

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 15 October 2012 in
Committee Room No. 6, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30p.m.**

Present:

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

Members of the Board

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

Young People

Saul Cranson
Daniel Bensley
Kieran Boyce

Change Council
Change Council
Change Council

Also in attendance:

Councillor Williams
Councillor Farthing
Councillor D. Snowdon

Washington Central
Washington South
Washington Central

All Supporting Officers

Meg Boustead
Alan Caddick
Dawn Shearsmith
Jennifer Cain
Dot McGough
Debra Dorward

Head of Safeguarding
Head of Housing
Sunderland Virtual School
Fostering Officer
Quality Assurance Officer
Governance Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Ball, Kelly, Maddison, Speding and Stewart.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 July 2012

9. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2012 be agreed as a correct record, subject to the correction of Councillor Derrick Smith's Christian name.

Supported Living Accommodation

Alan Caddick, Head of Housing was in attendance to provide an update in relation to supported living accommodation.

Board members were advised that a Gateway had been set up, which linked with a number of providers. It was intended that the Gateway would be used when carrying out assessments with young people to determine what exactly it was they wanted to achieve, thus becoming more outcome focused. This meant that providers would work alongside the individual, referring to their life plan to ensure that their aims were being achieved.

The Head of Housing reported that the Gateway had been in place for five months, and that so far, it was making good progress and working positively. Providers were working collaboratively, sharing approaches and provisions which was pleasing to see, and a meeting with the Gateway was scheduled in order for the Council to review its progress more formally.

In terms of housing young people, Board Members were informed that there were some young people in the system that tended of to move from one placement to another due to their challenging behaviour. The Head of Housing and the Head of Safeguarding were planning to meet to discuss the best way of tackling housing young people with chaotic behaviours.

Board Members were advised that Centre Point was planning to introduce a family mediation service with a view of achieving better outcomes, and benefit changes through Welfare Reform was also on the Council's agenda as this was also likely to impact upon young people.

Saul Cranson and Kieran Boyce enquired if the Council would assist young people to secure a place at college or university, or an apprenticeship. The Head of Housing responded advising that this was certainly something that the Council would assist young people to achieve.

Councillor Lawson enquired if there was any possibility of extending a children's home to accommodate young people with chaotic behaviours to enable them to continue to live on site, but in a more independent way. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that the Council were in the process of engaging with the architects at Three Rivers to discuss potential options. The Council were also exploring whether any funding was available to build more supportive accommodation.

Councillor McClennan commented that she held concerns regarding the benefit changes, particularly when those under the age of 25 would not be receiving any financial assistance. The Head of Housing stated that this would have serious implications thus would no doubt present issues for the Council.

The Head of Safeguarding stated that each individual was looked at separately and that the Council worked with the Leaving Care Service to obtain feedback regarding the Pathway Service.

Saul Cranson enquired if a children's home could be specifically made available for people with disabilities. The Head of Housing responded advising that the Council try to accommodate the needs of all individuals, not just some, and whilst different approaches may sometimes be used, personal choice also had to be offered.

The Head of Safeguarding stated that work was ongoing with children's homes to address issues that they were experiencing with individuals. It was envisaged that some homes may become more specialist in future.

Representatives from the Change Council enquired how the Council determined whether foster care or a children's home was the best option for a young person. In response, the Head of Safeguarding stated that any young person would tend to start off in foster care, and then if foster care proved to not meet their needs, then the Care Planning Team, including the Social Worker and young person would jointly decide what would happen next. Some young people did not want to live with a family, particularly those who are older. The preferred option was to maintain stability for young people, and avoid if possible multiple place moves.

Councillor Macknight in referring to the report stated that she thought the Council had ceased to use Bed and Breakfast accommodation for young people. The Head of Housing stated that there were three young people in B&Bs at the present time, however they were not located in the City. Decisions taken to place young people in B&B accommodation were not taken lightly and the Council was looking at out of city placements as an alternative. It was confirmed that B&B accommodation was a high concern and only ever used as a last resort.

The Chair of the meeting thanked the Head of Housing for his attendance.

It was: -

10. RESOLVED to note the update.

Review of Corporate Parenting Board

The Head of Safeguarding introduced the item, and in doing so tabled minutes from a meeting held on 20 September 2012 and a draft set of revised Terms of Reference for the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Board were informed that the Review meeting that took place on 20 September 2012 looked at how the Corporate Parenting Board operated, what worked well and what could be improved.

The Chair stated that the purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board was for the young people to be satisfied that they could present their issues at meetings and that the Board would address those. It was important that the young people felt they could challenge officers and openly express their views in meetings.

The Head of Safeguarding facilitated a discussion amongst the Board regarding what they considered currently worked well and what could be improved. The following comments were made:-

- Minutes of meetings appear too long and formal
- Reports presented appear difficult to understand and are too long/complicated
- Communication links appear to be missing between the Corporate Parenting Board and officers within the Council who could resolve issues in a more timely fashion, preferably in time for the next meeting
- Young people's issues were not currently in balance with the agenda
- Consideration could be given to improving the role of Councillors. For example, would it be beneficial for councillors to form a panel which could sit before the young people and hear their issues
- For the benefit of the young people, it would be useful if issues raised could be documented in a list, then an update regarding the progress of each one be presented to meetings of the Board. This was in order that the young people could be confident that their issues were being taken seriously, and that the Board could review the list
- The committee room layout would feel more inclusive if it were conference room style, rather than theatre style so that Board Members could talk face to face
- It was good that young people were represented from all areas of the care system and that they remained the same to ensure messages could be fed to and from the Board consistently
- It was considered that there was a good level of participation at meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Board was advised that in future, there would be five representatives from the Change Council in attendance at meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Head of Safeguarding thanked the Board for expressing their views. A date for the next Review meeting would be confirmed in due course.

Upon consideration, the Board: -

11. RESOLVED to: -

- i) Consider the draft Terms of Reference; and
- ii) Submit any comments to the Head of Safeguarding prior to the next Review meeting, the date of which would be confirmed in due course.

Performance Monitoring Report

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report (copy circulated) which had a dual function of providing Board Members and partners 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.

The report specifically covered: -

- Quarter 1 Position Statement
- Looked After Children Performance Scorecard
- Looked After Children Outcome Statement
- Looked After Children Dataset – up to August 2012

Representatives from the Change Council stated that there were too many percentages within the report, which made it difficult for them to get an accurate picture of how the Council was performing. The Head of Safeguarding explained that the report was made up of percentages because it was a government requirement to produce and submit the information that format.

Councillor McClennan enquired if the Council’s severance package had effected staffing, to which the Head of Safeguarding responded advising that Children’s Services had flattened the management structure, but apart from that there had been no other changes in relation to social work. It was reported that more resources had been put into the Adoption Service by taking on more independent practitioners to assist with assessments. Fortunately, the Council did not have a

high turnover of Social Workers, and it was confirmed that no front line staff in social care took the severance.

Councillor McClennan in referring to the 'Currently Looked After Children Characteristics' on page twelve of the report enquired how the 396 children and young people looked after in Sunderland at the end of June 2012 compared with regional figures. The Head of Safeguarding stated that she would obtain the regional figures.

The Board were advised that children placed outside of Sunderland were regularly reported to Councillor Pat Smith. Page thirteen of the report provided a breakdown of Looked After Children throughout the years 2008 to date. The Head of Safeguarding stated that Children's Services were finding that young people spent less time in care due to the numbers decreasing. This was regarded a positive move and was the reason why looked after children population figures had not increased.

Councillor McClennan enquired if a breakdown of BME looked after children could be provided. The Head of Safeguarding agreed to obtain this information and submit it to a future meeting.

It was also confirmed that a demonstration of Viewpoint would be provided to a future meeting.

Kieran Boyce in referring to page fifteen of the report enquired about the locality of the eleven additional foster carers mentioned. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that the eleven additional foster care places would be located in Sunderland.

Councillor Snowden enquired if the benefit reform would cause problems recruiting additional foster carers. The Head of Safeguarding responded, and in doing so stated that Children's Services were successfully recruiting foster carers at the present time, however there were fewer people coming forward wishing to adopt. For that reason, it had been challenging trying to place siblings together because people did not want to take on a large financial commitment.

Saul Cranson enquired how young people coped being moved around. Saul was advised that Children's Services did their best to avoid multiple place moves, however in some instances young people must be moved away from the Northeast to allow them to make a new start. Children's Services ensured to make contact and also expected their families to do the same.

The Board was advised that offending was still an issue that Children's Services were working to combat in Sunderland. The Head of Safeguarding agreed to ask the MALAP to produce a report to present to a future meeting detailing the challenges and work that was taking place.

In response to a request from Councillor McClennan, the Head of Safeguarding stated that arrangements would be made to include information on offending amongst care leavers in Sunderland.

The Head of Safeguarding also agreed to ascertain more information regarding the assaults mentioned at the bottom of page twenty-nine of the report.

The Board were advised that a report on Education Performance would be submitted to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board which would provide an update in relation to the virtual school.

For future meetings, aspects of the performance report demonstrating graphs would be copied in colour and a link to the electronic agenda and papers would be emailed to the Corporate Parenting Board upon publication.

The Chair thanked the Head of Safeguarding for her update.

12. RESOLVED to note the content of the report.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

12. 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.

