

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 10 July 2012 in
Committee Room No. 6, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30p.m.**

Present:

Councillor P. Smith
Councillor Ball
Councillor A Lawson
Councillor Macknight
Councillor McClennan
Councillor D Smith
Councillor Speding
Councillor D Trueman
Councillor Walker

Members of the Board

Executive Member for Children's Services
Ryhope
Shiney Row
Castle
Hendon
Copt Hill
Cabinet Secretary – Shiney Row
Washington West
Washington North

Also in attendance:

Councillor Davison
Councillor Marshall
Councillor T Martin
Councillor G Miller
Councillor Stewart
Councillor Turton

Redhill;
Doxford
Hendon
Washington South
Redhill
Sandhill

Meg Boustead
Jane Hedley
Debra Dorward
Neil Gibson

All Supporting Officers
Head of Safeguarding
Solicitor
Governance Services Officer
Principal Case Manager

Appointment of Chairman

1. RESOLVED that Councillor P. Smith be appointed as Chairman of the Corporate Parenting Board for the Municipal Year 2012/2013.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Blackburn, Kelly and Phil Taylor.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 February 2012

2. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

Quarter 4: Performance Monitoring Report

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Members with information regarding performance against key performance indicators and targets for Looked After Children.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The Chair explained that the Council had a duty as ‘corporate parents’ to ensure that actions were being taken to improve outcomes for young people.

Board Members were advised that Children’s Services were looking at the lives of young people and how happy they were in their placements. Work was also being undertaken to establish whether young people had suitable places to live when they leave care, combined with their feelings and views to give an indication of the child’s outcomes from the care system.

Information had been obtained from a system called Viewpoint. This was made up of questionnaires for looked after children, the Care Leavers Evaluation survey, indicator information taken from the Looked After Children Performance Scorecard and data held on the Looked After Children dataset.

Sunderland had also compared the information that they had obtained and compared it with the results of a national study carried out by the Children’s Society and the University of York.

Members were advised that the numbers of looked after children in Sunderland remained stable. A list of placement types was contained within the report. The Head of Safeguarding stated that the list of placement types was considered to form a typical pattern, with the majority of children looked after being in foster care.

The report provided information regarding the length of time young people remained in care, and it talked about how young people were encouraged to live independent lives. The figures suggested that young people were staying in care for shorter periods of time, with lower proportions in care for over two years.

This was a significant reduction on the same figure for 2008, where just 70% had been looked after for more than two years.

Councillor McClennan enquired how easy Viewpoint was for young people to use and express their opinions, particularly if a young person did not feel comfortable using a PC. In response, the young people in attendance explained that all young people had a Viewpoint Worker who sat with them during completion of the survey. Also, the questions that Viewpoint asked were tailored to the age of the person conducting the survey.

The Head of Safeguarding added that Viewpoint was just one method of consultation the young people could use to express their opinions. Feedback could also be provided via their Key Worker or Social Worker.

Members of the Board suggested that they would find a demonstration of Viewpoint interesting. The Head of Safeguarding agreed to arrange this for a future meeting. Saul Cranson agreed to assist with the actual demonstration.

Board Members were advised that the stability indicators were very important as these were in place to monitor placement moves. This was very much a priority in Sunderland. A table was included which demonstrated the length of time children remained in placements.

The Head of Safeguarding stated that Sunderland performed well in relation to those adopted from the care of the Local Authority. 172 children left the care of the Local Authority between April 2011 and March 2012.

In response to an enquiry regarding why there appeared to be an increase of children adopted during the October and November months, the Head of Safeguarding stated that the adoption process was long and the date a child could be adopted depended on when the adoption process was finalised. The reason why there were more adoptions during these months might be that a lot of parents would prefer to have the adoption confirmed before Christmas.

A graph was included within the report demonstrating the number of days between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

Councillor Derek Smith enquired how many months prior to adoption would a child have been cared for. In response, the Head of Safeguarding stated that an

adoption application could not be submitted until a child had been placed for at least ten weeks, then six weeks must be given for a social worker to write a report.

Education information was provided later in the report, which focused on improving Key Stage 1 results, the decline in Key Stage 2 and the decline in children achieving 5 GCSE A*-G and A*-C, improved school attendance, the reduction in the number of children with fixed term exclusions and special educational needs.

The report also updated Members in relation to looked after children offending, being healthy and children not in education, employment or training (NEET).

Councillor McClennan commented that it was essential that the Council continued to monitor and track the number of children not in education, employment or training, particularly in order to assess the impact the recession was having on young people.

One of the young people in attendance stated that the clash of young people living together could sometimes be negative and had a tendency of becoming disruptive.

Councillor Ball enquired if the Council kept in touch with young people after they had left care to ensure that they were coping ok. In response, the Head of Safeguarding stated that young people were encouraged to keep in touch, and experience shows that they tended to until they reached 19 years old.

Councillor Lawson referred to substance misuse, and in doing so enquired if young people who smoked were offered interventions. The Head of Safeguarding stated that all children's homes offered guidance and the Council strongly discouraged smoking and offered smoking cessation. The Council also persevered to work with young people who refused help in relation to substance misuse intervention.

In response to an enquiry regarding whether looked after children were all given regular dentist checks, it was confirmed that they visited the dentist every six months.

Upon consideration, it was: -

3. RESOLVED that the report be noted.

Advocacy Review Update

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report (copy circulated) providing Board Members with an update in relation to the contract to deliver independent advocacy to Sunderland's looked after children.

(For copy report – see original minutes.

Board Members were advised that the Independent Advocacy contract with Action for Children had been in place since April 2008. The contract was reviewed and extended in 2011/12 and new monitoring arrangements were put in place. The young people had contributed to the review and had suggested good ideas for improvement.

The young people who attended the review had notified the Council that they had not received an advocacy leaflet when they came into care, and that they were previously not aware the Advocacy Service was available.

One of the young people in attendance stated that she had still not received a copy of the leaflet and that she was infact aware of someone who required an advocate, however they had not been offered one, nor had they been advised how to access one.

The Head of Safeguarding agreed to take this matter up outside of the meeting and would continue to report back to the Board on the Advocacy Service.

4. RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

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.

