

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 12 October 2015 in Committee Room 2,
Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30pm

Part I

Present:

Members of the Board

Councillor P. Smith (in the Chair)	Silksworth Ward
Councillor G. Howe	Fulwell Ward
Councillor D. MacKnight	Castle Ward
Councillor L. Farthing	Washington South Ward
Councillor C. Marshall	Doxford Ward

Young People

Kieran Boyce
Saul Cranson
Billy Hardy

Also in Attendance

Councillor R. Davison	Redhill Ward
Councillor A. Lawson	Shiney Row Ward
Councillor L. Williams	Washington Central Ward

All Supporting Officers

Fiona Brown	Chief Operating Officer, People Services
Steve Walker	Director of Children's Services
Sharon Willis	Operational Manager, Care Homes
Anne Brock	Sunderland CCG
Jane Wheeler	Participation & Engagement Lead
Martin Birch	Head of Looked After Children, People Services
Dawn Shearsmith	Sunderland Virtual School
Jane Wheeler	Participation and Engagement Lead, People Services
Sheila Lough	Strategic Service Manager

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor P Stewart, Councillor Beck, Cllr Howe, Neil Revely, Kirk Hirst and Geraldine Dellat.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2015 be agreed as a correct record.

Matters Arising from the Minutes

(i) Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2015/2015

Councillor Farthing advised that there was a proposal for Members to receive training on the Work Plan, particularly in line with the various regulations. She acknowledged a glossary of terms had been provided but questioned if there was a need to look at specialised safeguarding training. Steve Walker advised that he believed there was a need to look at training requirements more widely for all members across the organisation.

2. RESOLVED that the proposal for training plans to be collated by Martin Birch and Steve Walker, within the next two weeks, be noted.

(ii) Change Council Update

Fiona Brown advised that the Delegated Decision to use the i-phone/Android smart phone application, "MOMO", had been actioned.

3. RESOLVED that the delegated decision to use the application MOMO was noted.

Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2015/2016

Fiona Brown advised that the Corporation Parenting Board Work Plan now included the time expectation for the completion of actions.

Consideration having been given to the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2015/2016, it was:

4. RESOLVED that the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan 2015/2016 be received and noted.

Review of Accommodation

Martin Birch submitted a report which examined the cohort of young people who had recently left the care of Sunderland City Council to ensure that they have moved into

suitable accommodation, with the right support to help them into independence. Moreover to enable members to have an overview of those young people who are NEET / EAT

Martin advised that a review of accommodation had been undertaken following concerns raised during the recent Ofsted Inspection, in terms of the accommodation available to care leavers and the service that they received from the Council. Concerns were also related to the sufficiency of suitable accommodation and the numbers of care leavers accessing Education, Employment or Training.

Martin advised that work had been on-going throughout the summer period and, although aware there were still issues to be resolved, there was an overall improving picture. Accommodation for five to six individuals, within the 16 to 18 years age group, will shortly be available at Elwin and consideration was also being given to change the statement of purpose for one of the current children's homes, to provide six beds for children, rather than its current emergency bed arrangement.

Martin advised that the Council had invested heavily in training and guidance and procedures for all staff relating to the leaving care task, in order to provide the best possible service to our young people.

Martin explained that there were two main performance indicators, accommodation and NEET. In order to properly understand the outcome for our care leavers an audit was undertaken of the last 10 young people who had left care at 18, who continued to be our responsibility as "former relevant" young persons. The outcome of the audit ascertained that 100% of young people were currently placed within "suitable accommodation" and 7 out of the 10 individuals identified were either due to commence college or had continued to attend 6th Form College.

Martin reiterated that it was an improving picture but there was still progress to be made.

Councillor Smith noted that previous proposals included Alan Caddick attending a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board to detail long term options. Fiona Brown advised that this was planned for February 2016.

Councillor Lawson stated that she was pleased to learn of the improvements but questioned the terminology used, "suitable accommodation", as during the last inspection a high proportion of young people felt the accommodation was not suitable.

Councillor Farthing reported that she was pleased with the feedback provided in relation to the identification of young people in continuing education but would be more assured if the full statistical data was provided, rather than a sample.

Councillor Farthing noted that Universal Credits would be implemented in November 2015 and highlighted that there would be a need to ensure young people leaving care had the necessary documentation to take this forward.

Councillor Howe questioned what constituted “suitable accommodation” Steve Walker advised that there was a clear legal definition of what was unsuitable, for example prisons, bed and breakfast establishments and what they referred to as homes with multiple occupancies, which was not sub divided. Outside of these examples everything else was deemed “suitable accommodation” but he believed it was important to have a range of accommodation available, to meet the needs of young people.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:

5. RESOLVED that:

(i) The report be received and noted.

Looked After Children Pledge

Jane Wheeler submitted the Looked After Children Pledge report and advised that in their role as corporate parents, members need to be updated on the progress of the pledge to all looked after children and young people in Sunderland.

Jane advised that the young people had now been matched, and met, their “buddies”, during a Workshop held in September 2015. The Workshop was held to look at what the pledges meant and each group had agreed to meet up through the year to work on their pledge, with the young people providing a critical eye.

Jane advised that following the workshops it had been agreed that 2 pledges would be reviewed at each Corporate Parenting Board, on a rotational basis, commencing February 2016. A representative from Communications would also be attending the next Change Council meeting to look at how to progress with communicating this message to all.

Councillor Smith enquired how the young people had found the Workshop and was informed they had found it good.

Steve Walker enquired if clear information was provided to the young people about what they could do if they found the pledges were not being met. The young people representatives confirmed that this was uncertain but the next stage would look at this and how issues were progressed. Steve Walker requested that the young people were advised that if they had any issues, with either their Social Worker or Council, they could complain directly to him.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Children's Homes Regulatory Visits

Martin Birch advised that the purpose of the Children's Home Regulatory Visits report was to inform Members of the plans for the quarterly Regulation 44 visits by Members and Officers.

Martin explained that five homes had been identified; two within North area, one in the East area and two in Coalfields. He advised that the initial proposal was to ascertain whether Members within these areas would like to undertake Regulation 44 visits.

Councillor Farthing stated that she would like to be involved in Regulation 44 visits but none of the homes identified were within the Washington area. Following the Ofsted Inspection she believed Members should be visiting the establishments more frequently and she felt there was a need to reinstate this arrangement.

Councillor Farthing questioned young people's views on the arrangements and whether consideration had been given for young people to visit the establishments. She highlighted that historically there was an Assessment Centre, where young people entering the system had an opportunity to meet and get to know each other. Jane Wheeler advised that consultation had been undertaken and this had not been looked upon favourable in terms of confidentiality.

Martin Birch explained that young people did not always like a lot of visitors within their home environment.

Members of the Board expressed an interest in undertaking Regulation 44 visits but requested that training be made available and sufficient notice provided. Members felt that the opportunity to make visits should be extended beyond the membership of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Sharon Willis advised that all Members were welcome to visit children's homes but she would recommend that consideration was given in relation to the turn-over of visitors.

Steve Walker proposed a one page descriptor for each establishment was written to assist Members. Martin Birch advised that each home had a Statement of Purpose which could be provided at the next meeting.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:

7. RESOLVED that:
 - (i) the report be received and noted;
 - (ii) expressions of interest to undertake Regulation 44 visits be extended to all Council Members; and
 - (iii) the Statement of Purpose for each establishment be circulated at the next meeting.

Change Council Update

Saul Cranson, Kieran Boyce and Billy Hardy provided a Change Council Update, detailing the working undertaken on:

The Pledges:

An initial Workshop had been held to enable the young people and buddies to meet. All involved enjoyed the meeting and most the group had already arranged their first meeting.

Re-branding of Change Council:

The Change Council believed there was a need for a new identity, to help establish themselves with other children and young people who were in care or leaving care. It was also felt re-branding would help re-launch the group and hopefully recruit more members.

Welcome packs for young people coming into care:

As the current Welcome Packs were developed five years ago they were now outdated and had not been used for a period of time. The Change Council had looked at the content of the packs and agreed, as a group, that they would not read the content.

Jane Wheeler had showed members from the Change Council the virtual city on "Who Cares Trust" and members questioned whether it would be possible to implement something similar, with a focus of a virtual welcome pack. The representatives from the Change Council shared that they were very excited about this idea but were aware that there would be a cost implication.

Kieran advised that, in the short term, he had proposed an A-Z of coming into care for young people.

Health passport

The Change Council had been approached in relation to their health passport. This was something young people received when leaving care. The Change council looked at the passport information provided and confirmed that they were quite happy with most of the content but put forward some suggestions for change, especially around wording.

The Change Council also looked at a survey that health had produced, to gain an insight into young people's experiences during their health reviews.

Residential forum to be held:

Billy advised that he and Geraldine were to represent Sunderland Young People in Care during a residential, at the end of October 2015. The aim of the residential was for young people from across the north east region to work together to create different ways of showing how the leaving care system could be changed for the better. The work produced during the residential would be used for a conference for decisions makers, due to be held in the spring.

Councillor Smith invited questions.

Councillor Farthing requested further detail on the welcome pack and possible App. Jane Wheeler advised that that App would have a financial implication but she was aware that partners may wish to be involved, similarly to the Who Cares Trust virtual world.

Jane acknowledged that there was information young people needed to know and Kieran Boyce's suggestion of an A-Z was a nice touch.

Steve Walker agreed that the App would be worth while discussing within EMT, especially in terms of the local university and students looking for a project towards their courses.

8. RESOLVED that the information provided be received and noted.

Children's Homes: Child and Young People (2015) Sunderland

Sharron Williams submitted the Children's Homes: Child and Young People (2015) Sunderland. She advised that from 9th February to 4th May 2015 Ofsted carried out an online questionnaire, nationally, with children and young people placed in children's homes. Ofsted sought the views of users and key stakeholders in Sunderland Children's Services and, following the recent inspection, had circulated the response detail.

Sharon shared that overall the responses were quite positive but advised that the overall responses had been amalgamated and it would have been informative to receive Sunderland's responses separately. She advised that when the inspectors met with individual registered managers they provided more detailed feedback.

Sharon explained that there was no feedback from parents/carers included within the data and when questioned, Ofsted had stated that this was because of the poor response but she planned to highlight how important this information was.

Sharon reported that School Improvement Partners were invited to complete the questionnaire.

Councillor Smith requested and received confirmation there were no questions.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:

9. RESOLVED that the report provided be received and noted.

Performance Report Update

Martin Birch advised that the attachment to the report had been circulated in error.

Martin Birch submitted the Performance Report Update and advised the purpose of the report was to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an updated position on performance information for Looked After Children in Sunderland. He highlighted that the Corporate Parenting responsibility was shared by the Council as a whole. All members, not just those with an interest in Children's Services, were "Corporate Parents".

Martin reported that the number of Looked After Children had increased during the period April – June 2015, when compared to the end of March 2015. This increase was an expected outcome, following the Ofsted inspection, activity to address drift and delay and embedding the process of the Section 20 Panel. Robust systems were being implemented to keep track of the children subject to Section 20, previously an area which resulted in delayed planning for children and young people.

An External Placement Panel was being implemented to scrutinise all placements outside of the LA boundary, to ensure children and young people were accommodated correctly.

The number of beds within internal residential provisions was to be extended, together with the number of external providers within Sunderland. This would enable some young people to be returned from external provision based outside of the LA boundary, where appropriate.

Martin highlighted that plans for Elwin had already been discussed within the meeting for leaving care accommodation.

Councillor Farthing stated that she was aware that other local authorities tried not to get children and young people accommodated under section 20 and questioned why there were so many in Sunderland in comparison. Steve Walker advised that this was due to two elements. The recent increase was because a proportion of children and young people who should have been LAC were now accommodated. He explained that a frequent issue within services experiencing difficulties was that care plans were not fully drawn up, to enable children to move on and this was an issue which needed to be addressed as a matter of urgency. Some children were in voluntary looked after arrangements, whereby parents continued to have responsibility for the child, but the concern was those individuals looking after the child had no decision making arrangements. Steve advised that, following these issues being addressed, there should be a reduction in numbers.

Steve Walker explained that it was not always possible to prevent children becoming LAC, but it was possible to stop them from becoming long term LAC.

Kieran Boyce, Kaul Cranson and Billy Hardy withdrew from the meeting.

Fiona Brown advised that in terms of future performance the proposal was to bring this data to the Corporate Parenting Board. Steve Walker explained that as part of the requirements the Intervention Board had developed data sets, including prevention, early intervention and outcomes.

Martin Birch circulated copies of the following documents at the meeting:

- Sunderland Children's Services Improvement Board Performance Dataset (Reporting period: August 2015)
- Sunderland Children's Services Learning Improvement Plan 2015-16

Steve Walker advised that as part of the work going forward, in response to the recent Ofsted Inspection, the local authority would be provided with a report detailing Ofsted recommendations and the Council would need to set out how they would be addressing issues. The Learning Improvement Plan was Sunderland's response to the recommendations and detailed what was being done to address the recommendations.

Steve Walker advised that an Improvement Board had been established and would be chaired by Nick Whitfield. The membership of the Board would be wide, including elected members, paid services representation and partners. The Improvement Plan had been signed off by the Board and the proposal was to implement monthly reporting for the next one year period.

Steve Walker advised that a number of actions were 'RAG' rated Amber as there had been no opportunity to consult with partners as widely as was wanted, to provide agreed responses. He acknowledged that it was a challenging plan with a lot of work to be undertaken but felt Sunderland were well on in the process. Scrutiny would be provided by both the Board and the Corporate Parenting Board.

Councillor Farthing acknowledged the task of scrutiny was massive and, although she was uncertain how this would be managed, believed the Corporate Parenting Board need to be involved. There was a substantial amount of work to be undertaken in all areas and Councillor Farthing reiterated that this was a massive task to be undertaken. She stated that she believed a key issue was ensuring Social Workers were doing what they were paid to do and doing their role to a high standard. Councillor Farthing stated that this was something which needed to be monitored.

Steve Walker advised that he had not had an opportunity to meet with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee but believed the key areas were recruitment and retention, quality assurance issues and the current arrangements within MASH. He advised that a further area which he felt would be beneficial to consider was private fostering, as he believed the Scrutiny Committee could help raise the profile of this. Steve explained that very often individuals did not realise that if they looked after a child for a period of weeks they should be informing the Local Authority.

Consideration having been given to the report, it was:

10. RESOLVED that the report provided be received and noted.

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

At the instance of the Chair, it was:-

11. 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.