



**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
20th May 2004**

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
REPORT ON ACTIVITY: APRIL 2003 – MARCH 2004**

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: COUNCILLOR BRENDA THOMPSON

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: JAN DOUGLAS

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present to Members a summary of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the year 2003/2004 (see Appendix 1).

BACKGROUND

2. The Corporate Parenting Board has now been in operation for four years and in that time has gained a national reputation for its work. Key to the success of the Board has been the commitment of all Councillors and Officers to fulfilling their responsibilities as corporate parents.
3. Corporate parenting is a core statutory responsibility and central government continues to set clear targets and performance indicators in respect of services for children looked after by local authorities. Throughout the year, the Corporate Parenting Board has maintained a focus on improving services for those children and young people in the most cost-effective way.
4. The Inspection of Children's Services in Middlesbrough, carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate in July 2003, highlighted that "Councillors showed a clear understanding of and commitment to address issues that affected children's services." The report also recognised that, "An active Corporate Parenting Board was also in operation that had good links with young people."

ACTIVITY OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD 2003-2004

5. The Corporate Parenting Board considered a range of reports and information in relation to family placement services, residential care, leaving care services, education and health. A number of recommendations were made to the Executive Board, all of which were accepted and are being implemented. The attached report describes the activities of the Board between April 2003 and March 2004 in more detail (Appendix 1).
6. The Board also met with a total of six young people who attended six out of eight meetings. Young people gave presentations to the Board in relation to a consultation exercise on Every Child Matters, experiences of education and their involvement in the Leaving Care Service.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

7. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. This report is of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

8. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board:
 - a) Note the content of this report.

REASON

9. The recommendation is supported by the following reason:
 - a) To recognise the work of the Corporate Parenting Board in enabling the authority to meet government expectations in relation to corporate parenting in a way that is inclusive, accountable, effective and efficient.

HEAD OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES – JENNI COOKE

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board April 2002 – March 2003

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Corporate Parenting Board
Report on Activity
April 2003 to March 2004

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Brenda Thompson

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: Jan Douglas



1. Introduction

This report sets out the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the past year. The success of the Corporate Parenting Board has been recognised by the Audit Commission and information about the Board has been included in the Joint Review 'Making Ends Meet' Web site as an example of good practice [<http://www.joint-reviews.gov.uk/money/children/>]. The Board has considered a wide range of issues and made recommendations to the Executive for action. Further detail about the work of the Board is set out below.

2. How the Board Developed

Middlesbrough Council established the Corporate Parenting Board in February 2000 (Cabinet, 8/2/2000). The aim was to provide a focus for activities arising from the responsibilities of Members and Officers to act as "good parents" in relation to children looked after by the authority. The Board was developed in response to specific expectations being placed on local authorities by central government within the Quality Protects Framework (see Appendix A).

After the first year of operation, the Cabinet (13/2/2001) gave the Board delegated powers so that it became the recognised decision-making body in respect of the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities for children and young people looked after (see Appendix B for remit and membership for 2002-2003).

The Cabinet (13/2/2001) also approved the draft 'Corporate Parenting Policy and Strategy' which includes sections on:

- Children's Rights and Children's Participation
- Assessment, Care Planning and Review
- Placement
- Education and Personal Development
- Health
- Care Leavers
- Achieving Best Value

Each section contains national objectives and performance indicators and as such, the strategy is in keeping with the Performance Assessment Framework; Best Value Performance Indicators; Audit Commission Performance Indicators and the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. This document provides a framework for corporate parenting within the authority and is subject to monitoring and review by the Corporate Parenting Board.

In September 2002, following changes in constitutional arrangements, the Corporate Parenting Board was re-established as an advisory body to the Executive Board. As the Corporate Parenting Board does not consist entirely of Executive Board Members, it could no longer exercise delegated powers. Decisions made by the Corporate Parenting Board were, therefore submitted to the Executive for approval via the minutes.

From January 2003, the Executive sought to clarify decision-making processes by requiring the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board to present a report to the Executive Board as soon as appropriate after each meeting. This report details the business that has been considered and highlights the Board's recommendations to the Executive in respect of any decisions that are required.

3. The Work of the Corporate Parenting Board

There were eight meetings of the Board between June 2003 and April 2004. Members considered reports and information provided by Social Services, Education, the National Youth Advocacy Service and young people who are looked after, or were formerly looked after, by the authority (see Appendix C for more details).

During the year, the Corporate Parenting Board advised the Executive on a range of decisions and issues:

- Approval of a Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service, including a guide for children.
- Approval of a Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service, including a guide for children.
- Support for actions taken in response to Department of Health guidance on promoting the health of children looked after.
- Wide circulation of information arising from a 'Matching Needs and Services' exercise.
- Support for action taken to increase placement provision for children over 11 years of age.
- The development of a Tees-wide Adoption Consortium as an interim measure in the work towards a 'stand alone' Tees-wide Adoption Service.
- Support for the approach taken in response to the guidance issued by the Minister for Children in relation to the 'Canning Judgement'.
- Inclusion of young people's views in the Behaviour Support Plan.
- Support for the creation of a social work team for children looked after.

A total of six young people attended six out of eight of the meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board. They talked to Members about their work in relation to:

- Involvement as Young Advisers in the Leaving Care Service
- Consultation exercises carried out in relation to Every Child Matters and Education provision
- Personal experiences of Education

The Youth Development Worker from the Leaving Care Service and the Children's Participation Officer attend to represent the views of young people when they are unable to attend themselves.

Key Issues Considered by the Board

Family Placement

The Family Placement service has been subject to a number of statutory and regulatory changes and further change will take place in the forthcoming year, particularly in relation to adoption support services.

This year the Adoption Service joined the Fostering Service in being registered and inspected by the National Care Standards Commission (now known as the Commission for Social Care Inspection). The Board considered the Statements of Purpose and Children's Guides for both the Fostering and Adoption Services as the statements are subject to annual approval by elected Members.

Consideration was given to the proposals for developing a Tees-wide Adoption Service in partnership with the four Tees unitary authorities. Issues relating to matching adopters to children were also considered by the Board.

Education

Education continues to be a key priority for the Board and it was acknowledged that Middlesbrough Council, as a corporate parent, could make an important contribution to the lives of children and young people in care, by valuing and supporting their educational achievements. Education is regarded as the passport to better life chances.

Members received information on the educational attainments of children looked after and the actions being prioritised as a result of the Social Exclusion Unit Report, 'A Better Education for Children in Care'. The great efforts being made by the Education of Children Looked After Team in providing the statistics and working towards improving the results of Children Looked After and closing the gap in results with their peers was acknowledged.

Young people also presented information to the board about key issues to do with education and shared their personal experiences of education.

Inspection Findings

An Inspection of Children's Services was carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate in July 2003. The main findings in relation to Children Looked After Services were that the looked after provision is 'widely regarded as being effective' and that the high level of demand for looked after services impacted on budgets, choice and availability of placements. Areas for development included developing a strategy to increase provision and choice locally; reviewing systems regarding admissions into care to ensure that they are robust; and focusing on indicators regarding the life chances of children looked after.

In this context the Board welcomed the creation of a social work team for looked after children as part of a new Children Looked After business unit. The aim is to improve services to children looked after and, in the longer term, to develop services in partnership with other agencies.

Conclusion

The Corporate Parenting Board has considered a wide range of issues and has continued to make significant progress in addressing the needs of children looked after by the authority. The role of the Board in advocating on behalf of children for whom the authority has corporate parenting responsibilities has been instrumental in promoting their well-being. The value of the work carried out by the Board was recognised during the recent Inspection of Children's Services in Middlesbrough.

Sue Little
Children's Participation Officer
May 2004

The Role of Members as Corporate Parents

Central government has very clear expectations of local authorities in respect of corporate parenting. These expectations were sent in a letter from the Secretary of State for Health to each elected Member in the country in September 1998. In summary, the Secretary of State had three key messages for Councillors:

- children in the public care must be the primary focus for the resources and accountability of the local authority which has accepted a parenting responsibility for them;
- children who have spent a significant time being looked after by the local authority should afterwards be given the kind of support that decent and responsible parents would give their own children:
- children in the public care and other children in need, including disabled children, should be provided with a fully rounded set of support and care services, in partnership with health and education services particularly.

The Secretary of State also spelt out the government's expectations of the 'Local Authority as Corporate Parent':

- provide care, a home and access to health and education and other public services to which all children are entitled according to their needs
- provide a mixture of care and firmness to support the child's development, and be the tolerant, dependable and available partner in the adult/child relationship even in the face of disagreements
- protect and educate the child against the perils and risks of life by encouraging constructive and appropriate friendships, and discouraging destructive and harmful relationships
- celebrate and share their children's achievements, supporting them when they are down
- recognise and respect their growth to independence, being tolerant and supportive if they make mistakes
- provide consistent support and be available to provide advice and practical help when needed

- advocate their cause and trouble-shoot on their behalf when necessary
- be ambitious for them and encourage and support their efforts to get on and reach their potential, whether through education, training or employment
- provide occasional financial support, remember birthdays and Christmas or annual celebrations within the individual child's religion and culture
- encourage and enable appropriate contact with family members – parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and brothers and sisters
- help them to feel part of the local community through contact with neighbours and local groups
- be proactive, not passive, when there are known or suspected serious difficulties

APPENDIX B

Remit of the Corporate Parenting Board

The Board will work in an advisory capacity to the Executive Body with the following terms of reference:

To be responsible for the Council's role as Corporate Parent to those children and young people who are looked after and accommodated by the Local Authority.

That responsibility to also include:

- (i) Ensuring that the education, health and social needs of Children Looked After by the Authority are met;
- (ii) Developing effective corporate responses to fulfil the Authority's responsibilities as a Corporate Parent;
- (iii) To implement changes to policy and practice and inform service development in the context of corporate parenting;
- (iv) The dissemination of information concerned with its responsibilities associated with corporate parenting to all elected Members and relevant staff; and
- (v) The implementation, maintenance and review of this Council's 'Corporate Parenting and Strategy' document.

Membership (2003 - 2004)

Councillor J Jones	-	Chair
Councillor J Brunton		Vice-Chair
Councillor R Brady		Deputy Mayor
Councillor F McIntyre		
Councillor B Taylor		
Councillor J Taylor		
Councillor B Thompson		Executive Member Social Care and Health
Councillor P Thompson		Executive Member Education
Councillor A E Ward		
Observers:		
Tylee Quick		Young Person's Rep
Thomas Tolmie		Young Person's Rep
Brian Simpson		Foster Carer
David Hunter		National Youth Advocacy Service
Carol Bowen		Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust

The Board has places for up to 6 young people to attend.

APPENDIX C

Reports/presentations to the Corporate Parenting Board June 2003 to April 2004

- 'Making Life Better' - Policies And Strategies To Improve The Life Chances Of Children Looked After By Middlesbrough Council
- Statistical Information on Children and Young People Looked After by Middlesbrough Council
- Matching Needs and Services
- Recruitment of Rota Visitors
- Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service Statement of Purpose & Children's Guide
- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service Statement of Purpose & Children's Guide
- Teesside Adoption Agency – Progress Report on Feasibility Study & Tees-wide Adoption Service
- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service – Statistical Update
- Annual Inspection of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service by the National Care Standards Commission
- Inspection Of Children's Services – Findings Regarding 'Looked After Services'
- Placement Options for Older Children
- Five Rivers Partnership Board Half-yearly Report
- Five Rivers Project Ltd. Annual Report
- Leaving Care Service
- Social Work Teams/Creation of 'Looked After' Team
- Educational Attainments of Children Looked After
- "A Better Education For Children In Care" - Presentation Of The Social Exclusion Unit Report – and Key Messages from the Education Protects Conference – 8 October 2003

- “A Better Education For Children In Care” – Priorities for Action
- Education Survey of Children Looked After
- Experiences of Education – Presentation by Young People
- Promoting the Health of Children Looked After – Action Plan
- Support For Children Looked After Who Have Special Needs
- Middlesbrough’s Response to Ministerial Guidance on the ‘Canning Judgement’
- ‘Every Child Matters’ – Green Paper on Services for Children, Young People and Families
- Every Child Matters – Consultation Session For Young People
- The Children Bill
- National Youth Advocacy Service