

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 27 October 2009 in
Committee Room No. 1, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor P. Smith (Chair)
Councillor E. Ball
Councillor A. Hall
Councillor Paul Maddison
Councillor Trueman
Councillor Walker
Councillor L. Walton
Councillor D. Wilson

Members of the Board

Executive Member, Children and Learning City
Ryhope
Coalfield
Opposition St Michael's
Executive Member, Sustainable Communities
Washington North
Opposition St Peter's
Castle

Part I

Also in attendance:

Keith Moore
Nick Murphy
Jane Hedley
John Arthurs
Alyson Boucher
Steve Robinson

All Supporting Officers

Deputy Director of Children's Services
Services for Looked After Children Manager
Senior Solicitor
Development Manager for Looked After Children
Young People's Officer
Assistant Leaving Care Worker

Young People

Katie Olanan
Shannon Arnold
Natalie Carroll
Kallam Addison
Konner Addison
Kirstyn Wood
Daniel Bensley

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gofton and N. Wright.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of Meeting held on 14 July 2009

7. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2009 be agreed as a correct record.

Councillor P. Smith in referring to the minutes enquired whether Ken O'Neil had been invited to a meeting of the Change Council to translate the percentages contained within the Performance Report into actual numbers for the benefit of young people and to make the data more understandable.

In response John Arthurs, Development Manager for Looked After Children stated that discussions had taken place with Ken O'Neil regarding altering the format of the Performance Report to make it more understandable and that Ken had agreed to adapt the style of future reports.

Children Looked After – Performance Report

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report providing Board Members with information about performance indicators and targets for Looked After Children.

Nick Murphy, Services for Looked After Children Manager introduced the report stating that comparisons with other Councils were included within the report and that Sunderland's ranking was average compared with its peers.

It was reported that all children under the age of 10 were in family placements and that figures were stable.

Attention was then drawn to each national indicator in turn and a description of performance was provided. These included updates on placement stability, timeliness of reviews of Looked After Children, Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training at the age of 19, Children Missing from Care, Children subject to Private Fostering, Participation of Looked After Children in Reviews and Percentage of Children adopted.

Councillor P. Smith requested clarification regarding NI 71 – Children Missing from Care. In response, the Services for Looked After Children Manager explained that this was a new indicator and that the DCSF had supplied the Council with a self-assessment framework to use when dealing with issues of children missing from home and care. This was about keeping track of numbers and being assured that the figures are correct.

Councillor P. Smith in referring to the table detailing Children Looked After and Care Leavers Performance against BVPI and PAF indicators stated that she would like some further information on the performance indicators that had not been reached i.e. those identified with an X. The Services for Looked After Children Manager then provided an explanation for each of the indicator descriptions where performance had not been met.

Upon consideration, it was:-

8. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Link to Work Programme – Corporate Parenting: Safeguarding

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a quarterly report on Young People's access to Independent Advocacy.

John Arthurs, Development Manager for Looked After Children outlined the report and informed the Board that Independent Advocacy for looked after young people, care leavers and other users of Children's Services during 2008-2009 had been provided under a contract with Action for Children.

Members were informed that last year there had been a considerably high take-up of the Advocacy Service compared to only three young people accessing the Service this year. Having researched this it would appear that young people would rather seek support from the Young People's Officer than go to the Advocacy Service.

Five young people had approached the Young People's Officer for support with representations but did not wish to be referred to the service given that their queries were relatively straightforward.

Furthermore, two young people had reportedly made representations directly to the Children's Complaints Service but neither wished to be referred to the Advocacy Service.

In relation to young people with Learning Disabilities, Members were informed that Action for Children had commenced a pilot programme in consultation with Services for Disabled Children to provide direct outreach to young people with learning disabilities. Two young people currently using the Independent Advocacy Service who have disabilities had taken up the Service through this initiative. As this was an area of work which was poorly represented nationally it was hoped that the model introduced at Sunderland could be seen as a model of good practice.

The Board were advised that the current contract extension expires in March 2010 and that work has commenced on procurement for the provision of service beyond this date. The Development Manager for Looked After Children explained that the Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit had been invited to consider joining a regionally commissioned service led by Middlesbrough Council. However it was decided not to take this up as the interests of Sunderland's young people were considered to be better served in Sunderland.

Upon consideration, it was:-

9. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the continued development of the Service and the arrangements for re-commissioning the contract be noted; and
- (ii) further quarterly reports to be received.

Young People in Care Changing Lives

The Change Council submitted a report providing Board Members with an update on the work of the Change Council since the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Shannon Arnold, Natalie Carroll and Konner Addison jointly presented the report. In doing so they informed Members that the next issue of Change News was almost complete.

In relation to training, Members were advised that young people were currently taking part in a Total Respect Course. What's more, some young people had taken part in delivering a training course at Leechmere Training Centre on sexual health needs. Arrangements were in place for some young people to deliver training to professionals outside Sunderland and some future training on the Fostering Network was planned to take place in November 2009 and February 2010.

It was explained to the Board that the Family Justice Council had invited the young people to carry out some training with Judges, Barristers, Solicitors and Magistrates on how young people feel when they attend Court. It was felt that training of a similar kind had been very successful the previous year and as a result the young people had been invited to play a bigger role in their conference in March 2010.

Jane Hedley, Senior Solicitor then commented that the experiences that young people receive in Court are very important and Natalie's presentation last year was very well received.

Members were advised that work was continuing alongside young people from other Councils to ascertain the way in which regional linkages could be developed.

Members were then provided with an overview of meetings that the young people had held with Kathryn Rutherford, Communications Officer and Shirley Gounder, Interim Head of Safeguarding. The young people had also been involved in forming a panel during interviews for the recruitment of the Head of Safeguarding and Assistant Head of Safeguarding in Children's Services.

Finally, it was explained that following its success last year a Change Fun-Day had been arranged to take place on Saturday 28 November 2009 for young people and their carers.

Councillor P. Smith expressed her appreciation for the report and commented that she was impressed with the excellent progress the young people had made.

Keith Moore, Deputy Director of Children's Services advised that Meg Boustead, the newly appointed Head of Safeguarding was due to start work at Sunderland on Monday 2 November 2009 and that Denise Moore, the Assistant Head of Safeguarding has also been appointed with the help and guidance of the young people.

The young people in attendance expressed that they had enjoyed being involved in the recruitment process and thanked the Council for the opportunity.

Councillor Hall congratulated the young people on the last issue of the Change Council Newsletter and stated that she was looking forward to the next issue. She then went on to enquire about the Change Fun-Day. In response Shannon explained that the Day would be held at the Bethany Christian Centre in Houghton-le-Spring where lots of activities are available for young people who are in care. It is hoped that this style of event is an informal way of gathering young people together and also provides an opportunity for people to raise any problems that they are experiencing.

Alyson Boucher, Young People's Officer explained that at the last event the views of the young people were useful and that their views would be gratefully received again this time round.

The carers of young people had also been asked whether there was anything that could be done to make their job easier. It was hoped that the event would be dynamic, fun, relaxed and informative.

Upon consideration, it was:-

10. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(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.