

## ***Corporate Parenting Board***

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 5 July 2010 in  
Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30 pm**

### **Present:**

Councillor P. Smith (Chair)  
Councillor Speding  
Councillor Trueman  
Councillor D. Wilson  
Councillor A. Hall  
Councillor P. Maddison  
Councillor Francis  
Councillor D. Smith  
Councillor Walker

### **Members of the Board**

Executive Member, Children and Learning City  
Executive Member, Healthy City  
Executive Member, Sustainable Communities  
Executive Member, Safer City  
Coalfield  
St Michael's  
Fulwell  
Copt Hill  
Washington North

### **Also in attendance:**

Meg Boustead  
Nick Murphy  
Simone Common  
John Arthurs  
Alyson Boucher  
Jane Hedley  
Debra Dorward

### **All Supporting Officers**

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

### **Young People**

Shanice-Dawn Sykes  
Dan Johnson  
Kirstie Maxted  
Kirstyn Wood  
Daniel Bensley  
Kallam Addison

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors E. Ball, Gofton and L. Walton.

## **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Francis reported a personal declaration of interest as he was a Member of the family proceedings court.

## **Minutes of Meeting held on 30 March 2010**

The minutes were to be amended to reflect that Councillor D. Smith was Councillor for Cophill Ward not Houghton as stated in the minutes.

Subject to the above amendment, it was:-

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2010 be agreed as a correct record.

The Head of Safeguarding in referring to the minutes provided a verbal update in relation to Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP). In doing so she stated that an event had been arranged to take place on Wednesday 21 July 2010 to look at future MALAP priorities, including finance, housing, jobs/careers, health, placements, education and bullying. The results of the event would be reported back to the September meeting.

Daniel Bensley requested an update on the 'Pledge to Children and Young People'. The Head of Safeguarding agreed that a launch of the Pledge had previously been discussed and that the 21 July would hopefully provide an opportunity to progress these discussions further.

In referring to accommodation issues, the Young People's Services Strategic Manager stated that Alan Caddick, Head of Housing would be in attendance at the next meeting to provide an update on housing related issues.

## **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.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Members were notified that the performance information contained within the report related to the 12-month period ending May 2010, and that the majority of the figures provided in the report were subject to finalisation and validation by the DfE.

Key points from within the report were then highlighted, during which the following corrections were made:-

- All children under 10 were in family placements should read "All children under 12 were in family placements".

- 3548 reviews took place and 328 of them were in timescale ... should read "348 reviews took place and 328 of them were in timescale".

Councillor D. Wilson enquired if there was an age limit on parents adopting children. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that there was no age limit, however potential parents had to be at least 21 years of age. She went on to explain that the best interests of the child was the primary focus.

Upon feedback on the report, the Head of Safeguarding advised that in future, reports would be amended to set out all abbreviations in full and the use of acronyms would be avoided. Performance data would also be displayed more clearly as the current table format was not easy to understand.

In referring to the table showing details by placement type of Children Looked After in foster care, Councillor Francis enquired why the percentages did not total 100%. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that this was because some categories overlapped.

Councillor D. Wilson enquired what steps would be taken to improve the long term stability of young people, to which the Head of Safeguarding stated that accommodation issues required consideration as well as support mechanisms, including educational needs.

In response to a question regarding the length of time young people remain in foster care, the Head of Safeguarding stated the Care Matters paper recommended that children in care could have the right to remain in foster care until aged 21, however this was removed from the Bill when the Act came into force. Jane Hedley, the Solicitor in attendance was of the understanding that this was being reconsidered.

Councillor D. Wilson in referring to NI58 the Performance Indicator relating to Strengths and Difficulties enquired if stress management was included. The Head of Safeguarding described that when the national indicator came into force, the foster carer/social worker would be asked to score strengths and difficulties in a questionnaire after the young people had been in care for 12 months. She added that the indicator looked specifically at the emotional well-being of young people and that the results of questionnaires assisted Officers plan services.

Councillor Francis enquired how often the questionnaires were completed, to which the Head of Safeguarding advised that only school children in care were assessed every 12 months. The assessment did not apply to children with severe disabilities.

Councillor Francis then referred to the average score and probed further enquiring what the range was. The Head of Safeguarding stated that she would obtain some more data on the indicator scores which would be submitted to the next meeting.

Upon consideration, it was:-

2. 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 for the year 2009-2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

John Arthurs, Development Manager for Looked After Children outlined the report and in doing so advised Members that take up of the advocacy service had been fairly low in 2009-2010, however requests for advocates were picking up in the current year, with six new referrals being recorded in the first quarter of the year.

The number of referrals from children in foster care continued to exceed those from residential care, with more direct requests from children and young people or from carers on their behalf.

Members were informed that the allocation of advocates continued to be within five working days of referral. Three of the new referrals had concerned young people who had been placed a considerable distance from Sunderland, therefore it was encouraging to see that they were aware of the service.

In terms of the Contract Review, a new specification had been designed for a three year contract which would give the new arrangements greater continuity and stability up to August 2013. The contract for Independent Advocacy had been advertised, with a view to being re-commissioned by the end of September 2010.

Councillor Hall in referring to paragraph 3.4 enquired how issues raised by the young people were handled, particularly when they involved disagreements between the Local Authority and their parents. The Development Manager for Looked After Children responded advising that issues would usually be handled by himself, the young person's carer or the Advocacy Service and that common sense and initiative could usually resolve most matters successfully.

An example was then provided of entrenched disagreements as requested by Councillor Francis.

Councillor D. Wilson enquired why would a young person require an advocate, to which the Development Manager for Looked After Children advised that by law a young person looked after could request an advocate to act on their behalf. Jane Hedley, the Solicitor in attendance provided an example that a care order could be discharged which the young person might disagree with.

The Young People's Officer stated that in the past there had been instances when young people had not wanted to be discharged, therefore an advocate was required.

Councillor Francis in enquiring was the role of an -advocate similar to a Children's Guardian was advised that it was not. The advocate was a person acting on behalf of a child, and to ensure that the views of the young person were heard and that the Authority has listened to their views.

Councillor Speding enquired how young people appeal if they are unhappy. The Development Manager for Looked After Children advised that the young person would be guided through the complaints process which the advocate would support them through. To avoid complaints, measures were in place to look at care plans of each child on a regular basis.

Upon consideration, it was:-

3. RESOLVED to note the report and the continuing development of the service and due arrangements for re-commissioning of the contract.

### **Change Council Consultation Feedback – Presentation**

Dan Johnson, one of the young people in attendance introduced a video of the Change Council Fun/Consultation Day.

Members noted that in 1999 Sunderland City Council's Children's Services created a consultation group called 4UM (Forum). This group was made up of young people in care and was created to help young people express their views and be heard. In 2008 4UM was asked to develop a Children in Care Council which was where the name and slogan "Change – Young People in Care Changing Lives" came from – Change Council for short. The first meeting of the Change Council took place in September 2008 and one had taken place every month since then.

The Consultation/Fun Day event held on 28 November 2009 at the Bethany Centre had been an excellent opportunity for young people to express their views about being in care. Comments received from the young people included their views on the Change Council, about whether they felt their views were being heard and what further changes they would like to see in school.

Shanice-Dawn Sykes ended the presentation by informing Members that it was intended to share the DVD with the Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP).

Councillor P. Smith commented that she was very impressed with the confidence the young people had portrayed when expressing their views and that the DVD clearly demonstrated they are well versed in voicing their opinions. She went on to suggest that it may be helpful to the Change Council if they invited more Cabinet Members and Scrutiny Members to Change Council meetings, to get a two-way conversation flowing.

Upon consideration, it was:-

4. RESOLVED to note the update.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

5. 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 is likely to reveal the identity of an individual (including the Authority holding that information) (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.