Children's Plan were being delivered. The main priorities for care leavers were making sure that children did not have to leave care before they were ready, that all care leavers had access to an appropriate range of accommodation options and providing the right support to make a successful transition to independent living.

Nationally, 24% of Care Leavers were aged 16 when they left with only 6% staying with foster families nine months after their 18th birthday. In Middlesbrough young people were offered the opportunity of moving into supported lodgings after their 18th birthday. Only two young people, from over 70 receiving a service, had left care when they were 16 between April 2009 and April 2010. It was proven that leaving care at an older age was associated with better career outcomes.

The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation nationally had risen from 75% in 2003 to 90% in 2009. In Middlesbrough the percentage was higher and there was currently only one young person in unsuitable accommodation and this young person was in custody. The availability of supported lodgings had increased and other options to increase support for young people were being explored. The Authority worked closely with Erimus Housing to find suitable accommodation and an agreement was in place to ensure that all young people were re-housed immediately.

In Middlesbrough 100% of young people had a Pathway Plan and every young person over the age of 18 had their own social worker or personal adviser. Middlesbrough was proactive in ensuring that all young people were given the opportunity to share their views and these were taken into account by the Authority. Any significant changes in a young person's care plan were reviewed by an Independent Reviewing Officer.

Under the revised Statutory Framework there was provision for young people up to the age of 25 to be allocated a Personal Adviser. However it had been noted that there was no recommendation for statutory provision for those not in education, employment or training (NEET). The Authority had drawn attention to this in its feedback to Government.

In Middlesbrough there was a commitment to providing support for care leavers up to age 25 and specific reference was made to this in the draft Integrated Youth Support Strategy recently developed following the amalgamation of Connexions and the Youth Service. A Connexions Worker was based with the Pathways Team for three days per week and every young person had a Link Worker.

Middlesbrough was part of the national Care2Work Programme and had a plan in place to provide work placements for young people. The Pathways Team maximised take up of work and training opportunities such as those provided by the Fairbridge Trust and Community Campus. The team had also explored the possibilities offered by the Future Jobs Fund and noted that Job Centre Plus was very proactive in supporting care leavers. The team ensured that there were very clear career progression plans in place for young people.

Middlesbrough was also involved in the Right2bCared4 pilot and there was a culture of committing to young people looked after until at least age 18. Middlesbrough maintained high aspirations for its young people and focussed on the transition to adulthood rather than leaving care. The Pathways Team would always support young people if they needed a home to come back to.

With regard to the Education Strategy, Members of the Board agreed it would be useful to have an update from the Virtual Headteacher at a future meeting.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Care Leavers' Conference.

REVIEW OF CORPORATE PARENTING ARRANGEMENTS

A report was presented to seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Board on proposed changes to the current corporate parenting arrangements in Middlesbrough. Corporate parenting arrangements in Middlesbrough had consistently been recognised as good practice in previous external inspections and performance assessment processes.

Recent statutory guidance required the Mayor, the Chief Executive, the Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning and the Director of Children, Families and Learning to fulfil specific roles in respect of safeguarding children and corporate parenting. This guidance was considered by the Executive on 15 September 2009 and it was confirmed that in respect of corporate parenting, the Board would continue to advise the Executive in relation to enabling the Council to fulfil its corporate parenting responsibilities and that the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel would continue to consider relevant safeguarding issues in its programme of work.

In order to comply with statutory guidance, it was proposed that:

1. The Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning would undertake the role of Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board.
2. The Chief Executive, the Director of Children, Families and Learning, the Deputy Director, Safeguarding, would be ex-officio Members of the Corporate Parenting Board, acting in an advisory capacity.

The Board proposed that the Chair of the Council, the Deputy Mayor and the Executive Member for Social Care should also be ex-officio Members of the Corporate Parenting Board.

3. The Corporate Parenting Board would continue to meet six weekly to receive reports and hold issues focussed events, involving others such as the Children in Care Council, on an alternating basis. Recommendations to the Executive would be made on a quarterly basis.
4. Following each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board, any recommendations made by the Board would be referred to the relevant department, statutory agency or partnership organisation to enable their response to be included in the Chair's report to the Executive.
5. Clear links between the Corporate Parenting Board and the proposed Children in Care Council would be established. This would include representation from the Children in Care Council on the Corporate Parenting Board and occasional forums on issues raised by children and young people.
6. Further work would be undertaken to review all other arrangements and mechanisms related to corporate parenting, including:
 - Implementation and review of The Pledge.
 - Rota Visitors.
 - Training for Elected Members.
 - Links with the Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children Board and the Children and Young People's Trust.
 - Options for developing Champions for Children Looked After amongst Officers across the Council and in partner organisations.
 - Information Provision.

Further work on existing arrangements would ensure that Middlesbrough continued to perform well and in external inspection and performance assessment processes. Members noted the importance of performing well to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

Members discussed the rationale for the current start time of meetings and it was confirmed that the 4.30 pm start had previously been agreed to enable young people to attend. It was anticipated that young people involved in the Children in Care Council would receive training to enable them to increase their participation and input into meetings.

It was highlighted that there was currently a vacancy for a Rota Visitor and Councillor Dryden agreed to take up this role.

Members emphasised the importance of the Corporate Management Team playing a lead role in as Champions for Children Looked After.

A provisional date of 16 June 2010 had been set for the launch of The Pledge. The launch was likely to take place at Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre at 4.00 pm and all Members of the Board would receive an invitation.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to approve the proposed changes in corporate parenting arrangements as detailed in paragraphs 1-6 above.

ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance and contributions to the Corporate Parenting Board during her time as Chair. The Chair added that she had particularly enjoyed meeting many young people from whom she had learned a great deal.