

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 7 July 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Dryden, C Hobson, G Purvis, P Purvis and J A Walker.

OFFICERS: S Harker and N Pocklington.

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

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brunton, Budd and Rooney.

****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 31 March 2011 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

CORPORATE PARENTING OVERVIEW

The Deputy Director, Safeguarding, presented an overview of the role of the Corporate Parent. The overwhelming majority of children in care were there because of family problems or because they had experienced abuse or neglect.

Looked After Children (LAC) were children who were in the care of the Local Authority, through a Court Order or by agreement with their parents. LAC might live with members of their extended family, foster carers or in residential care.

There were currently approximately 350 LAC in Middlesbrough and this figure was double that of statistical neighbours and currently the highest it had ever been. There were 2200 Children in Need (CIN) in Middlesbrough and 226 Children at Risk of Harm. The Children at Risk of Harm had reduced from over 300 due to better management and more children being placed in the legal system, allowing them to be removed from Protection Plans.

Children who were in custody or homeless were deemed to be looked after and the responsibility of the Local Authority. In addition, children placed with family members were also deemed to be LAC and there were significant numbers of this type of placement in Middlesbrough. It was highlighted that this was an issue in terms of planning for placements and resources. Family members were now remunerated at the same level as foster carers and this had added to the Council's budget pressures.

Children in public care had to be the primary focus for resources and accountability of the Local Authority which had parenting responsibility for them. Children who had spent considerable time being looked after by the Local Authority had to be given the kind of support that decent and responsible parents would give their own children and be provided with a fully rounded set of support and care services.

Research indicated that LAC experienced poorer outcomes than other children across a range of measures including health and education. LAC were over-represented in homelessness, unemployment, mental health services, prison and the armed forces.

The responsibilities of the Corporate Parenting Board included the following:

- Identifying priorities and developing a Work Programme.
- Establishing how agencies should work together to support LAC.

- Ensuring young people had the opportunity to discuss and feed back on the quality of the services that they received.
- Regular dialogue with the Children in Care Council.
- Providing good support on housing, education, training and employment.
- Ensuring services that were provided were good value for money.
- Receiving regular management information reports on Personal Education Plans (PEPs), school absenteeism, exclusions, SATs results, qualifications, numbers registered with GPs, numbers of health assessments, dental checks and placement stability.
- Receiving regular information on children placed outside of the Authority and comparing their data against performance indicators and plans to return them home.

With regard to children placed out of the area, it was suggested that the Board should receive an update from the Head of the Virtual School at a future meeting. Members also indicated that they would like to receive a presentation from the LAC Nurse.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided regarding Corporate Parenting.

OFSTED INSPECTION FEEDBACK

The Deputy Director, Safeguarding, informed the Board that an unannounced Safeguarding Looked After Children Inspection had taken place between the 6 and 17 June 2011. Feedback from the Inspectors had been given on 17 June 2011 and their report would be published on 22 July 2011. Details of the inspection findings were embargoed until the report was published and would be reported to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided regarding the Safeguarding Looked After Children Inspection.

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STATISTICAL UPDATE

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with statistical information regarding Looked After Children (LAC) in the care of Middlesbrough Council.

The number of LAC showed a 3.4% increase between March 2010 (325) and March 2011 (336). The number had continued to rise into 2011/12, reaching 349 at the end of May, which represented a return to the very high levels experienced in the period July-November 2010.

The rate of LAC per 100,000 under-18s increased in 2010/11 from 103 to 107 compared with a national average of 58 and an average for Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours of 84.

The percentage of LAC who had three or more separate placements during the year had reduced from 11.7% to 9.6% in 2010/11, which was better than national and statistical neighbour averages. A monthly performance clinic was held with Team Managers to flag up all children who had already had two moves and to plan ahead where possible to prevent a third move.

The percentage of LAC who had been living in the same placement for at least two years declined in 2010/2011 from 60% to 52%, which was well below all comparator averages. Despite the reported trend for this indicator, individual case information indicated that there had been positive outcomes for a number of children as they had moved into adoptive or long-term foster placements. So whilst the performance indicator appeared poor, the outcomes for children were good.

The percentage of LAC placed for adoption within 12 months of the decision being made improved significantly in 2010/11, rising from 70% to 77.3%, which was well above the national average of 72.4%. The 2010/11 out turn was also better than local performance in 2008/09. Performance had dipped the previous year as two children not placed within the 12 month timescale had been held back when a third sibling was born. The plan was amended to allow all three children to be placed together.

The cohort of children placed for adoption was typically small and could vary significantly from year to year, eg there were 10 cases in total during 2009/2010 whilst there were 22 cases in 2010/11. This could cause significant swings in the percentages reported year-on-year and did not accurately reflect the number of children being placed for adoption, eg the 7 children placed for adoption within the timescale in 2009/10 produced a performance figure of 70%, whilst the 77.3% reported for quarter three related to 17 children having been placed for adoption so far this year, a 143% increase in the number of placements.

It was highlighted that Middlesbrough took the view that some families could be supported and their parenting was good enough. However it was also the case that the Authority persevered with some families for too long. It was however crucial to demonstrate that families had had every opportunity to parent their children.

Currently Middlesbrough had no new adopters waiting for placements and buying in adopters from another Authority cost around £28K per placement. It was acknowledged however that the approval process for adopters needed to be rigorous. There was also a reliance on prospective adopters from out of the area applying to Middlesbrough to avoid the risk of birth parents disrupting an adoptive placement.

The Corporate Parenting Board had received a detailed report on the educational achievement of LAC at its January 2011 meeting and summary details were provided in the submitted report. LAC achievement at Key Stage 2 and at GCSE level showed significant improvement year on year, taking local performance well above national and statistical neighbour comparators.

The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation fell from 95.2% to 88.2% in 2010/11, which was below national and statistical neighbour averages. Two young people in the cohort were in prison at the end of the year and these were the only care leavers who were not in suitable accommodation.

The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training declined from 67% to 59% in 2010/11, falling slightly below the statistical neighbour average (60.8%).

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

FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2011/2012

The Chair asked the Board for suggestions for topics for the Forward Work Programme 2011/2012.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive that the following items would be included in the Forward Work Programme 2011/2012:

- Discussion with LAC Nurse and/or representative from the Primary Care Trust (PCT).
- Feedback on the Safeguarding Looked After Children Inspection and Action Plan.
- Individual Case Studies.
- Early Intervention and Targeted Services.
- Opportunities to meet with young people and/or the Children in Care Council.