

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**23 September 2008**

**ESTABLISHMENT OF CHILDREN IN CARE COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF SAFEGUARDING**

**LINK TO WORK PROGRAMME : Corporate Parenting: Care Matters**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To advise the Board of the progress in establishment of a Children in Care Council under the provisions of 'Care Matters: Time for Change'

**2. Background**

- 2.1 'Care Matters' places a requirement upon local authorities to establish a 'Children in Care Council' to enable young people in care to influence the development of services they receive. Good parents listen to their children in making decisions which will affect them and the Children in Care Council is a mechanism whereby, as Corporate Parent, the local authority can listen to the views of their children when developing services and policies.
- 2.2 The establishment of a Children In Care Council will become a statutory requirement upon enactment of the Children and Young Person's Bill 2008.
- 2.3 The requirements of 'Care Matters' specify that the Children in Care Council will have direct links to the Director of Children's Services and to the Lead Member for Children's Services. Beyond this there are no presently no specific guidelines but we anticipate further standards to be set for local authorities to bear in mind the needs for participation of
- 2.3.1 Very young children,
  - 2.3.2 Disabled children and young people
  - 2.3.3 Children and young people who are not members of the Council.
- 2.4 There are no published specific requirements or standards, and it is for local authorities to determine local arrangements. The regional and national position is variable. In addition to consulting with our own young people, we have looked at examples of practice in other authorities.

- 2.5 Including Sunderland, we have identified only four out of nine authorities in the region which have arrangements in place or developing. The remainder are waiting until the enactment of the Children and Young person's Bill. The regional Participation Workers' Network is considering establishing a benchmark across the region.
- 2.6 Nationally, different models of Children in Care Council are emerging, ranging from:
- Quarterly meetings of a large group of young people, held during school holidays, facilitated by contracted external provider and attended by the Director and Lead Member. (Croydon)
  - Bi-monthly meetings of members, senior officers with a small number young people attending, co-chaired by the Director of Children's Services and a young person. (Waltham Forest)
  - Revision of remit of an existing young people's participation group meeting monthly supported by the Children's Rights Officer and the Young People's Participation Officer. Links to Director and Lead member not clarified at this time. (Gateshead).
  - Establishment of a small group meeting weekly supported by two Young people's 'Engagement' officers, meeting bi-monthly with the Head of Safeguarding (South Tyneside)
  - Entire Participation programme including Children in Care Council contracted out to independent children's rights organisations (e.g. Durham: Investors in Children, Surrey: National Youth Advocacy Service)

### **3 Current Position**

- 3.1 Sunderland has had a young people in care consultation group for some years. 4UM was first established in 1999, supported by our Young People's Officer, as a monthly meeting for young people in care and care leavers to discuss their concerns.
- 3.2 The fundamental differences between 4UM and a Children in Care Council are as follows:
- 3.2.1 4UM has been based on good practice, and the Children in Care Council is to become a statutory requirement.
- 3.2.2 4UM has had communications with managers, and occasionally with senior officers, on an ad-hoc basis, but the Children in Care Council requires specified links to the Director and the Lead member.

- 3.2.3 Participation and attendance at 4UM meetings has been voluntary, open to any young person in care, and on a goodwill basis: The Children in Care Council requires a defined membership which is prepared to make commitment to attendance and this should be subject to appropriate compensation for the young people's time.
- 3.3 Since March 2008 the 4UM group have discussed arrangements for the establishment of a Children in Care Council. They decided the title of the council as "Change", with an explanatory 'strapline' of "Young people in care changing lives"
- 3.4 From June, the 4UM group contributed to the organisation of a 'Change Fun-Day' which was intended to raise wider awareness amongst looked after young people, and gather views about the role and initial priorities for "Change". The questionnaires (which were also used to gather Carer views) were designed and developed by the young people. The day was targeted at young people and their carers, recognising that for our young people to participate it is also essential to ensure that their carers are also committed to supporting this.
- 3.5 The 'Change Fun-Day' was held at the Seaburn Centre on 20 August 2008, and was attended by 90 children and young people and carers. It was also supported by Sunderland Voluntary Sector Youth Forum, Sunderland Youth Parliament as well as staff from the Safeguarding Unit, the Leaving Care Service, LACe Team, Community and Cultural Services and the Fostering Service.
- 3.6 In addition to a range of fun activities, there was a range of consultation processes in which the 4UM team gathered young people's views about many aspects of care, some using an electronic e-voting system provided by Sunderland Voluntary Youth Sector Forum.
- 3.7 The Young people's Officer and 4UM team are still to complete the collation of the feedback, but it is clear that there is a wealth of information which will inform the agenda for "Change" for a significant time to come.
- 3.8 The first meeting at which 4UM met as "Change" was on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> September 2008. A programme of monthly meetings is envisaged.

## **4 Next Steps**

- 4.1 The work started by 4UM to develop "Change" will continue with a range of further work to consolidate the council. The aim if this initial period is to

establish the constitutional arrangements for “Change”, and to some extent this may be influenced by any statutory guidance accompanying the enactment of the Children and Young Persons Bill 2008.

#### 4.2 Specific steps include:

- 4.2.1 The establishment of a constitution for “Change” and standards for Governance
- 4.2.2 Invitation to the Directorate and the Council to consider arrangements for links between the Director and Lead Member and the relationship between “Change” and the Corporate Parenting Board.
- 4.2.3 Council members to work with the Children and Families Communications Team to define the ‘brand’ for Change.
- 4.2.4 Establishment of a termly or quarterly newsletter to allow “Change” to communicate with the whole Looked After population. (The first issue to be during the Autumn Term and including feedback from the Change Fun-Day)
- 4.2.5 Agree and establish a system for young people to be elected, nominated or appointed to the Council from 2009-10.
- 4.2.6 Identify the additional input required to sustain continued participation of young people who are not members of “Change”

### **5 Summary:**

- 5.1 The current 4UM group to expand and be formally constituted as the Children in Care Council.
- 5.2 The council will be called “Change: Young people in care changing lives”.
- 5.3 Work programme for 2008-9 will focus on establishing constitution and arrangements for communicating with the wider looked after population.

### **7 Recommendation**

That the Corporate Parenting Board receive this report.

John Arthurs

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