

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 31 March 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Brunton, D Budd, Junier, Mawston, Rooney and J A Walker.

OFFICERS: S Harker, N Pocklington and J Wilson.

****ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** B Simpson, Foster Carer.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors McIntyre, P Rogers 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 17 February 2011 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

CARE PLANNING, PLACEMENT AND CASE REVIEW (ENGLAND) REGULATIONS 2010

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with a summary of new regulations relating to Care Planning, Placements and Case Reviews for Looked After Children. The regulations would be implemented on 1 April 2011 and updated earlier regulations implemented under the Children Act 1989. The Regulations made provision about care planning for Looked After Children (LAC) and associated matters.

Under the new regulations all family carers had to be regarded as foster carers and would therefore be entitled to receive the same allowances and training. All children looked after by family carers would also be entitled to reviews and monthly visits. This brought significant cost implications estimated at £150k-£200K for the current year.

The Department for Education had developed a range of training materials for multi-agency training and had clear expectations that the requirements of the regulations were rolled out to Chief Executives and Corporate Management Teams, Corporate Parenting Boards, Children in Care Councils and partner agencies through the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Children and Young People's Trust Board. There would be a particular focus on Schools and Health Agencies, as their contributions to the health and welfare of LAC had been re-defined and re-emphasised.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the requirements of the Case Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations to change procedures and practice in relation to the Local Authority's responsibilities for Looked After Children.

CHANGES TO THE CHILD TRUST FUND

The Corporate Parenting Board was presented with a report to inform them of changes to the Child Trust Fund (CTF) rules which came into effect from August 2010 as follows:

- **Starting payments** – parents of eligible children for whom child benefit was first paid from August 2010 would receive a £50 voucher from the Government to start a CTF account for the child.
- **Children being looked after by local authorities** – On 19 October 2010 the Economic Secretary to the Treasury confirmed in Parliament that Government contributions to top-ups for Child Trust Funds (CTFs) for LAC would stop in line with the ending of eligibility for CTFs for all children. From the end of 2010, local authorities in England would no longer be

required to make £100 top-up payments to children for every year they had been looked after by the Authority. Where LAC did not have a CTF, the Government would open an account for them with an initial payment. For LAC born on or after 2 August 2010, the Government payment into such an account would be £100.

- **Child Trust Fund accounts after December 2010** – Children born after December 2010 would not be eligible for a CTF, but accounts set up for eligible children would continue to benefit from tax-free investment growth and no withdrawals would be possible until the child reached 18. The child, friends and family would continue to be able to contribute up to an overall total of £1,200 a year and it would still be possible to change the type of account and/or move it to another provider.

The Treasury had announced that the Government would introduce new tax-free savings accounts, likely to be known as 'Junior ISAs' to provide parents with a clear and simple way to save for their children's future. There would be no government contributions to these accounts, and accounts would not be opened for all children, as was the case with the CTF. However, the Government would ensure that local authorities could open such accounts for children they looked after, if they chose to do so. In addition, third parties (including local authorities and charities), birth parents and foster carers could contribute to the accounts.

It was highlighted that a previous agreement for the Local Authority to make a contribution of £50 per year to the CTF account of every child or young person who had been looked after for more than one year, had not been implemented. The intention had been to use the Care Matters Grant to fund these contributions. Due to a system failure no eligible child had received what the Council agreed to contribute in 2007. Details of those children eligible to receive retrospective payments had been established and payments were owed to a total of 78 children at a total cost of £6,150.

There were two options available regarding future contributions to the Child Trust Fund for LAC:

Option A – Middlesbrough Council would, once the retrospective payments had been made to those children and young people described above, cease to make contributions to those children who had a CTF.

Option B – Middlesbrough Council would make an annual contribution to each child/young person with a CTF as set up under the original Regulations and Guidance.

The Senior Management Team had recommended that Option B was agreed as the preferred option.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the content the information relating to the change in Child Trust Fund arrangements.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STRATEGY

A report was presented to inform the Corporate Parenting Board of the reviewed Children Looked After Strategy, a copy of which was attached at Appendix A to the submitted report.

It was timely to review the Strategy and the resulting document had the 'Pledge Promise' as its foundation, ensuring that children and young people had not only contributed to, but also directed the way in which the Local Authority would conduct services relating to them. Key partners had contributed to the Strategy and Plan and this would be reviewed via the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership, running concurrently with the Children and Young People's Plan.

There were seven strategic priorities as follows:

- To reduce the number of looked after children and young people.
- To extend the range and type of placements.
- To provide safe, stable and secure placements for children and young people.
- To enable children and young people to make and sustain positive and supportive relationships.

- To ensure children and young people were offered the best possible education and support to reach their full potential.
- To promote the emotional health and well-being of children and young people.
- To help young people to be ready for adult life.

The Action Plan highlighted where the key priorities were reflected within the Pledge promises.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the content of the Children Looked After Strategy and its responsibility for ensuring that agencies work together to achieve positive outcomes for this most vulnerable group of children and young people looked after and leaving care.

UPDATE REPORT ON CHILDREN MISSING FROM PLACEMENT

A report was presented to inform the Corporate Parenting Board about children looked after by Middlesbrough Council who had been missing from placement between 1 October 2009 and 30 September 2010.

Middlesbrough had assigned specific responsibility for LAC who went missing from placement to two designated Service Managers, in recognition of the fact there was a high number of LAC and the duty for safeguarding and planning spread across both intervention and specialist services.

In February 2000, Middlesbrough Council and Cleveland Police agreed a joint protocol for 'Responding to Middlesbrough Children who are Missing from Placement'. Procedures sitting beneath this had been robustly revised and reviewed to provide clearer procedures for the process of reporting and undertaking risk assessments when a child was missing from home or placement. The current version of the Procedure was attached at Appendix A to the submitted report and was reviewed in January 2011.

To assist the Council in fulfilling the new statutory requirement around National Indicator 71, Middlesbrough undertook a tendering process to identify a partner to lead on implementation and development of the Procedures. Barnardo's was successful in its bid and commenced work with the Council in October 2009. An evaluation report of Barnardo's work to date was attached at Appendix B to the submitted report.

Details of children missing from placements in foster and residential care over the 12 month period from October 2009 to September 2010 were reported to the Committee. It was noted that there had been a significant decrease in the numbers missing from placement over the recording period. The information regarding children missing from placement was monitored and reported through various forums including the Middlesbrough Council and Five Rivers Partnership Board, the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership and in the Executive Member's Report to Council. The Council also recorded information under Regulation 7 of the Fostering Regulations, which was monitored by OFSTED during the annual inspection of the service.

The Contract with Barnardo's had greatly improved the way in which the concerns around children going missing from placement was managed and there were plans in place to develop the scheme to ensure that the response to children and young people who went missing outside of the area was as robust as that for children placed within Middlesbrough boundaries. It was highlighted that the children placed with private foster carers rather than in-house, tended to be in the older age group and this could account for the higher numbers of children missing from placement in the independent sector.

Middlesbrough Safeguarding Service was in the process of developing a Risk Management Group, a forum piloted by Northumberland Council and reporting great success in achieving its aim of improving the safety and well-being of its most vulnerable children and young people. This Forum would provide a council-wide strategy to support individuals who had been assessed (by a multi-agency group) as being at very high risk of harm. Those children and young people who were most frequently missing and identified as being at greatest risk, would be discussed in the Risk Management Group, if the 'Missing from Placement' operational group felt that the situation should be escalated.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the issues in relation to children looked after missing from placement, the overall reduction in the number of children and young people going missing and also the improvements in partnership work, which aimed to reduce the numbers still further.

MIDDLESBROUGH PLEDGE/CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL UPDATE

A report was presented to inform the Corporate Parenting Board with an update regarding the Pledge to Looked After Children and the Children in Care Council. The Pledge to Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council was approved by the Executive in August 2009. Since then, work had been underway to publicise the Pledge and embed it into care planning and review processes.

A great deal of time and energy had been spent ensuring the inclusion of the Pledge in the Statutory Review process and consultation documents for children and young people had been updated to embrace and reflect all their work around the Pledge. Copies of the documents were attached to the submitted report. It was noted that documents appeared to be completed in more detail when they were returned and there had also been an increase in the numbers returned.

Consultation with children and young people had clearly demonstrated that they wanted the Children in Care Council (CICC) to inform, influence, and be at the heart of decision-making, to advocate on their behalf and lobby those people who could make positive changes to the lives of children in care. The CICC was a forum for children in care to express their views to Elected Members and Officers, and ask them questions about service development and delivery, and hold them to account for delivery of the Pledge.

There was a core group of eleven young people who had met four times. The group was currently working through a process to help them decide how they would identify and prioritise issues for discussion with the relevant decision-makers and how they would communicate with other children and young people. Consistent attendance at meetings had been a problem and work was underway to encourage regular attendance. A Professionals' Steering Group had been agreed to support the CICC while it was in its infancy and address any issues that arose, ensure that the CICC stayed on track and arrange target dates for the CICC to meet with the Corporate Parenting Board.

In order to sustain momentum, the Corporate Parenting Board was asked to consider the following:

- The CICC could meet with the whole of the Corporate Parenting Board twice per year and exchange and share ideas and views.
- The CICC could receive all reports planned for the Corporate Parenting Board, allowing time for their views and ideas to be attached and sent to the Corporate Parenting Board meeting;
- The CICC would meet monthly to discuss issues and ideas and put them forward to the respective service manager or, if there was a particular topic, then an appropriate officer could be invited to the discussion.
- The CICC would design a newsletter to ensure all children in care were consulted and could have a voice if they were not part of the CICC meetings.

In March 2011, two young people who were care leavers from the Pathways Leaving Care Service, represented Middlesbrough at the National Young People's Bench Marking Forum, hosted by the National Care Advisory Service. This was a forum for young people in care and leaving care, to meet up. All of the young people who were members were also part of their own Local Authority CICC. The young people involved were due to meet with the Pathways Team Manager to feedback their ideas and issues, which would inform the development of the CICC within Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDED as follows:

1. that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the progress that had been made in developing the CICC and proposals for the future.

2. arrangements for a meeting of the CICC with the Corporate Parenting Board be progressed.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PLAN 2011/2014 – STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with information regarding the strategic needs assessment that had been produced to guide the development of the local Children and Young People's Plan for 2011-2014.

The Strategic Needs Assessment drew on a wide range of sources to present a comprehensive view of the life experiences of children and young people living in Middlesbrough. Rather than re-presenting the detail of the extensive range of data available to local children's services, the document used key pieces of evidence for each issue to highlight the story that emerged consistently from the full range of information and data.

Each section of the Needs Assessment set out the data sources that were used in its development. This included a number of detailed service and/or issue specific needs assessments, for example teenage pregnancy, mental health and substance misuse, which had undergone separate consultation exercises as part of their development.

The final document was shaped by a consultation exercise that included detailed discussions at the Children and Young People's Trust's theme groups and direct feedback from children's services' managers and practitioners.

A number of services had already made use of the document to support the preparation of funding bids and to inform service planning activity, including the development of the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, the development of a local Child Poverty Needs Assessment and the refresh of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. It was also being used to inform the emerging priorities for the Children and Young People's Plan for 2011-14.

RECOMMENDED as follows:

1. that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the availability of the strategic needs assessment as a service planning tool.
2. arrangements would be made for the document to be presented to all Elected Members at a future date.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STATISTICAL UPDATE

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with statistical information regarding children looked after by Middlesbrough Council.

The number of Looked After Children (LAC) had shown a small but continued reduction over the last three months, falling by 5% between November and January, from 350 to 331. The level of LAC was now at that recorded at the start of the financial year (April 2010) and represented a 2% increase on March 2010, compared to the 19% increase experienced between March 2009 and March 2010.

The percentage of LAC who had had three or more separate placements during the year, more than doubled between quarters two and three from 3.2% and 8.2%. However, performance remained in line with targets, reflecting the good levels of placement stability sustained in the first half of 2010/2011. Despite the dip in performance, outcomes for children had improved, as in many cases the move to a third placement had fulfilled the permanence plan for the child.

The percentage of LAC who had been living in the same placement for at least two years had continued to decline into quarter three, and at 54.5% was well below all comparator averages. The cohort had decreased in size as there were a number of children within this cohort who had spent time in placements that were not their final placement. These moves had now taken place and there had been a consequent impact on the size of the cohort. Despite the impact on the indicator, there had been a positive outcome for at least four children, who had been, or would be, adopted.

The percentage of LAC placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision being made fell slightly in quarter three but performance remained broadly in line with the outturn for 2009/2010. The cohort of children for this indicator was typically very small and could vary significantly from year to year. Looking forward there were a number of children currently in final placements that would lead to adoption.

The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation improved slightly in quarter three, increasing from 91% to 92% and moving local performance into OFSTED's upper median quartile for 2008/2009. Current performance remained above the national average (90.3%) for 2009/2010 but below the statistical neighbour average (94.5%) which declined year on year. The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training improved from 54.5% to 58.3% in quarter 3, bringing it closer to both the national (62.1%) and statistical neighbour (60.8%) comparators for 2009/2010. Comparator averages showed a marked decline year on year on 2009/2010.

The sustained high numbers of LAC continued to put increased pressure on the services providing support for children and their families. The Department's plans to improve the quality of assessments and subsequent referrals to appropriate support services by reviewing and strengthening its front of house arrangements had worked well. A Manager had been appointed and team members identified. An office base had been agreed and the installation of the required ICT infrastructure had been scheduled. The team would become operational in March 2011 in line with the target start date.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the statistical update on children looked after by the Local Authority.