

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 2 December 2008 in
Committee Room 6, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor P Smith (Chair)
Councillor Timmins
Councillor Speding
Councillor A Hall
Councillor N Wright
Councillor Paul Maddison
Councillor D Smith

Members of the Board

Lead Member, Children's Services
Lead Member, Adult Services
Lead Member, Culture and Leisure
Coalfield
North Sunderland
Opposition
Opposition

Part I

Also in attendance:

Mick McCracken
John Arthurs
Alyson Boucher
Helen Fay
Judith Corrigan
Jane Hedley
Gillian Warnes

All Supporting Officers

Head of Safeguarding
Development Manager for Looked After Children
Young People's Officer
Residential Services Manager
Designated Nurse for Looked After Children
Senior Solicitor
Senior Democratic Services Officer

Young People

Konner Addison
Daniel Johnson
Tiffany Johnson
Naomi Johnson
Sophie Farish
Shannon Arnold

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ball, Gofton, Oliver, Trueman, L Walton and Nick Murphy.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of Meeting held on 23 September 2008

14. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2008 be agreed as a correct record subject to an amendment to the second paragraph on page 2 so that the first sentence read "*Jane Hedley again referred to changes in guidance*".

Children Looked After Performance Report

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report providing Members with information about performance against key performance indicators and targets for looked after children.

The report highlights a number of areas of good performance, however Mick McCracken outlined some of the areas where performance was not so good. In the year ending September 2008, 45 out of 216 looked after children aged 10-17 years had offended, which was considerably more than the hoped for outcome, although still a small minority.

There are two groups involved in helping to improve this indicator, the Children Looked After Operational Group and the Children Looked After Strategy Group. The Strategy Group had been working with an officer from the Audit Commission to identify action which could be taken to improve this indicator and a consultant psychologist also attended the group to try to help members get a better understanding of what was happening.

Some looked after children have been involved in minor, opportunistic offending, but others have repeatedly been in trouble. For those young people, a set of strategies were being developed to reduce the frequency and seriousness of trouble they get into. For young people who have intermittently been involved in offending, it was a matter of making sure that they were in school and taking part in positive activities. Work was also being done with Police to ensure that looked after children were not discriminated against and treated fairly.

There were currently 191 young people with a Personal Education Plan (PEP). This represented 64.3% of looked after children. Performance had levelled at around 80% but this has been a sharp decline and a number of actions had been identified to ensure that this improves. Mike Foster, the Virtual School Head would be paying particular attention to absenteeism (including illness) and PEPs. Mike would be attending a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board to report on the work he had been doing to address these issues.

Councillor Wright commented that it would be useful for the Virtual School Head to attend a future Board meeting and added that it was disconcerting to see how far the number of PEPs had decreased. Mick McCracken reported that there was catch up work to do as some PEPs had been completed but were not on the system. Another issue was that social workers were currently responsible for PEPs and they have

many demands on their time, so Mike Foster would be talking to designated teachers in each school and asking them to pick up the responsibility for these. Mike hoped to be able to streamline this with the other plans which had to be completed.

Councillor Wright queried that if it was desirable for schools to complete the PEP, how could it be ensured that this would happen. It was highlighted that part of Mike Foster's job was to encourage and support schools into positively discriminating against looked after children and his links with schools were very good.

Councillor Wright also asked, with regard to the offending figures for looked after children, how did the number of convictions and final warnings compare between looked after children and those not looked after. Mick McCracken suggested that some time be put aside at a future Board meeting for the Looked After Children Offending Strategy Group to fully report to Members on the work that they are currently doing.

Upon discussion, it was:-

15. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Health Needs of Looked After Children

Judith Corrigan, Designated Nurse for Looked After Children, submitted a report to the Board advising of the work which was being undertaken to meet the health needs of looked after children and care leavers up to the age of 18 years.

The Looked After Children Health Assessment Team had been in operation since 2000 and carried out the statutory health assessments of all looked after children on behalf of the local authority. Often young people can have neglected physical and emotional issues when they first come into care and the health assessment helps to ensure that carers have the right information.

The Team has to report its performance to the Department of Health. 100% of looked after children had been offered health assessments and 93% had been assessed. Some young people opt not to have an assessment but the Team would check that they were registered with a doctor and attending dental check ups.

Currently support was being developed around young people leaving care and providing an oversight for children with disabilities who receive respite care. The Team was responsible for working with GPs and other community based services such as school nurses and health visitors.

Recently, Dr Welbury had left the Team and Judith advised that her current focus was to ensure that the service continued and that any gaps were filled. In the future, the Team would have to address issues which come out of national guidance, continue to meet the health needs of looked after children and influence commissioning for them.

Councillor Maddison enquired if the Health Assessment Team offered support to young people if they were referred to a consultant. Judith advised that it would usually be foster carers or residential staff who provided this type of support, but members of the Team would ensure that young people knew about appointments in good time and that social workers were aware of them. The Team had good relationships with paediatricians.

Councillor Hall referred to the new national guidance and asked if it was envisaged that this would lead to an enhanced service. Judith reported that Sunderland benefited from having a paediatric led service but this was expensive and not reflected nationally. It may be possible that the guidance would move authorities away from that sort of service.

Councillor Wright asked if Judith could expand on the current position within the Team now that Dr Welbury had left. Judith explained that Dr. Welbury had seen young people who required paediatric assessments for child protection reasons and carried it through into her role on the adoption and permanency panel. The difficulty was that Dr Welbury had a wealth of experience which was difficult to replace. Different doctors were now covering the work which may have implications for consistency and the situation would have to be monitored to ensure training needs were picked up.

It was highlighted that it was difficult to recruit paediatricians into areas of social care and a way to address this was to develop the skills of those doctors already in Sunderland. Members of the Board emphasised the importance of continuity in assessing health needs, particularly in the light of recent national cases which have been widely publicised.

Councillor Speding asked if young people would see a doctor in the area in which they were living. Judith Corrigan advised that young people would see a community doctor based at City Hospitals and would have an initial assessment at the Durham Road Centre. Young people usually have two appointments, but more would be arranged depending on their health needs. GPs were asked to participate and information was requested from health visitors and school nurses. The Team had a fairly comprehensive way of gathering information.

Previously, when GPs carried out the health assessment it was very much a physical examination whereas the Health Assessment Team would look at other issues. An open door policy was in operation and carers would sometimes contact the team, but do usually go to their GP first.

The Chairman thanked Judith for her report and upon discussion, it was:-

16. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Independent Advocacy for Looked After Children – Quarterly Report

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report advising the Board of current progress in the delivery of independent advocacy for looked after children and care leavers.

John Arthurs, Development Manager for Looked After Children, outlined the report and informed the Board that the service continued to develop positively. At a previous Board meeting, the involvement of young people in the Advocacy Monitoring Group had been raised and John reported that two young people had now been along to their first monitoring meeting with Action for Children.

The number of young people accessing the service since April of this year had exceeded the total number from last year. Referrals have mainly come through John Arthurs or Alyson Boucher. There had always been robust links with the Young People's Officer and many young people would use that route, but the Group were also looking at ways that the service could be accessed directly by young people.

Although direct comparison could not be made with other local authorities, there was a sense that Sunderland was getting proportionally more referrals than its neighbours.

Action for Children had been asked to identify any prevailing themes in the cases dealt with this year but there had been nothing specific. However, six out of fifteen referrals made in the last two years had related to transitions from care to independence and three of these highlighted concerns about young people with additional needs who had experienced difficulties or delays in reaching agreement about support from adult services.

Councillor Wright commented that issues about transitions from care to independence had been raised before and it was a serious concern. She asked what the views of officers were on transitional arrangements.

John Arthurs noted that it was a particular challenge to get this right and it may be useful for the Board to look at what other services are doing. Mick McCracken reported that some young people transferred to the Leaving Care Service at age 15 and the Young People's Group had identified a large number of issues about leaving care. It was suggested that the Leaving Care Service should be represented on the Corporate Parenting Board and Members agreed that this would be a good idea.

Mick McCracken stated that there was recognition that transition arrangements for young people with a disability needed to be improved. Children's Services provide resources up until a young person is 18, but then Adult Services may not be able to supply the same service. Over the last few months, Children's Services and Adult Services had been developing plans for better arrangements and person centred planning beginning at age 14. A team would be based in Adult Services but would reach into Children's Services to ensure continuity.

Councillor Wright commented that these developments were encouraging and Councillor Timmins highlighted that a lot of discussion had taken place about whether a transitional unit was required. There were a lot of pressures inherent in identifying accommodation for care leavers and putting the correct support in place, but it was hoped that the new team would enable arrangements to be linked up.

Upon discussion, it was:-

17. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) The continuing development of the arrangements for advocacy services be noted and the Board continue to receive quarterly reports;
- (ii) A representative from the Leaving Care Team be invited to attend meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

(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.