

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 21 March 2011 in
Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor P. Smith (Chair)
Councillor Trueman
Councillor D. Wilson
Councillor Maddison
Councillor D. Smith

Members of the Board

Executive Member, Children and Learning City
Executive Member, Sustainable Communities
Executive Member, Safer City and Culture
St Michael's
Copt Hill

Also in attendance:

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

All Supporting Officers

Head of Safeguarding
Services for Looked After Children Manager
Independent Reviewing Manager
Children and Young People's Rights Officer
Solicitor
Governance Services Officer

Young People

Craig Clifford
Konner McCully
Shanice Sykes
Tiffany Johnson
Daniel Bensley
Ian Barwick
Shannon Arnold

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Gofton, A. Hall and Speding.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of Meeting held on 7 February 2011

23. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

Children Looked After: Performance Report (1 April 2010 – 31 January 2011)

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).

Board Members were notified that the performance measures used in the report were those prescribed by the previous government, and that in future performance would be measured against a new 'outcomes framework' which was currently being development as part of the Young People's Framework. The 'outcomes framework' would alter the focus of reports so that in future young people would be presented with less quantitative data i.e. statistics and instead more qualitative data i.e. descriptive information would be provided on matters that are felt to be important to the young people, such as placement stability.

The Head of Safeguarding confirmed that future reports would be improved to contain more dynamic and interesting information for young people as they would be based around measures that they had expressed they would like to see.

A summary of the key points listed within the report were then highlighted.

The Chair commented that at a recent visit to the Pupil Referral Unit, she was informed that they had five young people attending which she previously knew nothing about. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising Councillor P. Smith that she would ensure that this issue was picked up in future during the monitoring of education outcomes.

Upon consideration, it was:-

24. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Proposed Closure of Children's Homes

The Head of Safeguarding and the Change Council submitted a joint paper which set out for Board Members attention a series of concerns submitted by the young people which the Head of Safeguarding had responded to.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chair introduced the report stating that at the last meeting held on the 7 February 2011 the young people presented a series of questions and concerns that

they expressed they would like to put to the Corporate Parenting Board, and she suggested that in order to give sufficient time and dedication to the questions and the answers that the young people submit their questions as an agenda item to the next Corporate Parenting Board.

The report outlined the concerns raised by the young people. These were in relation to the following issues: -

- Proposed Closure of Children's Homes
- Leaving Care / Housing
- EMA / Pocket Money
- Miscellaneous
- Schools

The young people in attendance drew attention to various concerns that they had raised within the report, during which detailed discussion was held and the following comments were made.

Proposed Closure of Children's Homes

Head of Safeguarding reported that following feedback from the young people at the last meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board regarding the closure of a Williamson Terrace children's home the young people had been consulted.

It was evident that the young people felt that the introduction of a Care Plan did not help to stabilise a young person if they continued to be moved around and also prevented young people from settling in. The Head of Safeguarding responded to the comment stating that the closure of the children's home would be carefully planned to avoid as much disruption as possible. It was confirmed the closure would not be rushed and that the home would remain open until December 2011. Also, the Authority recognised that place moves could be difficult, and took young people time to adjust to. It was unfortunate that a home had to close, and the decision to choose one had not been taken lightly, however Williamson Terrace was the most appropriate home to close.

Upon questioning, the Head of Safeguarding explained that there was no correlation with CentrePoint being built and Williamson Terrace closing and that it was purely a coincidence that the opening and closure had been announced at the same time. Board Members were advised that the plans for CentrePoint had been place for some time.

The Head of Safeguarding confirmed that care plans were being carefully looked into to determine where the young people currently residing at Williamson Terrace would go once the home was closed. It was also confirmed that the Authority recognised that not all young people chose to be in foster care and that nobody would be forced into a foster placement. Nonetheless, the Authority still ad to make foster placements available for those who did want to be placed with a family.

Leaving Care / Housing

The Head of Safeguarding responded to a comment regarding young people feeling pressured to move on to make room for children requiring care. In doing so, she stated that no young person in care should feel compelled to move on until they were ready. She confirmed that care plans were in place to monitor this and that the Authority would do everything it could to help individuals.

At this juncture, it was emphasised that any young person not wanting to go into foster care due negative experiences would not be required to. It was also made clear that should any young person encounter problems whilst in foster care must report these in order that the Authority can make the necessary arrangements to look into them then and there.

Board Members were advised that the Authority was looking to introduce a scheme to allow young people to remain in foster care should they choose to beyond the age of eighteen up to nineteen.

The young people considered that capable young people should be offered the opportunity to live in their own flat instead of supported accommodation. The Head of Safeguarding stated in some instances young people who had felt they would have actually found that it proved to be more difficult than they expected, which was why the Authority suggested young people move to supported accommodation in the first instance.

The Head of Safeguarding informed Board Members that discussions were underway with Alan Caddick, Head of Housing regarding the range of options that were available for accommodating young people leaving care and to address the issue of providing young people with some variety. An Action Plan was also currently being developed to follow up the Pledge in relation to the provision of accommodation options for young people, which it was hoped would lead to more choices.

At this juncture, the Chair stated that it would be a good idea for Alan Caddick to be invited back to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board to update Board Members in relation to the issue of accommodation for young people and to compare the available accommodation in Sunderland with what other neighbouring authorities provided.

Councillor Trueman commented that young people due to leave care within the next twelve-months should be classified as a special case requiring support. He agreed that offering a range of suitable accommodation options to young people was important, however he appreciated that this was an enormous undertaking for the housing providers to come up with appropriate solutions that were safe them, nonetheless the Authority would try.

The Independent Review Manager drew Members attention to the fact that young people leaving care did not have the benefit of parental guidance or ready access to financial support to correct a wrong decision or mistake and for that reason a mechanism to provide support beyond the age of eighteen was required.

EMA / Pocket Money

The Head of Safeguarding in responding to concerns regarding the different treatment young people receive in relation to EMA stated that EMA was coming to an end, and that the Authority fully recognised that it was important that young people were treated fairly in this regard across all of the City's children's homes. However, it was pointed out to the young people that it was very unlikely that every home would operate in exactly the same, and that there would be some minor differences.

It was also clarified for Board Members information that children's homes would encourage young people to save some of their pocket money. This was to prepare them for the future by limiting what they had to spend as they would if they lived independently and had other financial commitments.

Schools

In response to the concerns felt by young people in relation to schools embarrassing them the Head of Safeguarding reported that Janet Murray, the new Virtual School Head teacher would be invited to attend a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board in order that the young people could discuss this in more depth.

Members in attendance thanked the Head of Safeguarding and the young people for submitting their concerns/answers to the meeting.

Upon consideration, it was:-

25. RESOLVED to: -

- (i) note the comments contained within the report;
- (ii) discuss the issue of foster care in more depth at the next meeting;
- (iii) invite the Virtual School Headteacher to a future meeting;
- (iv) invite the Head of Housing to a future meeting

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

26. 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.