

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 29 October 2009.

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

OFFICERS: S Harker, C Kendrick, J Kochanowski, N Pocklington and J Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: B Simpson.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Biswas and P Rogers.

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

SAFEGUARDING OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Service Review and Development Manager presented a report to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the issues for Children Looked After (CLA) against the Stay Safe agenda.

Since the Annual Report submitted to the Board in November 2008, there had been a significant increase in children becoming looked after which had been challenging for all services in Middlesbrough. A number of factors which might have contributed to the increase included media coverage, awareness raising as services increased, and the development of preventative and early intervention strategies. Work was to be commissioned with the University of Teesside to determine the actual factors behind the increase and it was acknowledged that there had been national and local increases in both CLA and children subject to Child Protection Plans.

Plans for CLA were robustly monitored by Independent Reviewing Officers to ensure that actions required to implement the care plans were carried out and outcomes monitored. During the past year significant changes had taken place within the reviewing service which employed 4.6 Officers. Three Officers had left during the year and agency staff had been employed. Two permanent staff had now been recruited and one vacancy remained.

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and Spurgeon's Independent Visitors Scheme were two schemes contracted to Middlesbrough to provide specialist support. NYAS provided one-to-one support for children and young people and advocated on their behalf to ensure their rights and needs were met. The Independent Visitors Scheme provided a befriending service for children and young people with little or no contact with their birth family and would also advocate if requested.

A full inspection of Middlesbrough's Fostering and Adoption Service was due to be carried out by OFSTED during November 2009. The Council's respite service, provided at the Gleneagles Resource Centre, and the residential care service provided by the Five Rivers Project were inspected by OFSTED twice a year. Independent inspections were made under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and Rota Visits were carried out by Elected Members, with the outcomes of all inspections reported to the Corporate Parenting Board.

In 2009 two cases had been referred to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in relation to Foster Carers and residential provision. The LADO had been in post since September 2009 and co-ordinated activity around allegations against people who worked with children and

monitored and evaluated the effectiveness of the procedures in place. The LADO produced a regular report to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board and it was suggested that it would be useful for the Corporate Parenting Board to receive similar information.

Social Worker visits were carried out on a regular basis to CLA placed both within and outside of Middlesbrough. The frequency of visits was determined by the Team Manager in response to the needs of each child. Due to the higher volume of work recently the minimum number of visits had been reduced if a placement was settled.

Placement stability was recognised as contributing to keeping children and young people safe and was a key element of the Performance Indicator Framework. The Key Indicators and Middlesbrough's performance over the past three years were detailed in the submitted report.

A recent review of Foster Carer payments in order to establish some parity between independent fostering services and Middlesbrough Council carers had been agreed and payments had been rolled out.

Policies for joint working between Social Workers, Housing, and Youth Offending services in assessing young people's accommodation needs had been developed. The move to independence or supported lodgings for young people leaving care was facilitated by the Pathways Team in partnership with young people.

Work was being developed around the Integrated Children's System (ICS) database in relation to documentation for looked after reviews. Over the next few months Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers would move to using the recommended forms.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to keeping children looked after safe.

CORPORATE PARENTING – A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with information about new statutory guidance setting out the roles and responsibilities of Elected Members and senior managers in relation to corporate parenting.

In July 2009, new statutory guidance on "The Roles and Responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services" was issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families under the Children Act 2004. The Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member were required to work together to provide strategic leadership for Local Authority Education and Social Care Services for children. They also had responsibility to lead and facilitate local partnership arrangements including those which underpinned the Children's Trust, the Children and Young People's Plan, the Local Safeguarding Board, information sharing and formal arrangements relating to children's health. These responsibilities extended to all children receiving services in the area.

Local Authority Chief Executives and Council Leaders had to ensure that the importance of improving outcomes for children and young people was reflected across the full range of business of both the Local Authority and the Local Strategic Partnership and had ultimate responsibility for the corporate working of the Council. They were also responsible for ensuring that overall partnership working was effective which included ensuring that children's issues were given appropriate priority within the Sustainable Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement and the Local Authority's Corporate Plan. The guidance also set out the responsibilities of the Chief Executive and Council Leader in relation to a new requirement for an annual report to address safeguarding issues.

The Executive considered the statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Lead Member and the Director of Children's Services at a meeting held on 15 September 2009. In respect of corporate parenting, it was confirmed that the Corporate Parenting 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 regular programme of work.

The guidance was clear that all Members of the Local Authority had a shared responsibility for corporate parenting, with some Members and Senior Officers having specific, statutory responsibilities. Details of the responsibilities for Council Leaders, Chief Executive, Lead Member and Director of Children's Services were included in the report. Summaries of the roles of the Corporate Parenting Board, Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel, individual Elected Members and all Elected Members in Middlesbrough were also detailed in the report.

The guidance also highlighted the role of the Overview and Scrutiny Board and suggested that the Lead Members might wish to look closely at the priorities and associated work streams in the Children and Young People's Plan.

It was highlighted that corporate parenting arrangements in Middlesbrough had consistently been recognised as 'good practice' in previous external inspections and performance assessment processes. The publication of new statutory guidance provided an opportunity to review existing arrangements to ensure that they were fit for purpose.

The Board discussed ways of raising Elected Members' awareness of their responsibilities as corporate parents. It was noted that briefings, training sessions and information had been provided to Elected Members in relation to corporate parenting over a number of years. A briefing session for all Members had been held in October 2009 on Working Together to Safeguard Children.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the views of the Corporate Parenting Board with respect to the new statutory guidance.

CHILDREN MISSING FROM PLACEMENT APRIL 2008-SEPTEMBER 2008

A report of the Specialist Services Manager was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with information relating to Children Looked After (CLA) by Middlesbrough Council who had been missing from placement between 31 August 2008 and 30 September 2009.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the issues in relation to children looked after missing from placement and that these figures had significantly reduced during the last two years.