

Time Commenced: - 6.00 pm
Time Finished: - 8.00 pm

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMISSION 11 DECEMBER 2007

Present: Councillor Rawson (Chair)
Councillors Higginbottom and Poulter

23/07 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Ginns.

24/07 Late Items to be Introduced by the Chair

No late items were introduced.

25/07 Declarations of Interest

Name	Type of Interest	Reason
Councillor Higginbottom	Personal	Chair of Governors – Ashgate Primary School
	Personal	Governor – Brackensdale School
Councillor Rawson	Personal	Governor – da Vinci Community College
	Personal	Trustee / Management Board Member – Umbrella
	Personal	Trustee / Management Board Member – Derwent Stepping Stones

26/07 Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Sub-Commission – 4 September 2007

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 September 2007 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair, with one correction as follows:

In Minute 14/07, Councillor Higginbottom's declaration of interest should read 'Chair of Governors' and not 'Vice Chair of Governors'.

27/07 Call – In

There were no items.

28/07 Statistical Information on Children Looked After

The Sub-Commission received a report from the Corporate Director for Children and Young People which provided the Sub-Commission with statistical information on Children Looked After.

Keith Woodthorpe, Assistant Director – Specialist Services, presented the report. It showed that all indicators were holding, with no major negative areas. There were 413 Children Looked After at 1 August. Keith advised that numbers of Children Looked After peaked at 425 in early October. He also advised that projections predicted a gradual rise in numbers.

The number of Children Looked After as a proportion of total children in Derby was exactly the average within the comparative local authority 'family' group, at 7.7 per 1000. The percentage of Children Looked After placed through agencies had risen to approximately 20% of the total. This was below the national average and that of the family group. The position on agency placements and the associated costs continues to be closely monitored. The performance against National and Local performance indicators was generally very good.

Councillor Poulter raised the issue of the number of children placed with other agency foster carers outside Local Authority boundary increasing from 47 to 56. Keith advised that this figure was currently holding, but that there was a projected overspend on the agency budget. Most children in the October peak had been placed through the independent sector.

Councillor Rawson asked if the issues caused by changes in legislation that contributed to a decrease in children placed for adoption in early 2006 had been resolved. Keith replied that they had, and that the service was heading to improve on their target for adoptions of Children Looked After. Keith also advised that last year's result gave us a top rating for that indicator, and that the forecast figure would make Derby one of the top-performing Local Authorities for adoptions of Children Looked After.

Councillor Rawson pointed out that the forecast for two indicators were below target. Keith replied that the forecast performance for the indicator 'Long term stability of Children Looked After' would be an improvement on the previous year, and would achieve a four-star performance rating. The indicator 'Distance children newly looked after are placed away from home' was a new addition, and the projected performance rating was not known. Keith suggested that finding the correct family was more important for many children than the geographical location of the family, and restated that Derby was doing very well in placing children for adoption.

Resolved to note appendix 2 of the report.

29/07 Maintenance Issues for Children's Homes

The Sub-Commission received a Report of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People regarding maintenance in Children's Homes. The report was presented jointly by Rod Jones, Head of Service – Residential and Leaving Care Service and Tim Findlay, Maintenance Manager.

Rod reported that the five Children's Homes operated by Derby City Council were in varying states of repair. The design specifications were not always completely suitable. The maintenance of the homes sometimes failed to meet minimum Ofsted standards, as the Children's Homes regulations required a higher standard than that required for other council properties.

Tim advised that the maintenance backlog across the Council was £108 million and increasing. A condition survey was planned by the end of the 2007-08 financial year but was subject to funding constraints. There were regular meetings to ensure that the system worked and that homes were as well maintained as possible. However, there was a struggle to maintain and decorate homes, with residential workers often carrying out minor repairs and decorating work themselves.

Another issue was that the standard of repairs deemed acceptable under current Council contracts was not always sufficient to meet the requirements of the homes. The current feedback system on work carried out was not always reliable. The report recommended the commissioning of a full condition survey of the five homes, and the development of a robust and realistic service level agreement for the delivery of reactive maintenance repairs.

Councillor Higginbottom asked why there was still a problem with the service level agreement, as the same issue had previously been discussed. Tim Findlay replied that no agreement exists, and that the City Council maintenance strategy did not meet Ofsted requirements. Tim added that regulations determine the standard required for maintenance in Children's Homes and therefore this was a special case that would need a separate service level agreement. There were cost implications, with the current situation of increasing backlogs and decreasing budgets. Keith Woodthorpe advised that Corporate Services agreed that maintenance of Children's Homes should be a priority, and he would press for them to be seen as a special case.

Councillor Poulter observed that the standard of the three homes he had visited were higher than he expected, but that minor defects spoiled the whole. He added that residential staff were frustrated by this and should not have to perform routine maintenance tasks. He gave two suggestions

for solutions, the first being devolving some of the maintenance budget to home managers for minor work and the second being a dedicated handyman for all five sites.

Tim Findlay advised that the possibility of a handyman was on the agenda. He suggested that it might work but that the range of competencies required could rule it out. With regard to devolved budgets, Tim Findlay warned that a major shortfall in one home could adversely affect the budgets for all homes if too much of the budget was devolved. Keith Woodthorpe and Rod Jones concurred with this point.

Councillor Rawson expressed his disappointment in the upkeep of one of the homes, as damage noted in an Ofsted report in May had still not been fixed when he visited in October. He suggested that the service level agreement should include the time taken to make a repair. Tim Findlay advised that sometimes follow-ups to temporary repairs were sometimes missed. He acknowledged there were difficulties, and advised that new call management software was being looked at.

Councillor Rawson asked if contractors performing sub-standard work could be identified, and Councillor Higginbottom asked if contractors left feedback forms for residential staff to complete. Rod Jones advised that feedback forms should be routinely left by contractors under their contract and that home managers were encouraged to complete these. However, not all contractors left these forms. Keith Woodthorpe added that there were no real consequences for contractors if the form was not left.

Councillor Poulter asked if PFI was an option if one building needed to be replaced entirely. Keith Woodthorpe replied that this could be an option so long as there was a commitment to revenue flow. He advised that previous experience showed PFI to be a commercially viable option for large projects but that the development of a single children's home may not be viable using the PFI route. Rod Jones advised that none of the homes were at risk of condemnation at present.

Tim Findlay advised that the condition surveys should be completed in time for the next Sub-Commission meeting. The Sub-Commission agreed to receive a brief update at the next meeting.

Resolved to recommend the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People and Corporate and Adult Services jointly to:

- 1) Commission a full condition survey of the five children's homes operated by Derby City Council, consider suitability and sufficiency issues, carry out an option appraisal and recommend proposals to bring them to a suitable standard, or replace them.**
- 2) Develop a robust and realistic service level agreement for the delivery of reactive maintenance repairs within the constraints of the Council's limited maintenance revenue budget and**

- increasing maintenance backlog.
- 3) Investigate the options of devolving some of the budget for the maintenance of children's homes to home managers and of employing a dedicated handyperson for the five children's homes.
 - 4) Develop a system of checks to ensure that feedback forms are left.

30/07 Issues of Concern Arising from Ofsted Inspections of Children's Homes

The Sub-Commission received a report of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People detailing the inspections made to children's home by Ofsted between 21 June and 11 October 2007, and the issues raised by Ofsted.

The report was presented by Rod Jones. He reported that Queensferry Gardens had been rated as outstanding, and that this was the first home in Derby to achieve this level of inspection judgement. The one home judged to be inadequate was Moorfield on the Ofsted inspection of 21 June 2007. In a second inspection the home had been judged to have improved well, but the overall judgement could not be changed until the next key inspection.

Rod advised that the priority was improving the performance of Moorfield to ensure that all five homes in Derby were judged satisfactory or better. He also advised that one issue raised by Ofsted in the inspection of Bute Walk had been challenged in writing.

The Sub-Commission congratulated Queensferry Gardens on achieving a judgement of outstanding, and agreed to issue a letter of congratulation.

Resolved:

- 1) To note the report.
- 2) To issue a letter of congratulation to Queensferry Gardens children's home on achieving an inspection judgement of Outstanding.

31/07 Educational achievement of Children in Care - Self assessment using the Audit Commission Toolkit

The Sub-Commission considered a report from the Corporate Director for Children and Young People showing Derby's current position as indicated by self assessment using the audit commission tool kit.

The report was presented by Keith Woodthorpe. He reported that of the sixty-eight standards exploring eight lines of enquiry, no standards were

assessed as 'Not Met'. The Children and Young People's Department would continue to use the toolkit on an annual basis.

Resolved to note Derby's current position as indicated by self assessment using the self assessment toolkit 2006.

32/07 Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills 2006/07

The Sub-Commission received extracts of the Ofsted Annual Report relating to Looked After Children.

This item was presented by Rob Davison – Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordination Officer. The extracts he presented from the Ofsted report related to Quality and standards in Social care inspections. Rob asked if this section should be provided to the Committee each year, and this was agreed by the Sub-Commission.

Resolved:

- 1) **to note the extracts of the Ofsted Report.**
- 2) **to request Overview & Scrutiny to bring relevant extracts of the Ofsted report to the Corporate Parenting Sub-Commission on an annual basis.**

33/07 Councillor Visits to Children's Residential Establishments

Rob Davison asked the Sub-Commission to consider the arrangements to collectively review the reports made on visits by elected Members to children's residential establishments. To avoid substantial printing, he suggested a short covering report be produced with the full visit reports to be accessible to the Sub-Commission and signposted as background papers. The reports should also make clear any sections that were to remain confidential.

Resolved to hold an informal meeting between Sub-Commission Members and officers before the next scheduled meeting of the Sub-Commission.

34/07 Exclusion of Press and Public

The Sub-Commission considered whether to pass the following resolution to exclude the press and public:

“That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press

and public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following item on the grounds that it was likely that confidential information would be disclosed in breach of an obligation of confidence required by the Government department that supplied the information”.

Resolved to exclude the press and public.

35/07 Joint Area Review – Looked After Children

The Commission received a verbal report on the draft findings of a Joint Area Review of Looked After Children.

Resolved to note the draft findings.

MINUTES END