

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 7 February 2011 in
Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30 pm**

Present:

Councillor P. Smith (Chair)
Councillor Speding
Councillor Trueman
Councillor Gofton

Councillor A. Hall
Councillor Maddison
Councillor D. Smith

Members of the Board

Executive Member, Children and Learning City
Executive Member, Healthy City
Executive Member, Sustainable Communities
Executive Member, Responsive Services and
Customer Care
Coalfield
St Michael's
Copt Hill

Also in attendance:

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

All Supporting Officers

Head of Safeguarding
Independent Reviewing Manager
Assistant Head, Sunderland Virtual School
Services for Looked After Children Manager
Children and Young People's Rights Officer
Senior Solicitor
Governance Services Officer

Young People

Konner McCully
Shanice Sykes
Tiffany Johnson
Craig Clifford
David Lamb
Kallam Addison
Daniel Bensley

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors
E. Ball, Walker and D. Wilson.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of Meeting held on 13 September 2011

Councillor D. Smith in referring to the Children Looked After: Performance Report enquired why there were no statistics recorded under the category 'PN7 – Child does not attend nor are his or her views conveyed to the review – currently being monitored'. In response the Independent Review Manager stated that this was because there were no children in that category.

16. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2011 be agreed as a correct record.

Children Looked After: Performance Report (1 April 2010 – 30 November 2010)

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 November 2010, with particular focus on the end of that period. The report also provided a detailed breakdown of the children Looked After performance indicators via a Performance Grid.

The Head of Safeguarding explained that she was interested in hearing the views of the young people regarding the way in which performance information was supplied, displayed and also if the length of the report was acceptable.

The young people were informed that the National Indicator Set for local authorities had been removed, which meant that the Council no longer received a direct response from Central Government. Consequentially, the Head of Safeguarding stated that she was about to begin some work alongside officers to explore putting in place some new performance indicators which would help the Council to measure performance, compare performance to previous periods and flag areas for improvement.

A summary of the key points taken from the report were then highlighted.

Councillor Trueman enquired why 2 of the 387 Children Looked After were unaccompanied asylum seekers and why the system did not automatically look after them. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that there were many rules and regulations around who could be classified as seeking asylum and that in the last eighteen months Sunderland City Council had indeed accommodated two people seeking asylum in the appropriate way. She went on to explain that quite

often the age of young asylum seekers entering the UK Border could not be determined immediately. However she did confirm that until their age was established, young asylum seekers coming into Sunderland were looked after.

Councillor A. Hall commended the report stating that the information provided was useful and very interesting. She then went on to enquire if there was any mechanism in place for recording the number of failed adoptions.

In response, the Head of Safeguarding stated that 'failed adoptions' would be classified as those that did not proceed through to adoption stage. She explained the procedure leading up to adoption involves a matching process which was conducted at introduction stage, and stated that a couple of those had not proceeded through to adoption in the last year. However, she was able to confirm that there had not been any children placed in adoption that had not proved to be successful and this was thanks to the matching process. A lot of work goes into matching process to ensure that families were matched with children.

Councillor A. Hall went on to enquire if a child who did not proceed through to adoption would be included in the statistics within the report, to which she was advised indeed they would, once their legal status had been amended accordingly.

Councillor P. Smith then enquired of the young people if they would like to bring any items of discussion from their Change Council to the Corporate Parenting Board agenda. The young people unanimously thanked Councillor P. Smith stating that it would be something which they would consider at their next Change Council meeting.

The Head of Safeguarding also recommended that the young people come forward should they have any suggestions on how to improve the Performance Report or if they would like to identify any areas of performance that they would like the Council to measure.

Upon consideration, it was:-

17. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Independent Advocacy for Looked After Children

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report concerning young people's access to Independent Advocacy.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Independent Review Manager firstly updated the Committee on progress in relation to the renewal of its contractual arrangements for an independent service provider in accordance with the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services 2004. In doing so, he advised that following a Tender Evaluation process Action for Children had been announced as the successful bidder. He explained that the newly awarded contract would run from 1 February 2011, initially

for three years with subsequent extension options subject to continued quality and adequate funding provision.

The Committee were also informed that the new contract would enable cost-savings in the remainder of the financial year, and based on past usage would enable continued savings over the next three years.

The Independent Review Manager went on to outline the remainder of the report to the Committee and in doing so advised that whilst take up of the advocacy service had been lower in 2009-2010 than in previous years, eighteen referrals had been picked up in 2010-2011, two of which had been in the current quarter.

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 Advocacy Service continued to record information regarding themes identified by young people, and feedback regarding responses.

In relation to themes, the Independent Review Manager was able to inform the Committee that these continued to relate to young people's uncertainty about their plans, or children seeking support to resolve difficulties regarding disagreements with the local authority and their parents. Some representations had been related to specific decisions about placement moves or school enrolment.

There had been six occasions when young people had requested that their representations be supported by the Children and Young People's Rights Officer without using the Advocacy Service.

Councillor P. Smith enquired how many young people in attendance at Committee had used the Advocacy Service, to which the young people responded that none of them had used it, however they felt reassured that the service was available. The Independent Review Manager reiterated to Members that the Young People's Rights Officer was usually the first port of call for the young people as she managed to deal with most of the issues that the young people tended to raise effectively.

Councillor D. Smith enquired if there was any possibility that a report could be obtained detailing past performance before the new Advocacy contract commenced. The Independent Review Manager stated that this would be expected and suggested that if it would be useful to Members a report detailing such performance could be submitted to the Corporate Parenting Board on an annual basis.

Upon consideration, it was:-

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

MALAP Strategy

The Services for Looked After Children Manager delivered a presentation to the Corporate Parenting Board on the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP) Strategy.

The Board was advised that the MALAP was made up of representatives from a range of services, directorates and partner agencies. The MALAP was Chaired by Head of Safeguarding and was made up of the following: -

- Services for Looked After Children;
- Case Management;
- Safeguarding Unit;
- Youth Offending Service;
- Young People's Services;
- Commissioning Unit;
- Performance and Information Team;
- Services for Disabled Children;
- The Virtual School for LAC;
- Workforce Development;
- Connexions; and
- Extended Services

The Board heard the Partners involved in the MALAP were as follows: -

- TPCT Children's Lead for Commissioning
- Designated Nurse for LAC
- Consultant Child Psychologist for LAC
- Sunderland College

The Services for Looked After Children Manager explained that in terms of governance arrangements the MALAP met on a bi-monthly basis and whilst it was not a formal sub-group of the Children's Trust, the frameworks developed by the Children's Trust helped to formulate the MALAP Strategy. What's more, the MALAP was identified in the Children and Young People's Delivery Plan 2010-2013 as the lead body for delivering improved outcomes for Looked After Children.

The purpose of the MALAP Strategy was to assist the MALAP identify existing services, strategies, and plans which impact on Looked After Children, in order that these could be considered for consolidation and development. The MALAP Strategy also provided a framework for future planning to ensure that Looked After Children are appropriately served within mainstream strategies, and that dedicated strategies are established and implemented where necessary.

The vision for the MALAP Strategy was as follows: -

“To ensure agencies work together to give all children and young people who are looked after or have been looked after, the best opportunities to do well in life.”

Members heard that although there had been several strategies for Looked After Children within Children's Services, there has never been a strategy developed and owned by partners as well as the Council, and the MALAP Strategy addressed this.

Priorities identified in the MALAP Strategy were being outlined as follows: -

- Improve access to emotional and mental health services for Looked After Children in short term placements
- Increase foster carer recruitment
- Improve long term placement stability

The Services for Looked After Children Manager explained that as an overarching driver to improve outcomes for Looked After Children, it was essential that the MALAP Strategy remained inextricably linked with the Corporate Parenting Board. He also took the opportunity to inform Members that the remit and process of the Corporate Parenting Board was currently being reviewed to ensure it fulfils its purpose of enabling Members and senior managers to be effective corporate parents.

Councillor P. Smith enquired of the Members if they would be interested in participating in a review of the Corporate Parenting Board or, if Members had any strong views on this.

Councillor A. Hall enquired if Member involvement in the review could be opened up to a wider range of Councillors. The Head of Safeguarding responded upon advice stating that indeed it could, and suggested that a future Corporate Parenting Board agenda could even be arranged especially for the topic of realising our responsibilities as corporate parents where other Councillors could be invited along to attend.

Upon Consideration, it was: -

19. RESOLVED to note the information contained within the presentation.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

20. 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.

