

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 18 August 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Dryden, Harvey, G Purvis, P Purvis, Rooney and Thompson.

OFFICERS: L Brett, S Harker, I Parker, N Pocklington and J Wilson.

****ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr B Simpson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Hobson and J A Walker.

****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 7 July 2011 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

OFSTED INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SERVICES

The Deputy Director, Safeguarding, presented an overview of the OFSTED Inspection Report on Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Middlesbrough.

An inspection was carried out by OFSTED Inspectors between 6 and 17 June 2011. The purpose of the inspection was to evaluate the contribution made by relevant services in the local area towards ensuring that children and young people were properly safeguarded and to determine the quality of service provision for Looked After Children (LAC) and care leavers.

A copy of the Inspection Report was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report and identified areas of strength, areas of practice that met requirements and some areas for development as well as the grades for each element of the inspection.

The overall grade for the Inspection was "adequate", with the support for children leaving care rated as "outstanding". Throughout the inspection week, the inspectors were very impressed with the work staff were doing and their commitment. In the report the word "good" was used 140 times and the word "outstanding" 14 times. Based on this, there had been a feeling within the Department that perhaps the overall grade might have been "good".

However, issues around capacity and the high numbers of LAC had been highlighted as areas of concern which needed to be addressed. Staff had much higher than average caseloads which put pressure on their time. So although they were doing good work, they did not always have the optimum time to spend on each case.

In terms of the safeguarding inspection, overall effectiveness was adequate and the capacity for improvement was good. Children and young people were safe and felt safe. The Inspectors were very complimentary about performance management and quality assurance. The "adequate" grades for the LAC inspection were disappointing, with the exception being the "outstanding" grade for the provision of economic well-being for young people leaving care.

The strengths for safeguarding and LAC were highlighted as follows:

Safeguarding

- Strategic leadership of the Council and its partners ensured safeguarding had the highest priority.
- Rapid improvement in frontline child protection services.

- Highly effective practice for screening contacts and responses made to see children, where there were child protection concerns.
- An outstanding completion rate for assessments.
- Competent senior officers across the partnership providing clear strategic direction and responding effectively to the changing demands of the service.
- Areas of service strength and weakness were in the main clearly identified and targets for improvement were supported by increased funding and efficiency savings.
- Good performance management and quality assurance.
- Services were improving and no services were deteriorating.
- Effective services to ensure that children and young people were safe and felt safe.
- Quality of core assessments was improving and recent assessments were good overall.
- Care leavers received very good support overall.
- Good effort was made to ensure that children attended their reviews and were given the opportunity to contribute.
- Good work by Independent Reviewing Officers to build and sustain meaningful relationships with children and young people.
- Good investment in staff training and development.
- Effective arrangements in place to monitor performance including robust supervision of social work staff.

Looked After Children

- Children and young people who needed a service were well supported.
- LAC and young people were safe and the level of investment in staff development and retention was good.
- The majority of children were placed with families where their individual needs were closely matched and met effectively.
- Partners had effectively prioritised services to support care leavers, and outcomes in this area were outstanding with highly effective corporate parenting.
- Young people were proud of the Council's Pledge to them.

The areas for development highlighted by the inspection were as follows

Safeguarding

- Ensure child protection chairs had sufficient capacity to meet the full range of their duties and responsibilities, exercised their authority to formulate child protection actions at conferences and contributed to strengthening arrangements for reviewing Children in Need (CiN) cases;
- Ensure child protection minutes were completed and disseminated to partner agencies in a timely manner;
- Ensure all partner agencies provided robust safeguarding supervision for staff and that firm arrangements were in place for the MSCB to agree and monitor compliance with supervision policies.
- Ensure all key partners including health visitors and school nursing staff were fully informed about domestic violence incidents where children or young people were present in the household.
- Ensure the formal complaints process was fully communicated to the children, young people and families receiving a service, and report complaints information to the MSCB.
- Extend the existing arrangements for child protection chairs to report lessons learned from their child protection work.
- Ensure all newly qualified social worker caseloads were appropriate in respect of size, case type and level of managerial support needed.
- Review the high rate of children and young people who were persistently absent from school and refresh strategies to reduce absenteeism and to monitor the impact.
- Refresh existing initiatives and look for new ways to help reduce the incidence of bullying in schools.
- Ensure early intervention and preventative services were fully co-ordinated across the partnership and were appropriately targeting children in need and their families.
- Reinforce the use of a single common assessment process across the partnership including those children and young people who experienced domestic violence and ensure robust systems were in place to monitor the quality of joint interventions.

- Develop the Integrated Children's System (ICS) to ensure this was fully compliant with service specifications and fit for purpose.
- Strengthen the MSCB business plan and reporting arrangements to include the performance of all partner agencies and actions taken to drive service improvement.
- Develop a comprehensive framework for the auditing of children's social care case files and reporting systems and ensure these were linked to the reporting arrangements for the MSCB.
- Develop systems to fully capture user feedback for service evaluation and planning purposes.

Looked After Children

- Increase options for permanency through the use of adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders, so that children and young people did not remain looked after unnecessarily.
- Develop ICS to avoid duplication and ensure LAC's records were comprehensive.
- Ensure written assessments, care and pathway plans were comprehensive and management audits and reporting arrangements were used to monitor progress and sustain improvement.
- Ensure policy, procedure and practice for LAC to access their personal records was routinely communicated to them and provision made for them to have access as they required it.
- Ensure LAC were routinely informed about the Local Authority's Complaints Procedure and Practice and what provision was made to support them.
- Ensure information obtained from the strengths and difficulties questionnaires was used effectively to influence the emotional health and wellbeing of LAC.
- Ensure that the emotional health and wellbeing of LAC was not compromised throughout the period of review and re-commissioning of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).
- Increase Social Worker capacity to ensure statutory visits to LAC and young people were conducted only by qualified staff.
- Improve the co-ordination and targeting of services for children on the edge of care, CiN and those children who were subject to a child protection plan, to safely reduce risk and prevent family breakdown.
- Increase the capacity of IROs so they had sufficient time to spend with LAC and young people to track and audit their cases and complete statutory reviews in accordance with the frequency set out in regulations.
- Strengthen the role of the function of the virtual school to improve educational outcomes for all LAC and particularly address poor school attendance, the variable quality of PEPs and ensure children's education was not inordinately disrupted through the exclusion process.
- Ensure all LAC received timely health assessments and health reviews and that care leavers received a comprehensive summary of their health care when they left care.
- Ensure all LAC were encouraged and enabled to attend celebration events, and time was taken to explain the importance of the Pledge and they were given a personal copy for their use.

The Deputy Director, Safeguarding, provided a detailed explanation of areas for development that were highlighted in the inspection and the measures in place to deal with these issues. It was noted that no areas had been identified that the Department was not already aware of and addressing.

Overall some very positive strengths were identified by the Inspectors. An Action Plan would be developed to address the areas for development identified within the OFSTED Report and brought to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board. The Inspection did not identify any issues that the Service was not already aware of.

The main focus of the Action Plan would be to strengthen the Virtual School and a range of work with LAC. It was suggested that the Board might wish to review the recent GCSE results and progress with the Virtual School at the next meeting.

RECOMMENDED that:

1. the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided regarding the OFSTED Inspection Report on Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services in Middlesbrough.
2. progress on the Virtual School would be reviewed at the next Corporate Parenting Board meeting.
3. an update on progress against the Action Plan would be presented to the Board in six months' time.

CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL PROGRESS REPORT

A report was presented to inform the Corporate Parenting Board of the progress made to support the continued development of the Children in Care Council (CICC) as a forum to represent the views of children in care. It was proposed that the Corporate Parenting Board would meet with the CICC in September to discuss the group's Communication Plan.

The CICC started a six-week group work training programme in June. The programme was delivered by the Project Manager Engagement and supported by staff from the Specialist Services Team. The aim of the training was to continue the development of the group through building their knowledge and understanding of their role and their ability to communicate with key people.

The outcomes from the training demonstrated an increase in the group members' self-confidence and key communication skills. During the training, the group had time to stop, think and reflect on how they wanted to communicate with a range of key people. The CICC Communication Action Plan provided the key findings and recommendations from this activity, which included:

- communication with children in care programme, focussing on a range of priority methods and systems;
- communication and joint working with a range of partners working with children in care;
- key milestones and outcomes that will measure success; and
- identifying the range of resources required to implement the plan.

One of the recommendations of the Plan was that the young people wanted to produce some publicity material to communicate with other children who did not live in Middlesbrough. It was suggested that this information could be given to all young people by their Independent Reviewing Officer at their Review. The information provided would be about the CICC and the work they were doing and funding had already been sourced for this project. A longer-term aim was for the CICC to develop their own website.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided regarding the CICC Communication Plan and arrange a meeting to discuss the Plan with the CICC.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members' views were sought on re-scheduling the start time of future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

AGREED that all future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board would commence at 1.30 pm.