

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 7 July 2015 in Committee Room 6,
Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30pm

Part I

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor P. Smith (in the Chair)	Silksworth Ward
Councillor D. Dixon	St. Chad's Ward
Councillor L. Farthing	Washington South Ward
Councillor D. MacKnight	Castle Ward
Councillor C. Marshall	Doxford Ward
Councillor P. Stewart	Redhill Ward

Young People

Kieran Boyce
Saul Cranson
Kirk Hirst
Fay Wearmouth

Also in Attendance

Councillor R. Davison	Redhill Ward
-----------------------	--------------

All Supporting Officers

Neil Revely	Executive Director of People Services
Fiona Brown	Chief Operating Officer, People Services
Martin Birch	Head of Looked After Children, People Services
Dawn Shearsmith	Sunderland Virtual School
Jane Wheeler	Participation and Engagement Lead, People Services
Alan Caddick	Head of Housing Support and Community Living, People Services
Julie Lynn	Performance and Improvement Lead

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Dan Bensley, Geraldine Dellet, Billy Hardy and George Mason.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2015 be agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

(i) Children's Homes Regulatory Visits

The Chair referred to the discussion at the last meeting and reported that the new Head of Looked After Children, Martin Birch, had prepared a report for today's agenda in relation to the new Regulations in place for the monitoring visits and the alignment of Members to linked establishments.

Martin Birch circulated his report in relation to Children's Home Regulatory Visits explaining that Members requested to be more involved in the visits and highlighted the following options:-

- To continue the current approach of a reciprocal arrangement of monitoring with a neighbouring authority. This had worked well for the other authority but for Sunderland a more robust reporting mechanism was required.
- To commission an independent service to deliver the visits, with a robust reporting mechanism. This option had been explored before and had not worked well however if this option was pursued on this occasion more robust arrangements and the format of the visits would need to be implemented.
- To commission an in house service using the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with a robust reporting mechanism following guidance issued from the Department for Education. It was explained that every child in care had an assigned IRO and it would be appropriate for the IROs to undertake these visits.

Martin suggested that constructive Member involvement in the monitoring visits could be by attending the assigned homes on a quarterly basis and undertake the Regulation 45 process, examining the standards of care, with each manager in order to produce the Ofsted report.

Councillor Farthing recalled that in the past the monitoring visits undertaken similar to the proposals at option 3 however due to staff shortages and illness a decision had been taken to commence the reciprocal arrangements with the neighbouring authority. She advised that an examination of the reciprocal service should be undertaken as the neighbouring authority was contracted to monitor Sunderland's establishments. She added that either option of using an independent service or an in-house service would be acceptable as long as more than one person was undertaking the monitoring visit. It was essential that the visits resume as quickly as possible to scrutinise the standards of accommodation and see how the children feel living in those homes.

Councillor MacKnight requested that further information be provided in relation to exploring the option for an independent service and Martin advised that he would provide the information at the next meeting of the Board.

The Chair reported that it was important to resume Members' Monitoring visits in their roles of Corporate Parents and this should be communicated in order to encourage full Member involvement across the Council.

Having given consideration to the report, the Board:-

2. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) option three, to commission an in house service using the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with a robust reporting mechanism with Member involvement and following guidance issued from the Department for Education, be pursued with immediate effect;
- (ii) this arrangement be monitored and its effectiveness reported back to the Board for further consideration; and
- (iii) further information be provided on the options to the next meeting of the Board.

(ii) "Next Steps" Accommodation Provision

Alan Caddick referred to the discussion at the last meeting in relation to accommodation provision and circulated a report on an overview of the accommodation needs and options available for those young people in 'Next Steps' and for those young people who might be vulnerable and in need of support. He highlighted the accommodation options and trainer flats across the city. He added that there was also a range of supported lodgings to provide accommodation for 16 -21 year olds and new providers were being recruited to prevent the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and to give the young people a more positive environment.

Board Members were advised that a pathway plan was put in place in consultation with the young person to support them and prepare them for the next stage of independence.

Alan drew attention to the current range of commissioned accommodation available for young people and young parents which included:-

- An Immediate Access Service – to assess a young person’s housing related support needs in order to stabilise the immediate housing crisis through the provision of short-term accommodation and support. This would usually be for 12 weeks prior to being moved into more settled accommodation.
- Accommodation Based Housing Related Support – where young people receive support to acquire practical, daily life knowledge and skills to live independently and access mainstream services.
- Floating Support – to support young people to successfully maintain independent living. It is used to prepare the young people for independent living and prevent breakdowns in tenancies or young people losing their homes.
- In addition there were a number of units of non-commissioned accommodation at the YMCA and Forever Care (East).

The Board was then advised that the future actions would include:-

- Developing an understanding of the needs of young people in terms of ‘next steps’;
- Ensure robust ‘Pathway Plans’ were in place for young people to inform future accommodation and support needs;
- Further develop the Housing Related Support Gateway as a means of managing the accommodation flows;
- Ensuring that there was excellent quality accommodation aligned with excellent and appropriate levels of support;
- Work with young people to understand their needs better and actively involve them in developing future accommodation options;
- Ensure that all young people complete exit interviews at the end of a placement;
- Develop a well-informed Accommodation Strategy for children and young people to inform future commissioning intentions; and
- Provide regular updates to the Corporate Parenting Board on progress, particularly on outcomes achieved for young people.

Councillor MacKnight enquired whether ‘Bed and Breakfast’ properties were being used for emergency accommodation needs. Alan explained that these types of property were used in homelessness cases but they were not used when young people were involved and referred to the range of provision available. Councillor Farthing reported that most of the accommodation providers had emergency beds available with or without food.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

3. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be received and noted;
- (ii) the future actions be noted and regular updates to the Corporate Parenting Board be made on progress, particularly on outcomes achieved for young people.

At this juncture, Councillor Smith advised that there would be a change in the order of business and to allow Item 6 to be considered first.

Management of Data Accuracy

Julie Lynn, Performance and Improvement Lead gave a verbal report to the Board following the concerns raised at the last meeting of the Board in relation to the accuracy of the definitive numbers of looked after children and the processes in place to validate the data held. She explained that the social workers and support staff used a reporting tool for the case work. This was kept up to date and included the full details of all looked after children numbers, placements, plans, reviews and health reports. She added that the information allowed managers to utilise the data and also for staff supervision.

The Board was advised that the data was validated and cross referenced. A weekly report was presented to Business Managers for examination and any data issues were identified. All the plans in place were triangulated to give an accurate date when issues required to be reported upon and any issues would be immediately acted upon. The information was also used to look at trending data in order to plan services.

Julie assured the Board that case file audits were also undertaken to ensure accuracy of recording.

Councillor Farthing enquired whether the data system highlighted when a review was appropriate. She referred to a recent fostering meeting where the child had only had one visit from the social worker and asked how frequent the visits should be for fostered children. Martin Birch explained that he expected that a social worker should visit every three months and this process would be monitored by a Team Manager to ensure it was being undertaken. Julie added that the data report highlighted when the statutory visits were due and if a review had not been entered onto the system.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:-

4. RESOLVED that the information be received and noted.

Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2015/2016

The Board was referred to the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan for 2015/2016. Members were invited to suggest issues that they would like the Board to discuss and include on the Work Plan.

Dawn Shearsmith drew attention to the entry on the plan for September 2015 relating to Education Attainment and NEETs and reported that this would normally be reported annually in December in order to give sufficient time to assimilate the exam results from all the schools and regional/national comparators. She explained that she would not receive all the GCSE results until the end of September. Councillor Stewart added that appeals might also be submitted by schools and agreed that it would be difficult to report the regional results. He suggested that an interim report be prepared for September to be followed up by a more detailed report once all the results had been assimilated.

5. RESOLVED that the work plan for 2015/2016 be noted.

Sunderland Looked After Children's Pledges

Jane Wheeler, Participation and Engagement Lead, People Services circulated an update report following on from the last Board on the Pledges which had been reviewed and agreed by the Change Council, the People Services Directorate and the Corporate Parenting Board. She reported that Councillors had been contacted and a number had agreed to be assigned to the pledges and the buddy proposals.

The Board was advised that each pledge would be owned by the children in care, who would hold the responsibility of a critical friend and the finalised assignments to the Pledges were as follows:-

- Pledge 1: "If possible I want to live with my own family or relatives"- owned by Saul. The buddy proposed was Neil Revely, Executive Director, People Service and the Corporate Parent was Councillor Farthing;
- Pledge 2: "If I need to come into care we will make sure that you are safe and appropriately cared for" - owned by Daniel Bensley. The buddy proposed was Jim Stewart, IRO Manager and the Corporate Parent was Councillor Stewart;
- Pledge 3: "I feel that I am being listened to" - owned by Geraldine Dellet. The buddy proposed was Louise Hill, Interim Head of Safeguarding and the Corporate Parent was Councillor Atkinson;
- Pledge 4: "I want to get a good education and enjoy my free time" - owned by George Mason. The buddy proposed was Dawn Shearsmith, Virtual Head and the Corporate Parent was Councillor P. Smith;
- Pledge 5: "I want to keep fit and healthy" - owned by Billy Hardy. The buddy proposed was Deanna Lagan, Head of Safeguarding CCG and the Corporate Parent was Councillor D. Dixon; and
- Pledge 6: "I don't want to leave care until I'm ready" - owned by Kieran Boyce. The buddy proposed was Sheila Lough, Strategic Service Manager and the Corporate Parent was Councillor Marshall.

Jane informed the Board that the next steps were to consider:-

- Communicating the Pledge to children, young people, foster carer's, staff and others,
- How the young people want to take their Pledges forward with their buddies, and
- How often the Pledges would be reviewed at the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Chair suggested that the Pledges should be reviewed at every Board meeting and that Members identify a few dates when they are available to meet. She added that the young people could then choose the location and date that was most convenient. The young people present at the meeting indicated that they would prefer to meet in the Civic Centre.

Jane reported that the next meeting of the Change Council would take place in the first week of September and it was the intention to hold workshops prior to that meeting. It was currently arranged to be held in the City Library however it could be relocated to the Civic Centre for convenience. Councillor Marshall advised that she would be away on holiday that week and Jane agreed to rearrange her Pledge meeting for her return.

Alan Caddick advised that the Pledges also crossed over with some of the intentions of the Accommodation Pathway Plan and some of the other Council activities such as 'Active Sunderland' and the Wellness Service could also help and support some of these Pledges.

Jane informed the Board that she would work with the Council's Communications Team in relation to communicating the messages of the Pledges to the wider audience.

6. RESOLVED that the report be noted and the actions agreed be approved.

Change Council Update and Competition

Jane Wheeler, Participation and Engagement Lead and Lucy Pearson, Operational Manager circulated a report of the Change Council at the meeting to provide an update on their work.

Jane reported that the Change Council was working with the Council's Communications Team on rebranding their logo and the proposals would be brought to a future Board meeting to review.

Saul Cranson then presented the ideas of the Change Council to encourage more young people to become part of their group which involved:-

- A recruitment day at Moorhouse Adventure Centre with team building and problem solving activities,

- A recruitment day at one of the leisure centres with free day passes for the looked after children. Members of the Change Council would be present to recruit other young people,
- A leaflet designed by the Change Council was being developed and would be circulated to all looked after children, and
- Examining the use of rewards and incentives to attend meetings and other activities for the Change Council. The rewards suggested were a free pass to the gym, driving lessons or cinema vouchers.

Kieran Boyce then highlighted that he had attended a DMT meeting with Saul on 29 June 2015 and the Change Council's proposal to change its name. He advised that it would now be known as 'Next Steps.'

Saul then reported that they had been working with Headliners, an organisation funded through the Big Lottery Fund, to produce a DVD for use by social workers, foster carers and other professionals working with looked after children. He added that this would show what young people really wanted and needed. Once completed a special screening of the DVD would be arranged.

Kieran reported that he and other Change Council members had been involved in a programme, 'Step up to Social Work.' He advised that this included interviewing social worker candidates and they had really enjoyed being part of the process.

The Board was then advised of the development of an easy to use i-phone/Android smartphone application, 'MOMO.' Saul explained that this tool would encourage engagement with the young people, help them to prepare for meetings, to send information to their social workers and it could be used highlight competitions.

The Chair having thanked the young people, on behalf of the Board, for their informative presentation, it was:-

7. RESOLVED that the information be received and noted.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

At the instance of the Chair, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006 the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered to involve a likely disclosure of information relating to an individual, or information which was likely to reveal the identity of an individual (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1 and 2).

(Signed) P. SMITH,
Chairman.

Note:-

The above minutes relate only to items considered during the time which the meeting was open to the public.

Additional minutes in respect of other items are included in Part II.

