



CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

20th May 2004

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – PROFILE AND TRENDS

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide the Corporate Parenting Board with information regarding the profile and statistical trends of Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council.

BACKGROUND

2. The provision of services to children looked after is a core statutory function and corporate responsibility. Since the introduction of the Quality Protects initiative, the Government has maintained a clear focus on improving services for this group of young people. This is reflected in the range of local government targets and performance indicators relating to children looked after.
3. It is crucial that information on the profile of children becoming looked after and trends in demand for services is analysed in order to plan services most effectively in partnership with other agencies.

TRENDS & PROFILE

4. The attached report sets out the current situation with regard to children looked after (Appendix 1). Whilst the numbers of children looked after increased significantly between 2001 and 2003, there has since been a reduction in 7% since March 2003. This reflects the increased emphasis on early intervention and preventative work with families.
5. The move to multi-agency, locality working will enhance opportunities for early identification of need and provision of services that will support this downward trend.

6. Whilst there is no such thing as a 'typical' child looked after, the statistical evidence suggests that a child is more likely to become looked after if he or she is:

“A younger child (under 11yrs) from a white or mixed ethnic origin where domestic violence; mental health or drug misuse are a main feature of one or both parents”

7. The information in the attached report will be used to inform the work of all agencies concerned with children and young people and to provide a basis on which to allocate resources.

OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT

8. The prevalence of parental drug misuse, mental health difficulties and domestic violence continues to present a challenge to all services providing services to children and their families. The further development of effective multi-agency working is a key factor in meeting this challenge.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

9. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. The report will be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

10. The Corporate Parenting Board is asked:
 - a). To note the contents of this report.
 - b). To support the further development of corporate working and multi-agency partnerships to reduce the numbers of children looked after by the local authority.

REASON

11. To ensure the focus and responsibility for 'Children Looked After' is maintained within and beyond the local authority.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

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CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER – PROFILE & TRENDS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide members with information regarding the profile and statistical trends of Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council. This information will inform Members role as a Corporate Parents to this group of children and young people

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Under the terms of the Children Act 1989, every Local Authority has a duty to provide accommodation for children in need in their area who fulfil certain criteria. The criteria reflects that the act of removing a child from their home is a serious decision which has a long term effect on the emotional and psychological well-being of that young person. The criteria to be fulfilled is that the child has:

- been lost or abandoned,

or

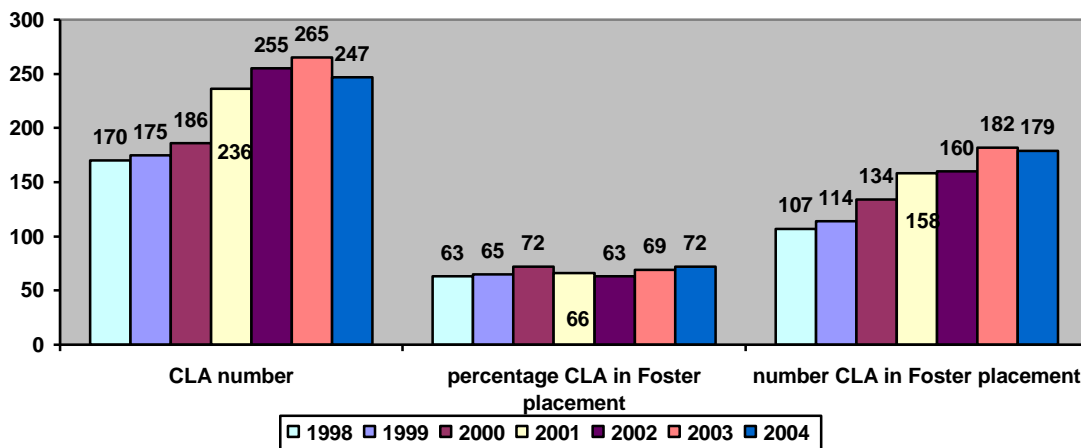
- there is no person with parental responsibility for the child
- that the person who has been caring for the child is prevented (whether or not permanently and for whatever reason) from providing the child with suitable accommodation or care.

1.2 In line with the Children Act 1989, Middlesbrough Council's policy is that, wherever it is safe to do so, children should be maintained with their families (immediate or extended).

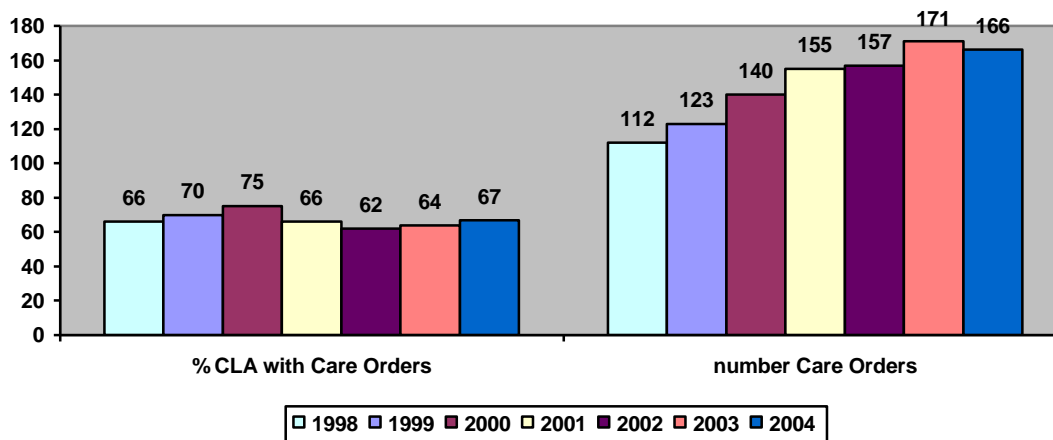
- 1.3 Middlesbrough Council Social Services provide services to approximately 2000 children in need and their families each year and has 247 children 'looked after'. This illustrates that the vast majority of families with whom Social services is in contact, receive support in caring for their children to such a level that the family can remain intact.
- 1.4 The term 'looked after' covers children who are received into care by virtue of a Court Order or children who are being provided with accommodation and care under a voluntary agreement with parents.
- 1.5 Throughout the course of any 12 month period, there will be many children who become looked after or cease to become looked after. A short period of respite is offered to families to help with a crisis situation or as a means of maintaining the family together. Longer-term care, can be within foster care or residential settings. The numbers of children being looked after at any one time therefore, are subject to some variation.
- 1.6 Currently Middlesbrough Council 'looks after' 247 children and young people. The following charts detail the trends and profile of this group as of March 31st 2004.

2. CURRENT DETAIL OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

2.1 CLA 1998-2004 in Foster Placement



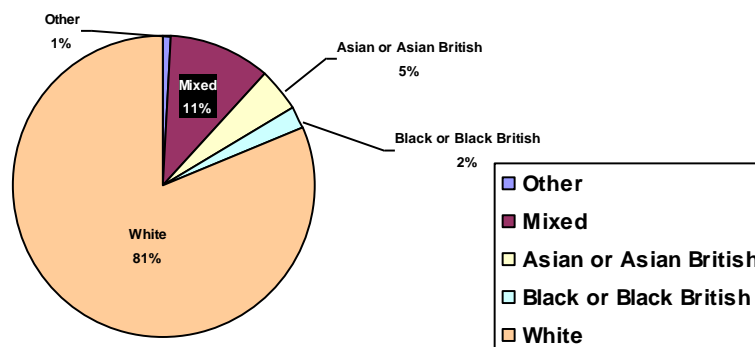
2.2 CLA 1998-2004 subject to a Care Order



The above chart shows that although the number of CLA in Middlesbrough with care orders has increased since 1998, the proportion has remained approximately at the level.

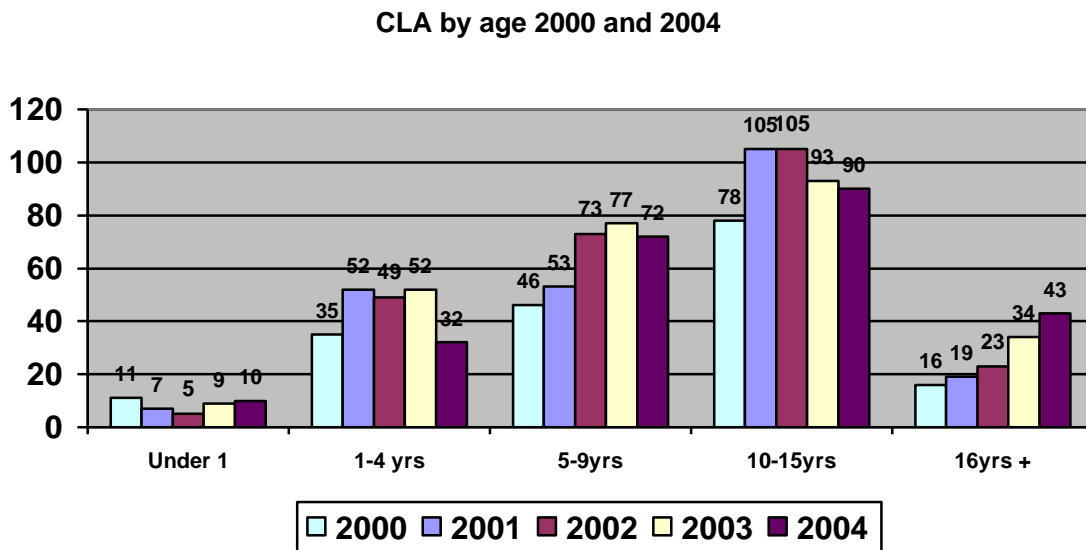
3. PROFILE OF CHILDREN 'LOOKED AFTER'

3.1 Ethnic Origin



The chart above shows that **81%** of CLA are white, **18%** are from ethnic background of which the majority are of mixed heritage. This is an over representation of the 'mixed heritage' group when compared with the local population.

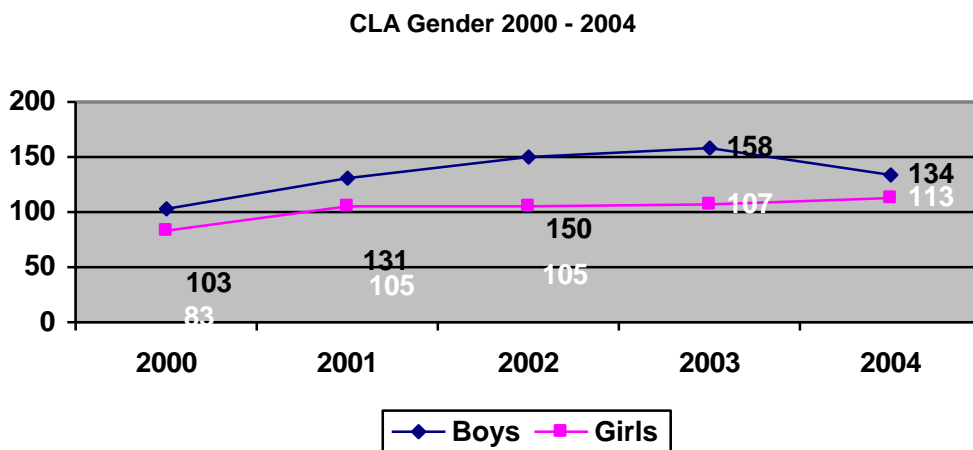
3.2 Children Looked After By Age:



The chart shows that there has been a significant increase in the 16 years+, which is in line with the national trend. Most notably a decrease in the number of age 1-4 year olds (where adoption is a preferred option for the long term) and 16 years+ whereas all other age bands remained around the same level for 2004.

Young people remain in care post 16 years as a result of a positive policy and practice initiative following the Leaving Care Act 2001. This reinforces the need to ensure young people do not leave 'care' at 16 years and live independently, but move into independence at a time appropriate to their own individual needs and situation. This has resulted in young people remaining in placement into their 17th and 18th year and often beyond (particularly if placed in foster care)

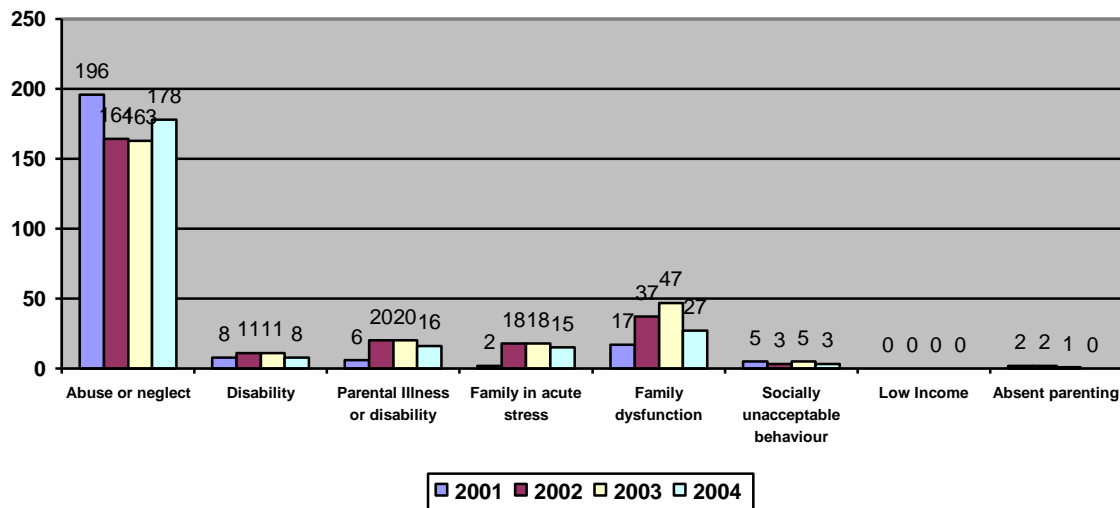
3.3 Children Looked After By Gender



In Middlesbrough the number of girls who are looked after has increased, whereas the number of boys has decreased.

4. REASONS FOR CHILDREN BECOMING LOOKED AFTER

4.1 Category of Need defining the reason for a child becoming 'looked after'



The chart shows that **72%** of CLA had a category of need of either abuse or neglect as at March 2004. This is an increase on the previous year's figures.

In the category 'Family Dysfunction', which has previously shown a steady increase, there has been a decrease from 47 to 27. This could be the result of 'reclassification' of cases as abuse and neglect would be key features of a dysfunctional family.

There is still no recording for CLA and the category Low Income as being the main need for a child becoming looked after. This would be expected, as these two factors would not individually result in the removal of a child, they may however be secondary or contributory factors to a more complex level of need.

5. SUMMARY

The number of children and young people 'looked after' by Middlesbrough Council had shown a steady increase between 2001 and 2003, however there has been a reduction of 7% since March 2003. Increased emphasis on early intervention and preventative working should see this downward trend continue.

The move to “locality working” on a multi-agency basis, which is being developed by the Preventative Working Group, will aid early identification and “packages of support” being offered to families on a multi-agency basis. This, together with other initiatives, including the ‘Information Sharing’ Project (formerly Identification Referral and Tracking) and locality meetings between agencies and organisations working with young people, will further develop prevention and early intervention with the most ‘at risk’.

Whilst there can be no general description of a child ‘looked after’ as each situation and individual is unique, the statistical evidence does suggest a prevalence of certain factors. These appear to suggest that:

“A younger child (under 11yrs) from a white or mixed ethnic origin where domestic violence; mental health or drug misuse are a main feature of one or both parents”

has more probability of becoming ‘looked after’ than other ages or groupings.

This evidence and information will continue to inform the work of all agencies concerned with children & young people and provide a basis on which to allocate resources.

Jenni Cooke Head of Children’s Services

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