

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 9 January 2019.

PRESENT: Councillors M Carr (Chair), J Brunton Dobson, A Hellaoui, L McGloin, C Rooney, Z Uddin and M Walters.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: A Ferguson - South Tees CCG.

OFFICIALS: M Bettencourt, B Bradshaw, J Bromiley, A Brown, A Coulson, M Hackett, C Lunn, T Parkinson, R Scott, P Stanyon Carr, H Watson and A Williams.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors J Sharrocks and J Walker.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no Declarations of Interest.

18/26 MINUTES - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - 7 NOVEMBER 2018

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board meeting held on 7 November 2018 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

18/27 SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 5 - ORDER OF BUSINESS

AGREED - in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 5, the Board agreed to vary the order of business as follows: 1, 2, 3, 7, 4, 5, 6 and 8.

18/28 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair read out the following statement to the Board and proposed that a vote be taken on the matter:

"I understand that there may be confidential information released as part of the next item, therefore under Paragraph 1 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, I feel it would be prudent to exclude any press and public from the meeting."

AGREED unanimously that the item be considered as confidential.

****The local press in attendance left the meeting at this point****

18/29 CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL PRESENTATION.

A presentation and interactive workshop was delivered by the Children in Care Council, which was very well received by all in attendance.

Members wished to formally record their thanks to the Children in Care Council for their attendance and valuable contribution to the meeting.

NOTED**18/30 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was proposed, seconded and agreed that a resolution be passed to re-open the meeting to the press and public.

AGREED that the exclusion of the press and public be lifted.

****The local press re-joined the meeting at this point****

18/31 BUSINESS CASE FOR THE SOUTH TEES MULTI AGENCY CHILDREN'S HUB

The Executive Director of Children's Services provided the Board with an update in relation to the establishment of a South Tees Multi Agency Children's Hub, which would operate across the Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland geographical areas.

It was explained that since the last Corporate Parenting Board meeting had taken place, two further meetings of the Strategic Board had been held with partner agencies, including Cleveland Police, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Middlesbrough Council and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. It was indicated that excellent progress regarding the development of the Hub had been attained, although further work was needed in relation to accommodation, longer term planning and broader implications.

An advertisement had been placed for the service management post, with a very positive response being received. Two final candidates had been identified and final interviews would be held on 18 January 2019. It was anticipated that the new operating model would be implemented in May or June 2019, slightly later than the earlier projection of April 2019. This was to take into account the notice period of the successful candidate.

In response to an enquiry regarding the location of the Children's Hub, Members heard that a suitable building had been identified on Daisy Lane, Overfields. It was explained that the size, availability of car parking and the IT links in particular were very good.

A number of work streams were currently being pursued in relation to:

- The overall design of the new operating model;
- The use of IT;
- Potential implications; and
- Human Resources.

It was reported that very positive progress had been achieved to date.

NOTED**18/32 PEER CHALLENGE REPORT FOR THE PATHWAYS LEAVING CARE SERVICE.**

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that, following the Pathways (Leaving Care) Team being the subject of a peer challenge in November 2018, feedback had now been received.

The Board was informed that the peer challenge was part of the North East region's 'sector-led improvement' initiative, which brought together teams of people, including an LGA Associate, to peer challenge one another. A request had been made for a peer challenge team to review the Pathways (Leaving Care) Team in Middlesbrough. It was felt that the process was especially demanding, but also very helpful. The Board had been provided with the completed overview report, together with an action plan that officers had prepared in response.

It was felt that the report was quite detailed, compiled from a very useful exercise from both a strategic management and frontline practice point of view. The staff, partners and foster carers had provided very good accounts to demonstrate the work undertaken.

Members were directed to page four of the report, second bullet point from the bottom, which posed the following question: *"Is there a more involved role for Elected Members through visits to homes, foster carers and for those living far from home. This will provide Elected Members with a direct opportunity to discharge their Corporate Parenting responsibility"*.

During discussion, it was explained to the Board that, so as not to pre-empt any preferred action, this matter had not been placed in the action plan, but could be added if required.

A Member made reference to previous activity that had been undertaken in terms of Members visiting children's homes and speaking to young people. It was felt that this needed to be revisited. Consideration was given to the involvement of Elected Members, from this Board, in future conversations with foster carers around the provision of help and support. It was felt that there was potential for Elected Members to become champions for specific homes in order to both encourage and facilitate relationship development. The Board agreed to work being undertaken to seek out appropriate mechanisms for future engagement work, for Elected Members to meet children, foster carers and visit residential and, potentially, individual homes. The issues around these varying approaches were acknowledged; it was important that engagement work was undertaken in an appropriate way.

A Member queried whether engagement work would be undertaken with adoptive parents, in addition to foster carers. In response, it was explained that the legislation was very different, and the level of engagement may also have been very different. Reference was made to Adoption Tees Valley and the post-adoption support work that was undertaken for the Local Authority. At the request of Members, the Director of Children's Care would liaise with Adoption Tees Valley in terms of ascertaining the potential for Elected Members to support this work.

The Board discussed the importance of training in ensuring that any Elected Members partaking in visitation activities were appropriately prepared. Reference was made to training undertaken within Local Authorities that had specific programmes in place, which included Elected Members visiting children's homes, with trained officers, and undertaking regulatory checks. There were some excellent practice models available around this. Members felt that it was important to seek out ways of working that balanced formal regulatory work, with establishing contact and engaging in more informal conversations.

The Board agreed to seek to progress the implications of this item and develop a programme of opportunities for corporate parents to meet with foster parents and children and, as part of the process, consider appropriate training and preparatory activities.

A Member made further reference to page four of the report, third bullet point from the bottom, and commented that as part of the Local Authority's social regeneration agenda, it was important to ensure that opportunities were being made available for care leavers and young people. It was felt that if the Local Authority demonstrated this to be taking place, then other businesses and partners would follow suit. Reference was made to wider activities that were on-going, which included the reinvigoration and relaunch of the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) with various sub-groups. One of the sub-groups was employment based and would look at opportunities for young people; the apprenticeship issue would be key. Members agreed that this particular bullet point presented a priority issue for the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Executive Director of Children's Services highlighted that the Peer Challenge activity had provided an excellent overview of the service, as well as sound preparatory opportunity because OFSTED, through focused visits, looked at care and leaver services.

AGREED:

- 1. That the Board would seek appropriate mechanisms to progress the implications of the item listed at the second bullet point from the bottom of page four of the report, and develop a programme of opportunities for corporate parents to meet with foster parents and children. As part of the process, appropriate training and preparatory activities would also be considered.**
- 2. That in relation to supporting adoptive parents, the Director of Children's Care would liaise with Adoption Tees Valley to ascertain potential opportunities for Elected Members to become involved in this work.**
- 3. That the matter raised at the third bullet point from the bottom of page four of the report be considered a priority for the Board.**

The Executive Director of Children's Services explained to the Board that the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the LAC (Looked After Children) Sufficiency Strategy were key documents for Children's Services.

Essentially, the LAC Sufficiency Strategy provided an overview of the types and array of placements that were available to meet the needs of children entering the care system. It was explained that, in the longer term, the two documents would be amalgamated to form one single document.

Reference was made to section four of the LAC Sufficiency Strategy (Current Position and Needs Analysis in the Middlesbrough Placement Sufficiency Assessment). The Board was advised that some of the data presented in the submitted document would be updated in the near future. The document would be re-circulated via e-mail once this had been actioned. Similarly, following the submission of a national return in December 2018, the performance section within the Corporate Parenting Strategy would also be updated to ensure that it too was current, and subsequently circulated via e-mail to Members.

Further reference was made to the re-launch of the MALAP, which was felt to be a significant step and one that would drive the Corporate Parenting Strategy forward. It was indicated that the action plan, which would identify how the MALAP would drive this agenda forward, would be completed accordingly.

It was explained that once the performance section of the document had been updated and the action plan prepared, the completed Corporate Parenting Strategy would be reviewed on an annual basis and updated with performance data and action plans as required. It was highlighted that this Board had a key role in receiving performance updates in the future around how, through the MALAP, the strategy was being delivered. Work was on-going, but excellent progress had been attained to date. It was agreed that the finalised versions of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and the LAC Sufficiency Strategy would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Director of Education and the Virtual School Head raised a discussion point regarding corporate parenting responsibility and what this meant for the Local Authority. Reference was made to page 28 of the report and the interpretation of the wording around the priorities for corporate parents. Mention was made of work being carried out by the Department for Education and the type of prioritising for Looked After Children by different Government departments. It was felt that there was opportunity for this to be explored locally through the MALAP, i.e. how the Local Authority and its partners could make a pledge for Looked After Children and care leavers in Middlesbrough.

The Director of Children's Care explained that activity undertaken in 2016 had resulted in a pledge from each directorate, with some very interesting suggestions being made. This could be re-visited as part of a wider pledge. A Member commented that this would align especially well with the social regeneration agenda, which would cross all of the Council's departments, and suggested that all Elected Members be provided with an opportunity for refresher training. It was agreed that the Director of Children's Care would follow this up with Democratic Services.

The Board agreed that the strategic document be submitted to the MALAP in draft format, and that further work be undertaken in respect of the action plan.

AGREED:

- 1. That section four of the LAC Sufficiency Strategy (Current Position and Needs Analysis in the Middlesbrough Placement Sufficiency Assessment) be updated as advised, and circulated via e-mail to Members.**
- 2. That the performance section of the Corporate Parenting Strategy be updated as advised, and circulated via e-mail to Members.**
- 3. That the finalised Corporate Parenting Strategy and LAC Sufficiency Strategy be forwarded to the next scheduled Board meeting (13 March 2019) for**

- consideration.
4. That the Director of Children's Care would liaise with Democratic Services to establish a training/briefing session for all Elected Members, in respect of corporate parenting responsibility.
 5. That the Corporate Parenting Strategy document be submitted to the MALAP in draft format, and that further work be undertaken in respect of the action plan.

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ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.Fostering Campaign - Update

The Director of Children's Care tabled a document for Members' perusal, which detailed the latest data set in respect of the Local Authority's fostering numbers.

The information evidenced a significant rise in enquiries that had been received as a result of the new fostering campaign, which had been undertaken with colleagues from Marketing and Communications. As an example, the average number of enquiries for the months of 2017 was between two and ten, the top being 19. However, for the month of August 2018, 53 enquiries had been received, with the statistics continuing to remain in double figures since that time.

There were currently 15 active assessments and, until all of those assessments had been approved, which did take time, a demonstrated increase in actual recruited foster carers could not be shown. However, the early indications in terms of increasing interest were especially positive.

NOTEDNewspaper Article - Rise in Care Statistics and the Impact upon Local Authorities

The Chair tabled a national newspaper article, which detailed the rise in the number of children being taken into care, and the impact upon Local Authority budgets. It was explained that although no specific reference to Middlesbrough had been made, the content of the article was pertinent to the area. In summary, the rise in children being taken into care had pushed 88% of Councils over budget, with Local Authorities overspending on Children's Services by an estimated £807m in 2017-2018.

NOTED