

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 10th March, 2009 in
Committee Room 6, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.00 pm**

Present:

Councillor P. Smith (Chair)
Councillor Timmins
Councillor Trueman
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, Housing and Public Health
Coalfield
North Sunderland
Opposition
Opposition

Part I

Also in attendance:

Mick McCracken
Nick Murphy
John Arthurs
Simone Common
Jane Hedley
Alyson Boucher

All Supporting Officers

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

Young People

Konner Addison
Naomi Johnson
Tiffany Johnson
Natalie Carroll
Peter Wright
Chaniece Wood

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Oliver and Speding.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of Meeting held on 2nd December, 2008

20. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd December, 2008 be agreed as a correct record.

Children Looked After: Performance Report

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

The report highlighted areas of good performance, for example at the end of January there was a reduction in the number of young people in care, so for every 10,000 children in Sunderland, around 57 of them were looked after. These figures compared reasonably well with other local authorities.

Board Members' attention was drawn to the Performance Indicators. Nick Murphy, Residential Services Manager advised that the percentage of children looked after with 3 or more placements stood at 9%, which compared well with other authorities. Also, the percentage of children looked after in the same placement for more than 2.5 years stood at 71.3%, which again was good.

Nick reported that there was a steady improvement in the performance of care leavers. There had also been a significant increase in the number of children placed for adoption during the last twelve months.

It was a credit to Mike Foster that the percentage of young people with personal education plans (PEP's) at the end of January was 94%.

Priorities for improvements were then outlined. A particular challenge, as reported at the last meeting, continued to be children looked after who offend. Work continued to take place to try to tackle this, which the Audit Commission fully supported.

Councillor Maddison enquired whether the Audit commission had identified any actions. Nick Murphy responded, advising that there were a number of strategies that had ramifications outside of the service and that Children's Services were in the process of drawing up an action plan to help reduce the frequency and seriousness of incidents.

The Chairman referred to the second paragraph in 3.2 and in doing so enquired what number of children go missing from care. Nick Murphy reported that the figures were very low, and although he did not have the exact figures to hand, stated that no more than one child in every month would go missing for in excess of 24 hours. Nick agreed to bring some statistics on the issue to the next meeting of the Board.

Councillor N. Wright referred to Nick Murphy's earlier remark when he stated that, the numbers of children looked after in Sunderland, compared "reasonably well" with other authorities, and she asked what did he mean. It was reported that Sunderland had a range of neighbours, statistical and geographical and stated that when

compared to Liverpool, they had twice the number of looked after children per 10,000 than Sunderland. Sunderland were reportedly in the middle of the table. Nick then agreed to bring some information to a future meeting of the Board, identifying how Sunderland compares with other authorities.

Upon discussion, it was:-

21. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Independent Advocacy for Looked After Children

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report concerning the Independent Advocacy Service for the year 2008-2009.

John Arthurs, Development Manager for Looked After Children, outlined the report and informed the Board that the service in delivering independent advocacy for looked after children and care leavers had continued.

Seventeen young people had accessed the service from 1st April, 2008 to 19th February, 2009, thus numbers had increased from just seven in 2007/2008.

Unfortunately due to differences in structures, comparisons could not be made with other authorities.

John then went on to state that carers had been a great support to young people and that Alyson Boucher, Young People's Officer had acted as a mediator in ensuring issues were dealt with.

Paragraph 3.5 outlined ten of the specific issues that had been raised by young people via the Independent Advocacy Service. All of which were serious concerns/issues around the anxieties they were suffering.

John reported that there were themes around young people's concerns, particularly from those who had additional/complex needs. One of these themes was around when they leave care, the service they will receive and the way in which their needs will be met. Board Members were advised that exploratory meetings had taken place around these issues and the associated legal framework and that talks had taken place with a small number of young people to identify specific issues.

Accessibility to the service was good and services were efficient in responding to young people and allocating an advocate.

In relation to future steps, Action for Children was hoping to work alongside the Young People's Officer to develop 'peer advocacy'. They were also looking into improving the advocacy service to benefit young people with learning disabilities and/or complex needs. Furthermore, work was ongoing with the complaints service to ensure that advocates are notified of the outcome of their complaints and representations.

Councillor D. Smith enquired how soon a message would be picked up if it was left by an advocate.

It was confirmed that usually a response would be issued the next day. That was the case with the majority of referrals as they were received during the day. Feedback from young people was that they held confidence in the route.

Councillor Hall enquired whether lessons are learned from complaints made. John Arthurs confirmed that lessons are indeed learned from the process and that responses to the complaints shape the services. He stated that monitoring was undertaken to identify themes in the issues identified by young people, which was how issues were picked up and responded to.

Councillor P. Smith commented that young people had raised 'lack of support from Adult Services' in the list of themed issues and enquired why this was. John Arthurs responded advising that work was underway to unpick the legal requirements of the service in terms of eligibility/criteria etc. However, young people's concerns were specifically in relation to transition arrangements for particular groups of young people.

At this juncture, Jane Hedley, Senior Solicitor, stated that for young people who clearly do not meet the criteria for Adult Services, steps needed to be taken by the Corporate Parenting Board to ensure that their individual assessments are studied and that the door is not closed on them.

Councillor P. Smith enquired further if these issues could be taken to a meeting of the Adult Social Care Partnership Board. Mick McCracken responded advising that a newly established transition team called the Futures Team had been created in Adult Services for young people who require services beyond aged 18. The team would be launched on 17th March, 2009 and was expected to focus on young people with disabilities/learning difficulties. Therefore a plan was in place to support this group.

Councillor N. Wright commented that she could recall Councillor Rolph raising the issue of improving the transition of services for young people with autism at a Children's Services Review Committee some time ago and she stated that in her own view transition arrangements were taking too long.

Jane Hedley, Senior Solicitor stated that it was recognised from across the Council that work needed to be done to improve transition arrangements and that Simone and her team had completed some excellent work over a period of years. Moreover, since that report had been taken to Review Committee, a scoping paper was being produced.

Simone added that support was provided to young people up to their 21st birthday and that transitional arrangements included ensuring young people understand the process.

Councillor Timmins commented that the advocacy results identified where extra resources were required and that the Transition Team would be in place shortly to

take this forward. Furthermore, the Housing Strategy Group were producing a policy on accommodation and the Group were keen to know people's ideas.

Upon discussion, it was:-

22. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the arrangements and extension of the contract continue to develop; and
- (ii) to continue to receive future quarterly reports.

Pledge to Children and Young People in Care

Nick Murphy, Residential Services Manager submitted a report, informing Members that in October, 2006, consultation on 'Care Matters' proposed the idea of a Pledge for Children in Care. He then went on to describe the background to the necessity and development of the Pledge.

Members were informed that the DCSF had published guidance on what should be included in the Pledge, which was outlined in Appendix 1 to the report (copy circulated).

It was reported that work to develop the Pledge had begun to take place under the auspices of the Care Matters Group and that approval was now sought to adopt it.

Members were advised that the pledge would be used:-

- by workers and carers as a checklist in drawing up care and pathway plans to ensure that such plans address what the pledge promises;
- by Independent Reviewing Officers during Looked After Reviews to check that the decisions of the review are consistent with the pledge;
- by Officers investigating children's complaints, as a reference point for the standard of service that the Council is expected to provide for children in care.

In addition, the regional pledge would enable the Council to continue to participate effectively in regional partnership working to improve outcomes for children in care.

The Chairman thanked Nick for his report and it was:-

23. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Change: Young People in Care Changing Lives

Nick Murphy, Residential Services Manager, submitted a report, informing Members of the progress made to date in establishing Sunderland's Children in Care Council (CICC).

Members were provided with some background information regarding the Council, including that 'Care Matters: Time for Change' contained guidance for local authorities to set up 'Children in Care Councils' to ensure that young people in care are able to put their views and experiences to Directors of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services. An update was also provided on how 4UM decided to rename CICC. This was to encourage new Members to join, enhance the image of the programme and prevent the title being abbreviated.

The new name was shown in the title of the report, however it was informally referred to as the 'Change Council'.

The Change Council first met in September 2008 and had met bi-monthly since then. The report outlined what they had done and discussed at meetings and what was yet to do.

A copy of the constitution was attached.

The young people in attendance at the meeting then drew attention to a range of issues which they had discussed and wanted to bring before Members' attention. These were recorded as follows:-

Leaving Care

- Decisions for 'things' need to be faster.
- There should be more options for supporting young people; different options for individual young people and the Council should treat all young people the same and not as individuals!
- There was currently a lack of suitable accommodation; thus more choice is needed – flats, houses and supported accommodation.
- More information, staff assistance and advice is needed on financial matters and potential grants that are available to young people.
- A 'clothing grant' is needed for young people who are living on their own and attending college – by the time a young person pays for their board, bus pass, there is very little left for anything else.
- Some young people still don't seem to see their leaving care workers (especially during holiday times like Christmas etc.) as much as they would like – can this be addressed?
- Children's Service is still moving young people on, before they are ready, both in residential and foster care.
- Foster Care Pilot – staying with carers until 21 years old – are Sunderland going to consider this?
- Staff need to get to know the young person and not just read their file, when they are working with them.

Social Workers

- There are not enough Social Workers, so young people don't get to see them as often as they would like.
- The lack of workers means that some young people wait too long for important decisions.
- Changing Social Workers means that the young person has to 'tell their story again' which is not good.

Other Issues

- Children and family workers should make sure that children and family appointments/referrals are arranged sooner – is this possible?
- Closing of Children's Homes –
 - Whilst the young people of the Change Council think that smaller children's homes are perhaps the right way forward, for some young people being in residential accommodation is the best thing for them, not foster care – how are Sunderland going to ensure that there are enough places available if a young person needs to come in to care?
 - With the closure of children's homes for children with disabilities; - what provision will be in place for future young people with disabilities who would need to be in care to be kept safe?
- Residential homes
 - There should be less things locked up in our homes, i.e. food; computers and sitting rooms.

Things to Take into Independence

- Every young person should leave care with either a passport or driving licence, preferably both! Young people who have been in care are more likely to have problems with ID once they leave care and this can cause problems for getting a bank account, jobs and student loans.
- Computers for higher education – young people should be given the best computer technology to meet the need of the course; not just given 'any' laptop.

Alyson Boucher, Young People's Officer, stated that she appreciated that there was a lot involved in tackling the issues the young people had raised. Nevertheless, they would appreciate a response.

Mick McCracken commented that the issues raised by the young people were heartening and he appreciated that there were issues that required addressing. He stated that a series of meetings would be arranged to kick-start addressing some of the issues raised and asked that Simone attend a future meeting of the Change Council, in order to discuss ways of tackling them alongside the young people.

He then added that the Board needed to approve a way of addressing issues that the young people raise. It was agreed that John Arthurs and Alyson Boucher jointly develop a structure to effectively manage this as a process. Mick was happy for Simone and staff in her team to meet with the young people to discuss issues

further. He stated that progress would be reviewed and that change would indeed occur for the better.

Alyson stated that she would take Mick's comments back to the Change Council at its next meeting and agree a date for the Officers to visit.

Jane Hedley drew Board Members' attention to the fact this was the last scheduled meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board and that it was important to ensure that future meetings are held at a time that will enable information to be fed through from the Change Council. Also, in future, it was recommended that the young people prepare a written report for the Board to draw Members' attention to the most salient points during the presentation of it.

At this juncture, Alyson Boucher stated that she had already furnished Democratic Services with a list of Change Council meetings, and that it was hoped they could be used to plan the next series of Corporate Parenting Board meetings.

Councillor Wright thanked the young people for their attendance and for bringing their report to the meeting. She hoped that all of the issues raised could be addressed.

Upon discussion, it was:-

24. RESOLVED that Officers would work to address the issues raised by young people and to receive further reports as appropriate.

Councillors Mentoring Looked After Children

John Arthurs presented a report for discussion regarding Member involvement with young people.

The report identified a series of potential arrangements for consideration by the Board. It set out suggested models, alongside the respective merits and pitfalls for each.

Open questions were put to the table to encourage discussion, such as how open are Members, and how can Members make themselves available for young people?

Members were asked to note that should any of them wish to assist in the development of the young peoples' Change Council, that their advice and guidance would be greatly appreciated.

Discussions then ensued regarding the ways in which this message could be delivered to the whole of the Council.

Following on from the discussion, it was:-

25. RESOLVED to note the report and a paper to be submitted to the next meeting on how to take the matter forward.

(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.

