

Corporate Parenting Board

**Minutes of the Meeting held on Tuesday 8 July, 2014 in Committee Room
No. 6, Civic Centre, Sunderland at 5.30p.m.**

Present:

Councillor Stewart
Councillor Lawson
Councillor Emerson
Councillor Macknight
Councillor Williams

Members of the Board

Redhill Ward
Shiney Row Ward
Ryhope Ward
Castle Ward
Washington Central Ward

Young People

Kieran Boyce

Also in Attendance

Councillor Allan
Councillor Davison
Councillor T. Martin
Councillor G. Miller
Councillor Copeland

Sandhill Ward
Redhill Ward
Hendon Ward
Washington South Ward
Southwick Ward

All Supporting Officers

Fiona Brown
Rosemary Pickering
Jenny Parkin
Lucy Pearson
Penny Brunton
Lynne Goldsmith
Jim Stewart
Sharon Willis
Steven Mason

Chief Operating Officer
Adoption Team, Sunderland City Council
Adoption Team, Sunderland City Council
Adoption Team, Sunderland City Council
Accommodation Services Manager
Senior Safeguarding Manager, People Services
Sunderland City Council
Operational Manager, People Services
Strategic Service Manager (Safeguarding)

Apologies for Absence

Apologies were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillor P. Smith and Dawn Shearsmith.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July, 2014 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

Corporate Parenting Board Annual Performance Report

The Executive Director of People Services submitted a report which informed the Board of the current position of the Council as 'Corporate Parent' and provided an update on the current performance of the Council in relation to meeting this responsibility.

The report included a position statement for Looked After Performance and the Looked After Performance Scorecard.

Fiona Brown referred the Board to the report and commented that it was refreshing to see that 25% of the performance indicators were showing an upward trend.

Members of the Board were invited to ask questions or make comments.

Councillor T. Martin referred to a section of the report which highlighted that looked after children who had offended represented 14.1% of the cohort, based on those looked after for more than 12 months as at 31 March 2014. Councillor T. Martin enquired why was this significantly above the 2012-13 national average of 6.2%. Fiona Brown advised Councillor T. Martin that she would respond to his enquiry in writing.

Councillor Williams asked if there was a reason why performance had declined in relation to the long term stability indicator (looked after for more than 2 and a half years, in the same placement for 2 years). Lynne Goldsmith replied advising that evidence showed that foster carers sometimes request for young people to be removed from their care. This also occurred in long term care. Councillor Williams was advised that the reason for this could be because the carer is unable to manage a young person that has behavioural issues, or that a young person placed as a child has now grown up and the carer cannot cope. It was reported that even the most experienced trained carers experience difficulties.

Lynne added that the Council was looking into continuity of care and providing respite for carers and young people. Training for carers was also being looked in to.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Williams regarding the number of breakdowns in care that there had been, Rosemary Pickering advised that there had been only one breakdown in three years.

Councillor Williams requested an update in relation to the care available to care leavers. Fiona Brown explained that some work had been undertaken with the Head of Housing regarding the development of an extra care scheme. Since then, work had commenced with service managers and landlords. It was confirmed that this piece of work would be included in the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan.

Councillor Macknight remarked that the all of the National Indicators should be set within the 'very good' banding.

Councillor Macknight enquired up to what age was a young person looked after. In response, Fiona Brown advised that a young person was supported up to the age of 21, and up to the age of 25 if they go on to be educated at university.

The Chair requested that the issue of accommodation be resubmitted to the Board at a future date. He also commented that it would be useful to receive information relating to NEETs in a more detailed report.

2. RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted.

Annual Report of the Adoption Agency

The Executive Director of People Services submitted a report updating the Board on the work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panels.

Jenny Parkin, Adoption Panel Advisor reported that the number of adoptions had increased and that the service remained extremely busy.

Members were advised that over the course of the year there had been 28 sets of adopters approved which was more than ever before.

Over the year, 48 children were approved for adoption and there were 47 matches between children and their new families. This increase was significantly higher than the 30 matches that had been approved in 2012/2013. It was reported that the biggest increase in matches had been for boys.

An addendum was attached to the report providing details of the family finding activity that had taken place in Sunderland, as well as information on the innovative Adoption Parties/Activity Days held in February 2014.

Councillor T. Wright enquired if siblings could be placed together. Jenny Parkin responded advising that every attempt was made to place siblings together and that the Council had been successful with this in the past. However, if there were three children then this could sometimes be more difficult than placing only two together. This also depended upon the needs of the children.

An enquiry was raised regarding why it took 8 years for two sibling boys to be placed together. Jenny Parkin advised that Sunderland had a higher rate of placing older siblings together, however the specifics of each case were different.

The Chair commented that the approved adopted family statistic showed that all couples were married, and asked was this usual. Jenny Parkin advised that the Council had no moral stance in relation to marriage, but confirmed that most adoptive couples were married.

3. RESOLVED to note the Annual Report of the Adoption Agency and Panels.

Work Plan for the Corporate Parenting Board

The Board was referred to the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan. During which, Members were invited to suggest future work items.

The following suggestions were made for inclusion: -

- Early Intervention/Troubled Families
- Special Guardianships

The Chair stated that an email would be circulated to the Board welcoming any further suggested items.

4. RESOLVED to note the Corporate Parenting Board Work Plan.

Adoption Parties in Sunderland

Rosemary Pickering and Jenny Parkin, Adoption Team delivered a presentation on Adoption Parties in Sunderland.

Adoption Parties were organised events that provided approved adopters, or prospective adopters the opportunity to meet a range of children who need adoptive placements and engage with them in a fun environment.

Having already held the first event, it was reported that the feedback received was very good and it was hoped that the Adoption Parties would prove successful in finding matches.

Kieran Boyce, Change Council enquired how adopters were notified of the Adoption Parties. In response, Jenny advised that letters are sent to adopters and prospective adopters.

The Chair enquired whether Sunderland liaised with other neighbouring local authorities regarding the Adoption Parties. Rosemary responded advising that six local authorities had joined together with Bath to run Adoption Parties, however Sunderland had chosen to remain alone as it was already further ahead and onto organising its second Adoption Party event.

Members were advised that in time, the successes of children placed for adoption as a result of Adoption Parties would become evident.

In terms of timescales, findings to date showed that younger children were being placed more quickly and the courts were moving children through the care system more quickly.

Councillor Williams enquired why a child could not be adopted within the same area that their birth family lives. Jenny Parkin advised that this depended on the family and was the decision of the court. In some cases, children must be placed outside of Sunderland, however decisions were made on a case by case basis.

Councillor Lawson enquired in relation to fast tracking adopters, whether this could have implications of failure due to assessments being completed too quickly. Jenny advised that some adopters do take longer than the average timescales to go through the process. It was confirmed that all assessments were carried out thoroughly and that usually potential adopters were very well prepared. Also, it would be unusual for a prospective adopter to opt of their decision to adopt, unless it was for good reason, such as a health problem or a relationship breakdown.

Members thanked Jenny Parkin and Rosemary Pickering for their informative presentation.

5. RESOLVED to note the presentation on Adoption Parties in Sunderland.

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

At the instance of the Chair, it was:-

6. 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 was 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. STEWART
Chairman

Note:-

The above minutes relate only to items considered during the time which the meeting was open to the public.