

27 October 2009

## **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

### **INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

#### **REPORT OF THE INTERIM HEAD OF SAFEGUARDING**

#### **LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME : Corporate Parenting: Safeguarding**

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide Members with a quarterly update on Young People's access to Independent Advocacy

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 Independent Advocacy for looked after young people, care leavers and other users of Children's Social Care Services during 2008-2009 has been provided under a contract with Action for Children

#### **3 Service use and outcomes**

- 3.1 As reported to the Monitoring group on 26 August, three young people have accessed the service in the current year
- 3.2 Five young people have approached the Young People's Officer for support with representations but did not wish to be referred to the service. These queries were relatively straightforward to pass on to the relevant service, and it is not uncommon for young people to be reluctant
- 3.3 Two young people have made representations directly to the Children's Complaints Service, and were offered advocates. In both cases the young people felt they had clearly made their views known and were confident that they did not need independent support.
- 3.4 All users of the service currently are looked after young people or care leavers although it is available to other young people receiving service.

## **4 Accessing the Service**

- 4.1 Allocation of advocates continues to be rapid, and well within the 5 working days of referral as required in the service specification and usually within 24/48 hours.
- 4.2 Direct referrals continue to be rare, although further promotion of the service, including providing contact details in the new 'Change News' magazine will be continued.
- 4.3 Referral rates in the current financial year are so far low in comparison to 2008-09, but more consistent with the take-up rates in 2007-8.

## **5 Young People with Learning Disabilities**

- 5.1 Action for Children have commenced a pilot programme (as described in the report to the Board in July 2009) in consultation with Services for Disabled Children to provide direct outreach to young people with learning disabilities. Participation Worker will promote awareness of the provision through engagement with our disabled children via their school settings, with parental agreement being sought in each instance.
- 5.2 Two of the young people currently using the Independent Advocacy service have disabilities and have taken up the service through this initiative
- 5.3 This is an area of work which is poorly represented nationally, and we hope will become a model of good practice
- 5.4 Progress will be monitored quarterly via the Advocacy Monitoring Group meetings

## **6 Contract Review for 2010 and beyond.**

- 6.1 The current contract extension expires in March 2010. Work has commenced on procurement for the provision of the service beyond 2010.
- 6.2 The Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Unit was invited to consider joining a regionally commissioned service led by Middlesbrough Council on behalf of the councils formerly part of the Teesside consortium, and Newcastle and South Tyneside who currently have a local consortium agreement. Both the consortia involved in this already have arrangements with the same current provider.

6.3 Sunderland has had no involvement in the development of the service specification for the regional tender which contains additional elements of young people's participation and consultation work which are presently undeveloped in some of the authorities in the consortium but which are already well-established in Sunderland. It is considered that the interests of our young people will be better served a service specifically commissioned to meet the needs and circumstances in Sunderland rather than a shared scheme.

## **7 Summary:**

7.1 The Service take-up to date has been lower than last year, but more in line with previous usage.

7.2 Work has commenced to establish a more pro-active arrangement for young people with Learning Disabilities

7.3 The Service Specification is being revised for re-commissioning for 2010 onwards.

## **8 Recommendation**

The Board is requested to note the continuing development of the service and the due arrangements for re-commissioning the contract, and to continue to receive quarterly reports.

