

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Parenting Board

MIDDLESBROUGH PLEDGE / CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL UPDATE

Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning: Cllr Mike Carr

Director of Children, Families & Learning: Gill Rollings

31 March 2011

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update regarding the Pledge to Looked After Children and the Children in Care Council.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the progress that has been made in developing the Children in Care Council and notes the proposals for the future.

IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION, WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

3. It is over the financial threshold (£75,000)
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards
Non Key

DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is

Non-urgent
Urgent report

If urgent, please give full reasons.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

The Pledge

5. On the 6 August 2009 the Pledge to children looked after by Middlesbrough Council was approved by Executive. Subsequently, work has been underway to publicise the Pledge and to embed it into care planning and review processes.
6. To publicise the Pledge, a letter from the Director of Children, Families & Learning, together with a copy of the Pledge leaflet, was sent to:
 - All children looked after aged 5+ (242);
 - All in-house and independent foster carers (101);
 - All other external service providers (32);
 - All social care staff (236);
 - School nurses and health visitors (130);
 - The Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service Looked After Children Service (10);
 - Designated teachers and Governors (124);
 - Local Colleges (6);
 - Integrated Youth Support Service Managers (26).
7. In addition, Pledge posters were distributed to all key offices and two pull-up banners are available, one of which is held at MTLC and the other which is on display in Vancouver House.
8. Staff with a direct responsibility for preparing care plans were also provided with a mouse mat to act as an instant reference point for the key elements of the Pledge.
9. One of the most important factors was ensuring the Pledge was embedded into the care planning process. A great deal of time and energy has been spent ensuring the inclusion of the Pledge in the Statutory Review process; the consultation documents for children and young people were changed to embrace and to truly reflect all their work around the Pledge (copies attached).
10. The views of our young people positively reflect these changes that have been made:
 - “They are much brighter and fun to fill out”;
 - “They are easier to fill in and they look better”;
 - “I like the doodle page”.
11. It is worth noting that the documents appear to be completed in more detail when they have been returned. There also appears to have been an increase in the return of forms and we are currently attempting to record this accurately.
12. Children and young people who were involved in the development of the Pledge were invited to an evening at the Bowling Alley to say ‘thank you’ for their work.

They also took part in a discussion with key managers and staff about what care planning meant to them and how the process could be improved. A key message from this discussion was that social workers should “listen more and spend more time with children”.

13. In May 2010 the children and young people met with the Mayor and Director of Children, Families & Learning. The young people represented themselves extremely well and enjoyed the meeting. Children and young people officially launched the Pledge in July 2010, at a Children, Families & Learning Department celebration event.

CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL (CICC)

Purpose of the Children in Care Council

14. Consultation with the children and young people clearly demonstrates that they want the CICC to inform, influence and be at the heart of decision-making, and to advocate on their behalf and lobby those people who can make positive changes to the lives of children in care. This will include the Director of Children and Young People’s Services, Lead Members, the Corporate Parenting Board and Senior Officers who can make changes.
15. The CICC will become a forum for children in care to express their views to elected Members and officers, and to ask them questions about service development and delivery, and in particular hold them to account for delivery of the Pledge.

Children in Care Council update

16. From the information sessions conducted through 2008 and 2009, there is a core of 11 young people who expressed the wish to be involved in the start of this council.
17. The first development session took place in June 2010 and the group has met a further three times since then. The young people are currently working through a process to help them to decide how they will identify and prioritise issues for discussion with the relevant decision-makers and how they will communicate with other children and young people. Consistent attendance at meetings has been a problem and work is underway to encourage regular attendance.
18. To move this forward, a professionals’ steering group has been agreed to support the CICC whilst it is in its infancy. This can address any issues that arise and ensure the CICC stays on track, and target dates will be arranged to eventually achieve meetings with the Corporate Parenting Board. As with other local authorities, it is recognised that this will take time and will be a learning process.
19. To sustain momentum, the Corporate Parenting Board should consider the following:

- (a) The CICC could meet with the whole of the Corporate Parenting Board twice per year and exchange and share ideas and views;
 - (b) 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;
 - (c) The CICC will meet monthly to discuss issues and ideas and put them forward to the respective service manager or, if there is a particular topic, then an appropriate officer could be invited to the discussion.
 - (d) The CICC will design a newsletter to ensure all children in care are consulted with and can have a voice if they are not part of the CICC meetings.
20. In March 2011, two young people who are care leavers from the Pathways, Leaving Care Service, represented and attended Middlesbrough at the National Young People's Bench Marking Forum, hosted by the National Care Advisory Service. This is a forum for young people in and leaving care up and down the country to meet up. All of the young people who are members are also part of their own local authority CICC. The young people thoroughly enjoyed this forum and felt inspired. The young people have set a date to meet with the Pathways Team Manager to feedback their ideas and issues, which will inform the development of the CICC within Middlesbrough.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

21. This report covers all children looked after, taking into account their diverse needs irrespective of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religious belief, having dependant/caring responsibilities, an offending past, being transgender or transsexual, or due to issues of poverty.

OPTION APPRAISAL

22. Not applicable

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

23. Previously, this work was funded via the Care Matters Grant. The Service is working on the detail for all budgets for 2011. This information will be available from April 2011 to Children, Families and Learning.
24. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report. Services for children looked after cover all Wards; this report will be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

25. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the progress that has been made in developing the CICC and notes the proposals for the future.

REASONS

26. It is important that elected Members are aware of this work in order that they can effectively fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents to children looked after and those receiving Leaving Care Services. The Corporate Parenting Board will play an active role in CICC meetings.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

27. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
- 8th July 2009 Middlesbrough's Pledge to looked after children;
 - The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Volume 2: Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Care Matters;
 - Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care (DfES October 2006);
 - Care Matters: Time for change (DfES, June 2007);
 - The Children and Young People's Act 2008;
 - Making the Difference. Putting the care back into corporate parenting, A practical guide for local Authorities as corporate parents. (Rainer + What Makes the Difference).

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