

## ***Corporate Parenting Board***

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 12 January 2010 in  
Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.00 pm**

### **Present:**

Councillor P. Smith (Chair)  
Councillor E. Ball  
Councillor Gofton  
Councillor A. Hall  
Councillor Paul Maddison  
Councillor Trueman  
Councillor Walker  
Councillor N. Wright

### **Members of the Board**

Executive Member, Children and Learning City  
Ryhope  
Pallion  
Coalfield  
St Michael's  
Executive Member, Sustainable Communities  
Washington North  
Southwick

### **Also in attendance:**

Alan Caddick  
Jane Hedley  
Meg Boustead  
Nick Murphy  
John Arthurs  
Alyson Boucher  
Penny Brunton  
Catherine Joyce  
Steve Robinson

### **All Supporting Officers**

Head of Housing  
Senior Solicitor  
Head of Safeguarding  
Services for Looked After Children Manager  
Development Manager for Looked After Children  
Young People's Officer  
Accommodation Services Manager  
Team Manager  
Assistant Leaving Care Worker

### **Young People**

Shannon Arnold  
Konner Addison  
Naomi Johnson  
Peter Wright  
Ronnie Critchlow  
Tiffany Johnson

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D. Wilson

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

### **Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 October 2009**

13. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2009 be agreed as a correct record.

At this juncture, the Chair brought Item 7 – PowerPoint Presentation on Housing Issues forward on the agenda.

### **PowerPoint Presentation on Housing Issues**

Shannon Arnold, Konner Addison, Naomi Johnson and Peter Wright from the Change Council delivered a presentation on housing issues.

During the presentation, the young people advised that the points that they were about to raise were not only their views, but were also the views of other young people in care. They welcomed the opportunity to present this important topic.

The presentation mainly covered issues and concerns raised by the young people in relation to support and financial assistance.

They felt that they differed from young people living with their families, particularly because young people in care often have to move out at a certain age due to Government guidelines. What's more the young people would like reassurance that help and support is available should they begin to struggle financially or if something goes wrong once they have moved out.

In terms of who needs housing, the young people felt that those over the age of 16 years old should have a choice to move out with support. They also felt that young people in foster care should not have to move out at the age of 18, although they appreciated that in some instances this was because carers no longer get paid the full allowance when a person reaches 18.

The young people explained that they would like a range of different types of accommodation to choose from to meet the different needs, wants and desires of young people. For example group living, supported flats etc.

They suggest that better partnership arrangements with different housing providers may help towards getting more accommodation at affordable prices.

In referring to where young people would like to live, the young people stated that they would like better access to housing outside of Sunderland, better local housing

in Sunderland and more help and support for young people coming out of prison. They also raised that they felt hostel type accommodation was not a good starting point for young people leaving care.

Some additional points were raised by the young people in relation to difficulties finding a first month's rent and bond money for a property, rules imposed by landlords can be strict i.e. not allowing friends to stay. It was also felt that young people who are just starting off can become financially worse off by getting a job because they lose benefits then struggle to make ends meet.

At the conclusion of the young people's presentation, Penny Brunton, Accommodation Services Manager and Catherine Joyce, Team Manager for the Leaving Care Service delivered a presentation on Accommodation Care Leavers in Sunderland.

Catherine Joyce started off the presentation stating that Sunderland have an accommodation service which a lot of Authorities do not have. She advised that the Leaving Care Service at Sunderland worked closely with Services for Looked After Children and that training is undertaken with foster carers around the options available. Good relationships were held with the Housing Options Team and the Leaving Care Service who work together prior to young people reaching 18 years old. Work also took place with a range of accommodation providers. Penny Brunton then advised Members that in terms of the approach that Sunderland take, a Pathway Assessment process begins when young people leave care and transfer to the Leaving Care Service. This process identifies timescales and is regularly reviewed, and includes discussion around financial issues.

Details were then provided on the range of housing schemes that were run in-house by Sunderland Young People's Services, the range of voluntary sector managed supported housing schemes and tenancies.

Members were then briefed on the situation in relation to finance, where they were advised that most supported housing schemes were funded through a mixture of rent, housing benefit and Supporting People contract funding and that much of the in-house housing schemes were funded through the Young People's Service.

Successes included fewer young people moving at 16 years old and instead moving closer to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. There is less use of bed and breakfast accommodation, which is now only used in a crisis situation and more choices for young people in terms of the accommodation that they are offered due to the excellent relationships that have been developed with the Leaving Care Service and Housing Options Team.

A series of organisational challenges were then outlined for Members, which included foster care training, independency training and encouraging previous users of the service to act as peer mentors to young people who were yet to experience independent living.

Some of the more strategic challenges were then highlighted for Members. It was acknowledged that at times it can be difficult to find suitable accommodation for

young people depending on their circumstances/history and at times research has to be undertaken to look for accommodation outside of the Sunderland area.

It was also acknowledged that by addressing any behavioural or other issues a young person may have prior to sourcing accommodation can make the transition from care to independent living run more smoothly.

Strategic issues in relation to finance were then outlined in the presentation. Members were informed that all financial implications and decision making must be justifiable and that reductions to budgets of at least 5% per year were expected in 2011/14.

The Chair thanked the young people and the Officers in attendance for their presentations.

Peter Wright, one of the young people in attendance enquired how many other Authorities do the Council work with to provide housing for young people. In response Penny Brunton advised that Sunderland work with Durham, Newcastle, all of whom have similar schemes and a variety of services which could be used for anyone wishing to live outside of the area.

Shannon Arnold then commented that there was not enough accommodation for young people wishing to move out. What's more, she did not consider it fair that young people are placed to live in hostels because they have nowhere else to go. In response, Penny Brunton advised that there was a lot of pressure placed on Young People's Services to provide accommodation but that despite their best efforts there were not always places available given that the schemes were open to the whole of Sunderland. She added that if resources could be expanded, this could be looked into.

Alan Caddick, Head of Housing stated that whilst it was recognised that funding was ring-fenced until 2010, the Council were protecting that further until 2011 and were reviewing contracts for delivering projects in Sunderland. He went on to confirm that the Council did want more accommodation for young people in Sunderland. Work was also underway to try to improve Pathway, and work more in partnership to assist young people access housing during what can be a very difficult time.

Councillor Trueman enquired what were the specific pressures on the accommodation service in relation to housing young people? Penny Brunton advised that the pressures were that in-house schemes were always full and there was a need for more trainer flats.

Councillor Anne Hall stated that a lot of schemes seemed to be City-Centric, and enquired what other areas were considered for accommodation schemes and how do Officers ensure linkages can be maintained with foster carers. Penny Brunton advised that the trainer flats and Gentoo were dispersed throughout the entire City, not just the City Centre. However, he acknowledged that hostels in Sunderland were concentrated on the City Centre which the Council were conscious of and were trying to move away from, dependent upon the availability of land.

Gateshead/Durham schemes could be investigated and the surrounding areas were also an option to be looked into.

Nick Murphy, Services for Looked After Children Manager also responded to Councillor Hall advising that there was always an opportunity for young people to go back to their residential home support, whether it be part of their Pathway Plan or an adhoc arrangement.

Councillor Hall stated, on behalf of all Board Members, that Councillors felt uncomfortable that Looked After Children who leave care may not be receiving the support they need. Hence, this was something to strive towards ensuring happens.

Councillor Gofton, on behalf of all Members of the Board, commended the work of Members and Officers in this area and expressed her thanks to the young people for airing their views.

14. RESOLVED that the presentations be noted.

### **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.

Members were advised that there had been some key challenges during the period since the last report and there were also aspects of good performance to be celebrated.

In referring to the report, the Head of Safeguarding explained that the numbers of Looked After Children remains stable. However, 27% of children with a Child Protection Plan historically have gone onto become looked after, and due to the current number of Children with Child Protection Plans, a rise is anticipated. In terms of short term stability, the numbers were doing well. However, in relation to longer term performance on how many moves in the last two years, the numbers were not doing so well.

Attention was then drawn to each indicator in turn, and a description of performance was provided. These included updates on leaving care, care leavers aged 19 in suitable accommodation, children missing from home/care, participation of Looked After Children in reviews, percentage of children adopted, percentage of children adopted who were placed for adoption within 12 months, strengths and difficulties questionnaire, education, disabilities and ethnicity.

Councillor Walker referred to the term 'special guardianship' and enquired if an explanation could be provided. In response, the Head of Safeguarding explained that the Special Guardianship Regulations 2005 set out the interpretation. However she described to Members that the term secures a child who cannot grow up with their birth family with a new family. A Special Guardianship Order provides the special guardian with legal responsibility for the child, which is expected to last until

the child is 18. However, the Order does not remove parental responsibility from the child's birth parents, as the birth parents still retain some rights and responsibilities. In practice, this means that the child is no longer the responsibility of the local authority and therefore this is an alternative to adoption for foster carers as the care order is discharged by the Special Guardianship Order.

Upon consideration, it was:-

15. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

### **Independent Advocacy for Looked After Children**

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a quarterly report concerning the Independent Advocacy Service.

John Arthurs, Development Manager for Looked After Children, outlined the report and in doing so advised Board Members that the number of referrals had been low, but that themes were beginning to emerge. For example, a number of young people had come forward stating that they did not fully understand the reason why they were in care, nor did they understand the Pathway Plan.

To resolve this, Officers were amending working practices to ensure that in future young people are well informed as soon as they enter the care system.

He advised further that young people who make a complaint now receive a friendly written response that is comprehensible and understandable. So far, this had proved to be effective as the young people had commented positively.

Members were advised that the aim in Children's Services was to allocate an advocate to young people within five days of referral, however it was confirmed that this usually happens within 24/48 hours.

In terms of the Contract Review, work had commenced on procurement for the provision of the service beyond March 2010. Members noted that the arrangements were essentially to maintain the current system, with changed pricing, which would be more cost effective.

Upon consideration, it was:-

16. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be noted; and
- (ii) the re-commissioning of the contract be agreed.

### **New arrangements for Safeguarding Inspections**

Nick Murphy, Services for Looked After Children Manager, referred Members to a report on New Arrangements for Safeguarding Inspections.

The purpose of the report was to update Members on the new arrangements from April 2009 and the Sunderland arrangements in relation to this.

Some background information was provided for Members, which led to the introduction of the new arrangements.

Attention was drawn to the fact that Joint Area Review (JAR) inspections of Children's Services ceased from April 2009. These were replaced by a new programme of inspection. Members were advised that two new inspections would take place relating to safeguarding children and young people. These were outlined as follows:-

- Unannounced inspections of contact, referral and assessment of children in need and children who may be in need of protection; and
- Announced inspections of Safeguarding and Looked After Children Services.

Work was ongoing in Children's Services to ensure that all services were fit for purpose and were able to cope and stand up to any type of scrutiny.

Upon consideration, it was:-

17. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(Signed) P. SMITH,  
Chairman.

