



**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD  
1<sup>st</sup> JULY 2004**

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE  
ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003-4**

**BRENDA THOMPSON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SOCIAL  
SERVICES AND HEALTH CARE**

**JAN DOUGLAS - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR SOCIAL  
SERVICES**

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**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with the Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for the year 2003-4, attached as Appendix 1.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service gives information on the principles, aims, objectives and standards of care of the Fostering Service, the services and facilities provided, the staffing during 2003-4, activity and developments during 2003-4, and developments and issues for 2004-5.
3. The Annual Report is intended to be a stand-alone document but some of the material is also contained in the Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service, which has already been presented to members of the Corporate Parenting Board for approval. Sections 6 and 7 of the Annual Report contain information which does not appear in the Statement of Purpose.

**OPTION APPRAISAL**

4. Not applicable to this piece of work.

## **FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS**

5. There are no immediate financial or legal implications in this report. There are no specific ward implications as the Fostering Service covers the whole of Middlesbrough.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

6. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board note the content of this report.

## **REASONS**

7. It is important that elected members are aware of this aspect of Social Services' work in order that they can effectively fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents to children looked after.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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

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# APPENDIX 1



## MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE



## ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2003/4

Issued by  
Middlesbrough Fostering Service  
Sandringham House  
170a Overdale Road  
Middlesbrough TS3 7EA

## **1. The Principles of the Fostering Service**

The work of Middlesbrough Fostering Service is based on the following principles:

- (1) Child focussed  
The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the fostering process.
- (2) Partnership  
The Fostering Service will work in partnership with parents and children, foster carers and their families, and social work staff and other professionals when delivering the service.
- (3) Anti-discriminatory practice  
The Fostering Service will respect Human Rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism.

## **2. The Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service.**

The main aim of the Fostering Service provided by Middlesbrough Council is:

- ◆ to provide suitable foster care placements for children who are looked after by Middlesbrough Council.

The Fostering Service will achieve this by:

- ◆ recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective foster carers and their families
- ◆ supporting, developing and retaining approved foster carers and their families
- ◆ working in partnership with the child's social worker to identify a suitable placement when it has been agreed that the child's assessed needs will be met by placement in foster care
- ◆ working in partnership with the child's social worker and other appropriate professionals to identify a suitable alternative placement from an Independent Fostering Agency, where appropriate and agreed by Middlesbrough Children's Panel.

## **3. The Standards of Care of the Fostering Service**

The work of Middlesbrough Fostering Service is delivered in accordance with the following standards:

- ◆ UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999
- ◆ the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers 1999
- ◆ the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002

In addition to the national standards, Middlesbrough Fostering Service has adopted local standards which underpin its approach to service delivery. These include:

- ◆ responding to enquiries from potential foster carers in a positive and welcoming manner and sending them an information pack within 2 working days of receiving the enquiry
- ◆ a requirement for social workers who join the team to be Level E workers with a minimum of 2 years experience of Children & Families work
- ◆ a commitment to the use of co-working by 2 social workers during the assessment process, in the belief that this leads to a high quality, thorough assessment
- ◆ the use of a banded payments system which recognises the valuable contribution made by foster carers as they develop skills and experience and relates the payment received to the skills and experience they have developed

#### 4. The Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service

The services and facilities provided by Middlesbrough Fostering Service fall into 3 main areas:

(a) Those provided to prospective foster carers:

- Information and advice about fostering
- Initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming foster carers
- Preparation training for applicants
- Competency-based assessment of applicants using BAAF Form F
- The opportunity to attend the Family Placement Panel when their application is presented

(b) Those provided to foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service

- Supervision and support from a named social worker from the Fostering Service
- Practical support (such as transport and activities for children) from a Support Worker, according to need
- A regular newsletter specifically for foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service
- Membership of Fostering Network
- Support groups and social events for foster carers
- A support group (known as the Children Who Foster group) for the children of foster carers
- A directory giving details of other foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service (providing they have given their permission for their details to be included)
- A foster carers handbook containing information on policies, procedures and practice guidance
- Access to Fostering Network's Advice and Mediation Service
- A programme of induction training for newly approved foster carers
- A programme of post-approval training specifically for foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service, consisting of 4 training events a year
- The hire of the training facilities at Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre or other appropriate facilities for use as a venue for the training events
- Financial support for placements, using a banded payments scheme
- Loan of essential equipment or household items to support specific placements

(c) Those provided to social work staff who need a placement for a child looked after by the Council.

These consist of:

- ◆ A duty social worker available during office hours Monday – Friday
- ◆ Provision of a range of foster care placements for children looked after by Middlesbrough Council
- ◆ Liaison with other agencies to identify suitable placements when none are available within Middlesbrough
- ◆ Provision of carers for use by the Emergency Duty Team for placements at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

#### 5. Staffing of the Fostering Service during 2003/4

There are 14 staff employed by Middlesbrough Council for the purpose of the Fostering Service, 6 in the Fostering Team, 5 in the Permanence Team and 3 shared between the 2 teams. In addition, there are 2 staff employed by Hyder Business Services who provide administrative support to the Fostering Service. Details of the staff in post on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2004 are as follows:

Name	Job title	Qualifications	Experience
Jane Wilson	Team Manager, Fostering Team	CSS – 1987 CMS – 2001	With Social Services since 1984. With Fostering Service since 1996.
Tony Kerr	Social Worker, Fostering Team	CSS – 1990 Practice Teacher Award – 2002	With Social Services since 1983. With Fostering Service since 1997.
Jane Young	Social Worker, Fostering Team	CSS – 1988 PQ1 – 2001 PQ Child Care Award – 2004	With Social Services since 1983. With Fostering Service since 1999.
Jane O'Toole	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 1998	With Social Services since 1998. With Fostering Service since 2002.
Val Hampton	Social Worker, Fostering Team	CQSW – 1986	With Social Services since 1986. With Fostering Service since 2001.
Jill Fawcett	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 2000	With Social Services since 2000. With Fostering Services since 2003.
Liz Watson	Team Manager, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1976 B.T.E.C Management Studies – 2002	With Social Services since 1974. With Fostering Service since 1996
Linda Hall	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 1995 PQ1 – 2002	With Social Services since 1995. With Fostering Service since 2003.
Karen Towers	Social Worker, Permanence team	DipSW – 2001	With Social Services since 2001. With Fostering Service since 2003.
Val Thompson	Social Worker, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1990	With Social Services since 1990. With Fostering Service since 2002.

Judy Yelder	Family Placement Development Officer	CQSW – 1976 Certificate in Training & Development – 1992	With Social Services since 1976. With Fostering Service since 1999.
Val Scott	Support Worker	NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People – 2003	With Social Services since 2000. With Fostering Service since 2000.
Aileen Pearce	Support Worker	NNEB – 1986	With Social Services since 1986. With Fostering Service since 2002.
Gill Bisp	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services	NVQ Business Admin. Level 2 – 1995 Level 3 – 1997 Level 3 Key Skills – 1997	With Social Services since 1981. With Fostering Service since 1996.
Sue Atkinson	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services	B.T.E.C Business Admin – 1996	With Social Services since 1998. With Fostering Service since 2000.

During 2003/4, one social worker from the Permanence Team left to take up a post with a local voluntary agency and due to recruitment and budgetary problems, this post remained vacant for the rest of the financial year.

## **6. Activity and developments during 2003/4**

- (a) Levels of activity during the year have been high, reflecting the numbers of children looked after and the use of foster care as the placement of choice when children become looked after. A summary of the main areas of activity is as follows:

Number of enquires received	151
Number of requests for initial visits	58
Number of applications	10
Number of foster carers approved	9
Number of foster carers de-registered	9
Total number of approved foster carers on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2004	112
Number of children in foster care on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2004	176
Number of children whose long-term fostering plans were approved	4
Number of children matched with long-term foster carers	6

- (b) The Fostering Service provides a programme of post-approval training for registered foster carers and during 2003/4, the topics for the training sessions were:
- ◆ Back to Basics – June 2003
  - ◆ Education Matters – September 2003
  - ◆ Communications – December 2003
  - ◆ Challenging Behaviour – March 2004

In addition to the above programme, foster carers also have opportunities to attend courses which are part of Middlesbrough Social Services in-house training programme and during the year, there was an increasing interest in attending these events. The summary of the training statistics for the year is as follows:

Number of training events attended by foster carers	21
Number of individual foster carers who attended	101
Total number of course attendances	285

- (c) In September and October 2003 and February 2004, the Team Managers, Development Officer and social workers from the Fostering Team were involved in presenting some sessions of a 3 day training course called 'Parenting the Public Child' which was aimed at social workers, foster carers and other members of staff who deal with children looked after. The 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the course covered topics relating to foster care. The Team Manager and Development Officer were also involved in planning and delivering training to the Family Placement Panel, which is required under the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.
- (d) An Inspection by the Social Services Inspectorate of the whole of Children's Services took place in July 2003 and staff of the Fostering Service were involved in providing information and taking part in interviews relating to this inspection process, as were foster carers and their children and children in foster care. The feedback received about the Fostering Service was very positive, commenting that the service was widely regarded as being effective and that the quality and commitment of foster carers were widely recognised. The Children who Foster group was singled out for a special mention in a section entitled 'Good Practice'. However the report also commented on the gap between demand and capacity due to the high numbers of looked after children.
- (e) The National Care Standards Commission carried out the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual inspection of Middlesbrough Fostering Service in October 2003. This inspection is carried out by Inspectors from the local office of the Care Standards Commission who carry out a wide range of checks and interviews to determine whether the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards are being met. In the main, the findings of the Inspection were very positive. A problem with the information on staff files was identified and has subsequently been corrected. Other recommendations were made concerning improvements in practice and these are gradually being implemented.
- (f) The biggest challenge faced by the Fostering Service during 2003/4 has been the provision of appropriate placements for children over the age of 11. Although there has been considerable success in terms of recruitment and retention since the introduction of the Quality Protects programme in 1999, the number of looked after children has also increased significantly, making placement choice difficult to achieve. Existing provision has been supplemented by the use of agency foster and residential placements and the children most likely to be placed in agency placements are those over the age of 11.



- (g) Several options for increasing our provision were considered within Social Services and it was agreed that the following would be actively pursued during 2004/5:
  - (a) establish a contract with an independent fostering agency
  - (b) submit a joint bid, with neighbouring authorities, for funding for a Treatment Foster Care scheme
  - (c) review the Banded Payments Scheme, with the active participation of foster carers
  - (d) explore the option of setting up a separate fee-paying scheme

## **7. Developments and issues for 2004/5**

- (a) At the end of May, one of the social workers left the Permanence Team to take up a post in one of the locality teams. This means that at present the Permanence Team has 2 full-time social work vacancies, representing a 50% vacancy rate. It is inevitable that this vacancy level will have a negative impact on the service provided to long-term foster carers until the vacancies are filled. The posts are being advertised but unfortunately, a previous advert did not result in any applications.
- (b) At the beginning of May, the fieldwork teams within Children and Families were re-organised and as part of this, a Children Looked After team was created. This team will focus on working with children who are looked after and is likely to work closely with the Fostering Service to achieve better outcomes for children in foster care. This development is welcomed by the Fostering Service .
- (c) Work will be done during 2004/5 on the options listed in paragraph 6(g) for increasing provision for older children. Work has already started on establishing a contract with an independent fostering agency and several expressions of interest have been received. The review of the Banded Payments scheme has started, with the first action being to seek the views of existing foster carers by means of a survey form which was sent to every registered foster carer. A joint bid, with Hartlepool Social Services, Stockton-on-Tees Social Services, Redcar&Cleveland Social Services and the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service was submitted at the end of April when bids for the latest round of funding for Treatment Foster Care schemes were requested. Work on all the options will continue throughout the coming year.
- (d) The recruitment strategy, which was implemented in 2000 and resulted in a significant increase in the number of foster carers, has recently been reviewed. Various actions will be taken during 2004/5 so that our need for foster carers is publicised on a regular basis. Particular actions will be taken in respect of the need for foster carers for children from ethnic minorities. There has been an increase in enquiries from people from ethnic minority communities but further work is needed to make sure this trend continues and results in more registered foster carers, particularly those who can offer an appropriate match for children from dual-heritage backgrounds.
- (e) There is a growing need for foster placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children within Middlesbrough. During 2004/5 training will be provided to raise awareness amongst existing foster carers of the specific needs of this group of children, and thus improve the quality of the placements that we can provide for them.

Judy Yielder  
Family Placement Development Officer  
June 2004

Jane Wilson  
Fostering Team Manager