

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday 4 February 2013 in
Committee Room No. 6, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30p.m.**

Present

Councillor Ball
Councillor Blackburn
Councillor Kelly
Councillor Lawson
Councillor Macknight
Councillor Maddison
Councillor McClennan
Councillor P Smith
Councillor D Trueman

Members of the Board

Ryhope
Hetton
Washington North
Shiney Row
Castle
St Michaels
Hendon
Silksworth
Washington West

Young People

There were no young people in attendance.

Also in Attendance

Councillor Davison
Councillor Farthing
Councillor Stewart
Councillor Watson
Councillor Williams

Redhill
Washington South
Redhill
St Anne's
Washington Central

All Supporting Officers

Meg Boustead
Dawn Shearsmith
Sharon Willis
Lynne Goldsmith
Debra Dorward

Head of Safeguarding
Sunderland Virtual School
Assistant Manager, Colombo Road
Thorney Close Children's Centre
Governance Services Officer

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors D. Smith, Speding and P. Walker.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2012

13. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October were agreed as a correct record, subject to the amendment to reflect Councillor Blackburn's attendance.

Review of Corporate Parenting Board

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report providing an update on the progress of the Review of the Corporate Parenting Board and some recommended changes to the Board to enhance its effectiveness.

By way of providing some background information, the Head of Safeguarding explained that the Corporate Parenting Board first met in September 2006 and had met quarterly since that date. At the first meeting terms of reference were confirmed as set out in the Council's Constitution and it was further agreed that the Board would report to the Children's Trust.

The review commenced in the Autumn and was lead by Councillor Stewart, Children's Policy Lead. Councillor Williams and Councillor Macknight supported throughout the process and the young people also participated.

The review group had met to identify what currently worked well and what worked less well in terms of the Corporate Parenting Board. A discussion was also held at the Corporate Parenting Board in October 2012 seeking their views in relation to the same. The responses obtained were outlined within the report.

Suggestions for improvement were highlighted as follows: -

Membership - The review group felt that it would be a good idea to include Scrutiny Members and representatives from People Boards in the Corporate Parenting Board.

Agenda - The production of an annual work plan in order that Board Members know which items are coming up.

Members felt that lengthy written reports were not always helpful and agreed that presentations might be better.

Space should be created on the agenda for the young people to speak and raise issues.

Performance reports should highlight information apposed to repeating the same information at every meeting.

Rooms - It would be helpful if the Board Members could face one another in the committee room.

Councillor Stewart thanked Councillors Williams and Macknight and the young people for their support during the review.

Councillor Stewart then went on to explain some of the suggestions for improvement in more detail. He advised that the young people in particular would like to feel that they had ownership of something on the agenda, and that they were keen to introduce an annual work plan for the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Head of Safeguarding stated that it would be beneficial if a care leaver could participate in future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board and assured Members that this was something that was being recommended back to the Change Council for consideration.

It was suggested that a Member from the Scrutiny Committee also attend future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board. Councillor Tate, who was in attendance stated that volunteers would be asked to come forward.

Councillor P. Smith commented that she was delighted to see so many Councillors present at the meeting.

The Head of Safeguarding concurred, and stated that she would like to continue to see as many Councillors as possible at future meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board.

An appendix detailing a timeline for changes was attached to the report.

Upon consideration, it was: -

14. RESOLVED that: -

- i) the Membership of the Corporate Parenting Board should be extended to Members of the Children's Scrutiny Panel and a representative from each of the People Boards, as well as the Lead

Member for Children's Services and the Policy Lead for Children's Services

- ii) all other Elected Members should be invited as participant observers to the Corporate Parenting Board, as all members have corporate parenting responsibilities.
- iii) The Corporate Parenting Board should agree an Annual Work plan with items against each date in the calendar. Young people from the Change Council should be involved in setting the work plan for the year during an annual event.
- iv) Other agenda items be added by Members or young people to augment the items on the annual work plan.

Education Performance

Dawn Shearsmith, Virtual School Headteacher was in attendance to deliver a presentation to the Corporate Parenting Board on Education Performance in Sunderland.

The information presented included Key Stage 1, 2 and 4 results for 2012 and trends over five years in English, Reading and Maths. Some exclusion data was also provided.

Councillor Tate enquired if attempts were being made to raise the level of performance in young people who were not meeting performance expectations. In response, The Virtual School Headteacher stated that measures were in place to assist pupils, and that 1:1 tuition was put in place for children.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Williams regarding School Action and School Plus, the Virtual School Headteacher confirmed that there were 3 pupils with School Action Plus contained within the statistical data in the presentation.

Councillor Stewart enquired if work had been undertaken at Key Stage 1 to predict results for Key Stage 2. The Virtual School Headteacher confirmed that she was collating that information at the moment.

The Leader commented that it was easier to understand the numbers rather than the percentage data, therefore suggested that statistics be presented in whole numbers.

Councillor McClennan enquired if Looked After Children were encouraged to try harder at school. The Head of Safeguarding responded stating that Looked After Children were encouraged but not forced, due to the trauma that could cause. Work was underway to look at introducing older

individuals who have experienced being in the care system as mentors for the younger looked after children.

The Leader stated that in terms of personalisation there were things that the young people could be encouraged to do. He suggested that the Corporate Parenting Board ought to look at what are the best interventions to ensure looked after children grow up to be all rounded individuals, with support for those who have suffered and do not appear to be interested in school.

The Virtual School Headteacher concurred with the Leader's comments stating that maths and English were not always high on the agenda of looked after children given the life troubles that they have experienced. She added that GCSE qualifications were not for every child and confirmed that there were other routes that they could obtain an education.

Councillor P. Smith commented that ten years ago, looked after children did not want to go school, therefore good inroads have been made since then.

Councillor McClennan enquired if looked after children were stigmatised by teachers and other children. The Virtual School Headteacher responded stating that this rarely occurs.

Councillor Williams stated that in her own experience, the looked after children were treated in exactly the same way as any other. However, it was unfortunate that in the current government, every child was judged on the results that they achieve.

Moving onto the Exclusions Data, Councillor Stewart enquired if some schools excluded more pupils than others. The Virtual School Headteacher stated that indeed there were some schools that excluded more pupils, and typically those were the schools that had the highest cases of challenging behaviour.

Members thanked the Virtual School Headteacher for her informative presentation.

Adoption Performance Report

The Head of Safeguarding submitted a report providing an update on the current adoption performance for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 December 2012.

The Head of Safeguarding advised that the Council continued to try to improve and move children through the care system quicker.

Members were advised that a new performance measure was shortly going to be introduced to speed up the assessment of adopters to fall within four

months. The Head of Safeguarding stated that would update the Corporate Parenting Board on the Council's progress with this.

Also, the management and performance of the adoption service would be brought to the Corporate Parenting Board in future reports.

The following reports were then tabled for Members' information: -

Adoption Service – the report provided the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the progress that the Adoption Service is making to improve outcomes for children and young people in Sunderland.

Adoption Service – Statement of Purpose.

Members were encouraged to provide their views and comments to the Head of Safeguarding. Members requested that the documents be submitted to the next meeting for further consideration and comment.

The Leader enquired about the Council's position in relation to early intervention. The Head of Safeguarding stated that Sunderland did not perform so well on the timeliness of looked after children being fostered. This was because Sunderland have a lot of young siblings who prefer to be placed together, and unlike other authorities Sunderland try to keep them together by placing them together, which takes longer. Sunderland also have a lot of older looked after children who require foster care.

In terms of the government's plans, they linked with the timeliness of approving adopters. At the moment, Sunderland were coping with the timescales, and it was confirmed that the challenge was now in relation to speeding up the process from eight months to four months.

In relation to the government removing the adoption grant, Sunderland's intention was to look locally and nationally to find families for children. The government was keen to encourage authorities to do this and spend money on adoption, which was something Sunderland also does.

15. RESOLVED : -

- i) to note the contents of the performance report; and
- ii) that consideration be given to the Adoption Service Report and Statement of Purpose with supporting appendices at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

Quarter 3, Performance Monitoring Report

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

(For copy report – see original minutes).

The report included a position statement for Looked After Performance, the Looked After Children Performance Scorecard, an Outcome Statement and the Looked After Children Dataset.

Members were advised that the numbers of looked after children had increased slightly from 417 in September 2012 to 425 at the end of December 2012.

The average number of days children remained in the adoption process had improved to 697 days in quarter 2. Members were advised that although this was above the National threshold of 639 days, performance was expected to improve towards the year end, and lead to an improved three year average for 2010-2013.

An opportunity was provided for Members to ask questions or make comments.

Councillor P. Smith in referring to the 'Being Healthy' section of the report enquired why there had been a reduction in the number of children and young people who had immunisations and dental check ups compared to 2011. The Head of Safeguarding responded advising that the Council had experienced difficulty seeking the appropriate authorisation for the provision of healthcare. However it was confirmed that parental consent was only required for the young people who enter the care system voluntarily. All children with a care order automatically received healthcare.

The Leader enquired what measures had been put in place to ensure that Sunderland do not fall behind on providing health checks to looked after children. The Head of Safeguarding responded, and in doing so explained that the electronic records system had been updated, therefore there was no longer a reliance on the paper-based forms. She confirmed that all looked after children would receive a health check, only some would be delayed.

Councillor P. Smith enquired how childrens homes were tackling the issue of substance misuse. The Head of Safeguarding explained that substance misuse was as much of a challenge for the childrens homes to tackle as trying to encourage them with their schooling. For example a young person cannot be denied being part of the care system because they take drugs. Childrens homes did all they could to discourage drug taking, however it sometimes the realisation becomes clear that substance misuse is a normal occurrence for some young people. This was because the peer groups that they surround themselves do the same, or infact some young people have grown up seeing it happen in every day life.

The Leader commented that he appreciated the difficulties the childrens home face, and enquired what action was being taken to address the issue. The Head of Safeguarding stated that the Council worked closely with Northumbria Police and YDAP.

Sharon Willis, Assistant Manager from Colombo Road Children's Home added that community police officers were very valuable to the childrens homes. However, it was difficult to tackle, given that some young people get small jobs, such as washing cars to pay for substances, whilst other young people get it from their birth families. The children's homes address and appeal to the young people and reinforce that it is illegal.

Councillor Walker suggested that it might be a good idea to show the young people a video or something that would allow them to see the bad examples of what could happen to them if they take drugs.

Upon consideration of the report, it was:-

16. RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

Viewpoint Demonstration

Pauline Stevens, Childrens Review Officer was in attendance to provide a demonstration of the Viewpoint software.

Viewpoint was a computer-assisted, self-interviewing questionnaire designed to facilitate consultation with young people.

The Children's Review Officer explained that Viewpoint allowed children to understand that the Council was always interested in hearing their views and would like to see the world through their eyes. All of the questions asked in the questionnaire were generic, however, the software was tailored to each individual child.

The way in which Viewpoint supports the child was outlined and a series of examples of some of the questions the young person could be asked was demonstrated.

Following the completion of every questionnaire, a report was generated which was sent to the child and the child's social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer.

Councillor McClennan enquired if children's previous responses were compared with their most recent responses in order to monitor their life experiences. The Children's Review Officer confirmed that responses were indeed compared, and if there was an issue of concern it was reported immediately.

It was confirmed that the Independent Reviewing Officer also worked to address any issues in formal reviews and Social Workers also pick this up.

Councillor McClennan enquired further how feedback is communicated with the young person. The Children's Review Officer explained that she endeavoured to visit each young person before their Looked After Children

Review to ascertain if action has been taken against the issues recorded in their Viewpoint questionnaire.

The Independent Reviewing Officers were also responsible for overseeing plans for all looked after children, which involved them having to critically evaluate plans and quality check information contained within the reports that the Viewpoint software creates.

The Head of Safeguarding explained that the Council was currently exploring the idea of joining up this service with another provider in order to make the service for independent and enhance the delivery of the service.

Members thanked The Childrens Review Officer for providing the Viewpoint demonstration and for answering their questions.

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

At the instance of the Chairman, it was:-

17. 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.

