

ITEM 5

Time Commenced: - 6.00 pm
Time Finished: - 7.10 pm

CORPORATE PARENTING SUB-COMMISSION TUESDAY 1 JUNE 2004

Present: Councillor Wynn (in the Chair)
Councillors Hird, Jones, MacDonald and Samra

32/03 Apologies

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Turner.

33/03 Late Items to be Introduced by the Chair

There were no late items.

34/03 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

35/03 Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Joint Sub-Commission

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2004 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair

36/03 Best Value Review of Services for Children Looked After - Progress Report on the Improvement Plan

The Sub-Commission considered a report from the Director of Social Services that set out the progress on actions arising from the Best Value Review Improvement Plan for Services for Children Looked After. Rachel Dickinson reported that a Best Value Review of Services for Children Looked After was completed in July 2003 and reported to Council Cabinet in September 2003. The Best Value Review was primarily concerned with how the Council was fulfilling its obligations as a corporate parent to Children Looked After, and the quality of service that they were receiving. Service areas included in the Review included assessment and care planning, children's quality assurances, fostering services and residential services.

It was noted that progress had been made in a number of key areas, including:

- the recruitment of a Reviewing Officer
- the Derby and Child and Adolescent Partnership being established

- the Advocacy Service contract being agreed with the CVS
- Elmhurst Children's Home being reallocated to Moorfield and the Children's Residential Management Structure finalised
- a plan for improving foster care and allocating the investment being approved and implemented

Councillor Wynn raised concerns around foster carers and the level of recruitment. He asked if the Council were competing against the private independent agencies. Rachel Dickinson reported that the Council had lost very few foster carers to the independent sector, and one carer had returned to the Council. It was considered that a lot of foster carers had been lost, due to the role becoming more challenging and the demands of the work. It was considered that the basic allowances had been improved as an encouragement to take up the role, however, allowances were still not meeting the cost of children looked after. It was noted that 36 children looked after had been placed in independent sector care. Many of these places were for children who needed specialised care and therefore needed specialised places, however, it was considered that the Council did not want to pay for their own shortfall.

It was considered that there had been a positive response to the publicity for recruitment in the staffing of qualified social workers in the Assessment and Care Planning Service, but still remained an area for concern. It was noted that recruitment and retention measures had been agreed and were currently being implemented.

Resolved to note the progress on the actions agreed by Cabinet arising from the Best Value Review Improvement Plan for Services for Children Looked After.

37/03 Education of Children Looked After Project (Gatsby)

The Sub Commission considered a report from the Director of Social Services that detailed the progress of the Education of Children Looked After Project (Gatsby). The report also highlighted the 39 recommendations made by the Social Exclusion Unit in September 2003 and on the Young Achievers Award Ceremony 2004.

Pauline Inwood reported that in September 2003 the Children's Green Paper "Every Child Matters" was published, alongside with the Social Exclusion Unit's report "A Better Education for Children in Care". The Report was published as a result of the Government's Investigation into the problems central and local Government had to overcome to provide children in care with a good education.

It was also reported that the 3rd annual Young Achievers Award Ceremony for Children Looked After and Care Leavers in Derby was held on the 25 April 2004.

It was noted that the implementation plan for the second phase of the Education of Children Looked After (Gatsby) project 2003/2006 was approved by the Project Board in December 2003, and would run until Autumn 2006. There were four main priority groups within the implementation:

- Priority A group - to promote school attendance, stability of home and school placements, and positive educational experiences at school
- Priority B group - to promote learning outside statutory schools, including provision of opportunities to pursue interests and hobbies and practical support to access educational opportunities
- Priority C group - to promote professional and workforce development and training, improved communication and multi-agency working
- Priority D group - to promote further data sharing and to establish and embed required data and information management procedures

It was considered that Priority A would be the main focus, it was hoped that a team would be established that would deal with priorities in a practical way.

It was reported that the figures in 1.2 of Financial Implications were not accurate. The administrative time for the Young Achievers Award Ceremony 2004 event was likely to reduce the costs by £1,500, and had now been fully quantified. The total bid for 2005 event would be £6,500. It was considered that this bid should be set up separately within the Council and not through the Gatsby Project.

Resolved

- 1. To note the progress of the Education of Children Looked After Project**
- 2. To note the report on Derby's position with regard to the 39 recommendations from the Social Exclusion Unit (September 2003)**
- 3. To receive a report on the Young Achievers Award Ceremony 2004 and requested that an additional £1,500 be funded to support the event in future years**

38/03 Children's Homes Regulation 33

The Sub Commission considered a report from the Director of Social services, which set out a summary of management inspection visits to Children's Homes. Rod Jones reported that Regulation 33 of the

Children's Homes Regulations 2001, required that homes should be visited once a month by an employee of the organisation running the home, but who was not directly involved in its management. It was noted that homes were inspected twice a year by the Commission for Social Care Inspections and these formal inspections were not repeated by the Council. It was hoped that in the next round of visits, Regulation 33 reports would be completed, as would formal inspections.

It was reported that 23 visits had taken place during the period November 2003 and March 2004 to the seven homes; Bute Walk, Coronation Avenue, Cricklewood Road, Elmhurst, Moorfield, Queensferry Gardens and Vicarage Road. Twelve scheduled visits were missed due to operational pressures on Social Services. It was noted that the monitoring system had been changed in order to improve on the number of meetings that were taking place.

It was reported that during the visits to the Homes, visitors were required to examine the daily log, record of sanctions, comment on the physical conditions of the homes and speak to any young people present. It was noted that all the home's buildings had now been surveyed for compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act to meet and exceed the minimum standards.

It was considered that children looked after were taking their educational activities and possible future employment seriously.

Concerns were raised relating to Bute Walk, around the tendency of children looked after to absent themselves for periods of time. Rod Jones advised that although children looked after do have a tendency to run away, it was considered a "phase of life" and often get enticed away. It was reported that of the two young people who were currently absenting themselves from their care home, one was now returning back to the home every night and a new home was being considered for the other child. Rachel Dickinson reported that the Social Services department was proposing to bring a report on missing children to the Corporate Parent Sub Commission meeting in September 2004.

Resolved to request that Council Cabinet recognise that children's homes need additional maintenance funding and support an increase in budget.

39/03 "If this were my child" - A Councillor's Guide to being a good corporate parent

The sub commission resolved to defer this item until the next available meeting of the sub commission as hard copies of the guide were currently unavailable and the email link to the guide was not currently working.

40/03 Future Agenda Items

The Commission decided to consider the following items at its meeting to be held in September 2004:

- a day in the life of children's care homes
- accommodation for care leavers
- update on best value review of services for children in care
- update on consultation - participation of young people
- "If This Were My Child" - a Councillors guide to being a good corporate parent
- a plan for improving foster care and allocating the investment agreed by cabinet.

MINUTES END