

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 2 February 2012.

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

OFFICERS: A Brown, D David, K Douglas-Weir, S Harker, J Keelty, I Parker, N Pocklington and L Woodhouse.

****ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Representative from the Children in Care Council.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillor 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 21 December 2011 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL ACTIVITY REPORT 2011

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the activity of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel during the period 1 January 2011 to 31 December 2011. Middlesbrough had established a Family Placement Panel which met the legal requirements in relation to fostering and adoption and could consider cases from both aspects of family placement work. The Panel played a key role in promoting the welfare of vulnerable children in public care.

In recent months the volume of work had been such that weekly meetings had been scheduled and this was likely to continue for the rest of the year. The Family Placement Panel met on 30 occasions during the reporting period and the number of items considered in each category were detailed in the submitted report.

The number of new foster carers approved had increased and there were currently eighteen assessments in progress. There had also been an increase in the number of foster carer reviews. All reviews came to Panel annually for new carers or for any changes in registration. A number of foster carers had changed registration to increase the age range of children and their capacity to offer more placements.

The number of foster carers de-registering was around the average, with a number of carers who were approaching retirement age choosing to reduce the number of placements they offered. It was anticipated that during the next year there were not many foster carers reaching retirement age and therefore with the new registrations this would increase Middlesbrough's total placement capacity.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided relating to the Family Placement Panel.

YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE SUPPORT TO CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on Youth Offending Service (YOS) work with looked after children in Middlesbrough.

South Tees Youth Offending Service was a multi-agency service established as a result of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The Service's aim was to prevent and reduce offending by

children and young people aged 10 to 17 years across the boroughs of Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland.

The YOS had representation on the Middlesbrough Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP). MALAP had responsibility for corporate parenting, bringing together all agencies which influenced the services delivered to looked after children and those leaving care. The YOS representative on MALAP supplied information to that meeting to ensure that entry to the criminal justice system by looked after children was monitored and all efforts at diversion were being made.

A recent HMIP inspection outlined the need for improvements in the care and resettlement of LAC. Sadly there had been two recent deaths in custody of young people who had been looked after. Prison Staff from Wetherby had been invited to attend a Conference to improve their understanding of the experience of LAC. The two day conference entitled 'Parenting the Public Child' , would be hosted by Middlesbrough in March,

The YOS tracked new cases to ensure that young people were identified and allocated to appropriately experienced Case Managers who were regularly supervised to ensure they were working in partnership with Social Workers and carers towards the most positive outcome. YOS staff received training, support and regular managerial oversight of their assessment and management of risk and vulnerability.

There were currently fifteen young people looked after by Middlesbrough who were subject to interventions from the YOS. This equated to 4.1% of looked after children (down from 5.2% last year) and 14.8% of the total Middlesbrough YOS caseload (up from 12.2% last year). The YOS caseload as a whole had reduced over the last year, however the complexity of cases had increased. Fourteen of the young people were subject to supervision in the community and one was serving a Detention and Training Order. Six young people were aged 17, three were 16, two were 15, two were 14, one 13 and one 12.

The YOS continued to make efforts to reduce the entry of looked after children into the youth justice system and promoted restorative processes to enable offending behaviour to be challenged and managed without resorting to criminal proceedings. A number of YOS staff were about to undertake accredited training in Restorative Conferencing and training others in working restoratively. The plan was to offer these skills to a wider audience within the Local Authority to further reduce the need for criminal proceedings against young people. It was highlighted that the use of restorative justice could reduce re-offending by up to 20-30%.

South Tees YOS offered comprehensive bail support packages, with or without Intensive Supervision and Support, to those young people awaiting conviction or sentencing on criminal charges. This provision enjoyed the confidence of the local Youth and Crown Courts. In the majority of cases an alternative to custodial remand was offered and accepted by the Court. However, some young people, either because the risk they posed to the public was too high, or because they had no suitable accommodation, were remanded into custody.

Plans outlined in the Ministry of Justice Green Paper released in December 2010 to reduce the use of custodial remand by transferring the cost of such placements to the local authority continued to develop. While the eventual implementation of this seemed likely, there were no identified timescales as yet.

Following Government proposals that the YOS might be abolished, it had in fact been retained within the Ministry of Justice, although in a much smaller capacity than previously. There had also been a consultation around the funding for the YOS and a settlement figure was currently awaited. Initial information pointed to up to a possible 90% cut in funding.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive as follows:

1. to note the information provided relating to the Ministry of Justice's Green Paper on changes to the funding of remands to custody.

2. endorse the continued work of South Tees Youth Offending Service in offering appropriate interventions for those who offend and alternatives to custody to prevent children and young coming into the looked after system.

PATHWAYS, LEAVING CARE SERVICE

The Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council's Care Leaving Service for the year 2011 was presented. A copy of the Annual Report was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report. The Annual Report provided information on the aims and objectives of the Leaving Care Service, the service and facilities provided, the staffing, developments and issues for 2011.

The Pathways Team under the duties of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 promoted young people remaining in care until they were prepared and ready to leave, and where possible beyond the age of 18. Once young people had left care, the service would actively support young people to lead positive lives as independent citizens.

During 2011 the Pathways Team had been reasonably settled until December when one member of staff left, another gained a secondment opportunity and a third person commenced a full-time placement. Two Social Worker posts had been advertised and people had been recruited, however there would be a significant delay in the new staff members joining the team. Due to this an Agency Worker had been employed for the first time due to the level of work within the team. Details of the staff in post on 1 January 2012 were included in the submitted report.

The Pathways Team continued to provide lots of positive opportunities and raise young people's aspirations. The Team was working in partnership with Teesside University and two young people would start University this year. The Authority had a responsibility to provide a financial package and suitable accommodation and also helped students with fees, laptops and books.

It was highlighted that the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers had dropped dramatically. There were less young people coming into the country and staff were becoming more expert in age assessments.

Employment, education and training remained a high priority for the Pathways Team and a 'From Care 2 Work' Employability Scheme was now in place. One young person had completed a legal placement at Middlesbrough Council which had supported his decision to apply to study for a law degree at University.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided in relation to Middlesbrough's Looked After Children aged 16 plus and Care Leaver Service.

INTEGRATED YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICE (IYSS) SUPPORT TO CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER AND CARE LEAVERS

A report was provided to update the Corporate Parenting Board on the support provided by the IYSS Service to Looked After Children (LAC). Over the past year, IYSS had established itself as the main provider of open access services to all young people aged 13-19 in Middlesbrough. A key part of this delivery was the support offered to LAC and Care Leavers. Due to national changes through new government legislation and budgetary requirements the service was being reconfigured to focus primarily on vulnerable and targeted young people. Officers were considering the implications of the recent government publication entitled 'Positive for Youth' which was the new cross government policy for young people aged 13-19 (published in December 2011).

IYSS made dedicated provision for LAC and care leavers in Middlesbrough and this provision contributed directly to the outcomes of the Middlesbrough Children and Young People's Plan. IYSS aimed to support LAC and care leavers in their progression into adult life. A successful outcome was that LAC and care leavers should be engaged in either education, employment or training until the age of 19 and economically independent by the age of 21.

Over the last year the Service had been re-configured to be much more focussed. IYSS no longer had responsibility to provide information, advice and guidance for schools. However the IYSS was in the process of offering its services to schools but at a cost. Four locality teams were now in place across Middlesbrough and an additional team would be in-situ at the new 'My Place' from March 2012.

In the present climate, Middlesbrough was performing reasonably well both regionally and nationally in relation to the number of care leavers at age 19 who were in education, employment or training. Each LAC was offered Tier 1 (intensive) support from a Personal Adviser and was able to receive the highest frequency of quality intervention from the service. This equated to a minimum of three hours of interpersonal contacts or six interventions in any twelve-month period. In reality this was often exceeded in order to deal with the complex needs of LAC.

A partnership agreement existed between the IYSS and the Virtual School, which incorporated LAC and Care Leavers Services of Middlesbrough Council, and enabled dedicated and specialist Personal Adviser support to be delivered to LAC and Care Leavers as required.

Every young person in secondary education in Middlesbrough had a named Personal Adviser. Personal Advisers worked in individual schools, with an enhanced offer to LAC. A further Personal Adviser co-ordinated the work and acted as a link to the Education LAC Manager.

During the past year there had been a National Citizenship Service pilot scheme which was delivered locally and targeted Year 11 pupils. Middlesbrough would have 260 places on the scheme in the next year. During the current year, 145 young people had been recruited and 103 had graduated. It was highlighted that there had been some issues with this year's scheme, particularly with the residential opportunity offered. However the IYSS Manager confirmed that lessons had been learned and future residentials would be a much better experience for young people. The IYSS Manager emphasised that substantial Government funding had been made available for this scheme and it was vital that Middlesbrough made best use of this opportunity.

Specific Personal Adviser roles and responsibilities were detailed in the submitted report. The majority of Year 11 LAC had been seen at least once by their named Personal Adviser. With regard to LAC, IYSS was currently supporting Year 19 students (17), Year 10 students (17) and Year 11 students (16). There were also 41 LAC educated outside Middlesbrough with whom IYSS had regular contact and offered support.

IYSS worked closely with the Leaving Care Service and had 4 designated Personal Advisers who were co-located half a day a week with the team. Joint training and development activities continued for Personal Advisers and the Pathway Team. The benefits of this approach were reflected in the development of clear career progression plans for all young people. IYSS had recently started discussions with Teesside University with a view to increasing the number of LAC and leaving care young people going into higher education.

IYSS Personal Advisers had offered guidance to those on benefits, including young mums and those on sickness benefits to make them aware of their financial entitlement. Personal Advisers also supported unaccompanied asylum seekers who were receiving a service from Pathways.

One area of concern was the significant reduction of service provision for young people over the last 12 months due to the changing nature of how the former Connexions Service and Youth Services were delivered across England. In some areas this lack of provision was having a major impact on supporting young people from Middlesbrough who were in care or leaving care in other local authorities.

Negotiations were well advanced within the Tees Valley area to establish a protocol on cross border activities and support LAC and young people leaving care. Regionally and nationally there was not the same mechanism in place to establish effective cross border co-operation, particularly as some areas no longer had young people's service provision in place.

RECOMMENDED that:

1. the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided.
2. the IYSS Manager would advise the Chair on statistical information in relation to the number

of Year 11 Looked After Children who had been seen by their named Personal Adviser and also the number of times they had met.

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 10.3% increase between January 2011 (331) and December 2011 (365). The number had been consistently in the high 360s for the second half of 2011.

The rate of LAC per 10,000 under-18s increased from 103 to 107 in 2010/2011 compared with a national average of 59 and an average for Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours of 88. When weighted for relative deprivation levels, Middlesbrough's rate appeared broadly in line with the trend for its statistical neighbours.

It was also noted that young people placed within their own family and also those leaving custody now had to be recorded as Looked After Children, which effectively increased the numbers. Due to changes in legislation, families were also now entitled to be paid the foster carers' allowances which had also affected the budget.

The Deputy Director, Safeguarding, highlighted that the Quarter 3 budget report would show the effectiveness of the work of the Family Resource Team. Active interventions had prevented approximately one hundred children going into care over the last year.

The percentage of LAC who had three or more separate placements during the year reduced from 11.7% to 9.5% in 2010/2011. In quarter three of 2011/2012, the proportion stood at 9.0%, which was slightly higher than for the same period in 2010/2011 (8.2%).

The percentage of LAC living in the same placement for at least two years had improved in quarter 3 of 2011/2012 at 62%, which was better than the year end position for the past two financial years and broadly in line with statistical neighbour averages.

The percentage of LAC placed for adoption within 12 months of a plan being approved had improved significantly, rising from 77.3% at the end of 2010/2011 to 94.4% in quarter 3 of 2011/2012. This remained well above the available comparator averages for 2009/2010, which indicated a national average of 72.4% and a statistical neighbour average of 78.5%. It was noted that the cohort of children for this indicator was typically small and could vary significantly from year to year.

LAC achievement at Key Stage 2 in the 2011 test results appeared in the top quartile for both English and maths. Results for 2010 were affected by the fact that only a quarter of local primary schools administered the tests.

GCSE results for LAC appeared in the bottom quartile for 2011. The cohort size showed a significant change between years falling from 35 for 2010, to 20 for 2011.

Outcomes for care leavers were showing a decline year on year at the end of the 2010/2011 financial year. The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation had increased to 91% in quarter 3 of the current financial year, with just one young person deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation. The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training had declined further to 46%, representing five young people in a cohort of eleven.

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