
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 1 July 2004.

PRESENT: Councillor J Jones (Chair), Councillor Brunton (Vice Chair); Councillors McIntyre, P Thompson and A E Ward.

OFFICIALS: P Bunce, J Cooke, C Kendrick, S Little, G McGready, L Watson, J Willis, J Wilson and J Yielder.

**** PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Thomas Tolmie (Young Persons Representative).

**** PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER:** Mr B Simpson (Foster Carer).

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brady, Hubbard, B Taylor, J Taylor and Mrs B Thompson.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

No declarations of interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2004 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE & CHILDREN'S GUIDE 2004/05

The Family Placement Development Officer submitted a report presenting the Board with the Statement of Purpose of Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service for 2004/05 and the Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service for 2004/05.

It was noted that the Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services came into force on 1 April 2002. One of the requirements of the Regulations and National Minimum Standards was that each fostering service should produce a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide to the Fostering Service. Both documents had clear guidelines prescribed within the Regulations regarding their content. In the case of Local Authorities, the Statement of Purpose must be formally approved by Elected Members and be reviewed, updated and modified at least annually.

On 18 December 2002 the Statement of Purpose of Middlesbrough's Fostering Service for 2002/03 and the Children's Guide were formally approved by the Corporate Parenting Board. It was also agreed the documents would be reviewed on an annual basis by the Board.

The Statement of Purpose was appended to the report and detailed the following key areas:-

- Principles
- Aims and Objectives
- Standards of Care
- Management Structure
- Staff Details as at 1 June 2004
- Number of Foster Carers
- Number of Children Placed
- Numbers of Complaints Received and Outcomes
- Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service
- Procedures and Processes used by Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service
- Support, Training and Review

A copy of the Children's Guide was also appended to the report.

Discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- Current review of the Banded Payments Scheme, with participation of Foster Carers, and exploration of establishing a separate fee-paying scheme.
- Reference was made to developing the purchase of placements where specialist input was required.
- Reference was made to the possibility of allowing foster carers to join the Local Government Pension Scheme, as carers often gave up full time employment to care for foster children and, therefore, denied the chance to contribute to a pension scheme.
- Acknowledged that issues encountered by Middlesbrough's Fostering Service were mirrored by other Local Authorities across the country.
- Members considered that the development of a National Fostering Service with prescribed procedures and protocols should not be discounted.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2004/05 in relation to Middlesbrough's Fostering Service be approved.
2. That the next annual review of the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide in relation to Middlesbrough's Fostering Service take place in April 2005 or as soon as possible thereafter.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2003/04

The Fostering Team Manager presented the Board with the Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council's Fostering Service for 2003/04.

The Annual Report was appended to the report and provided details on the principles, aims, objectives and standards of care of the Fostering Service, the services and facilities provided, staffing during 2003/04, activity and developments during 2003/04 and developments and issues for 2004/05.

It was noted that the Annual Report was intended to be a stand-alone document, however, some of the material was also contained in the Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service.

Sections six and seven of the Annual Report contained information which did not appear in the Statement of Purpose, namely Activity and Developments during 2003/04 and Developments and issues for 2004/05.

A summary of the main areas of activity, including the total number of approved foster carers as at 31 March 2004, the number of children in foster care as at 31 March 2004 and the number of enquires received about fostering, were detailed under Activity and Development 2003/04. Information in relation to support for foster carers was also included.

Members noted that positive feedback had been received from the Social Services Inspectorate with regard to the Fostering Service following an inspection of the whole of Children's Services in July 2003. The comments on the Fostering Service had been that it was widely regarded as being effective and that the quality and commitment of foster carers was widely recognised. Special recognition had been given to the Children Who Foster Group as an example of Good Practice.

In addition, the National Care Standards Commission carried out the second annual inspection of the Middlesbrough's Fostering Service in October 2003. On the whole, findings had been

positive, however, a problem with information contained on staff files was identified and subsequently addressed.

Under the heading Developments and Issues for 2004/05, information was provided on the following:-

- Creation of a Children Looked After Team
- Re-advertisement of vacant posts within the Permanence Team
- Joint bid with Hartlepool, Stockton and Redcar and Cleveland Social Services and the Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for Treatment Foster Care Schemes.
- Review of Recruitment Strategy
- Raising awareness of the need for foster placements for unaccompanied asylum seeker/ refugee children.

During discussion on the Annual Report, the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query concerning the dramatic fall in numbers of foster carers actually approved from the number of enquiries received, Members were advised that this was normal as people decided at various stages that fostering was not for them.
- Members considered that young people leaving foster care should be asked to assist to promote the value of foster carers and were informed that a number of young people currently helped with preparation for foster carers.
- In response to a question it was confirmed that files were held on prospective carers who had then decided not to proceed with fostering so that they were free to come back and pursue fostering at any time. Work was currently underway to develop a mentoring scheme with existing carers to help new carers.

RECOMMENDED that the contents of the report be noted.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE & CHILDREN'S GUIDE 2004/05

The Family Placement Development Officer submitted a report presenting the Board with the Statement of Purpose of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service for 2004/05 and the Children's Guide to Middlebrough Council's Adoption Service for 2004/05.

It was noted that the Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services came into force on 30 April 2003. One of the requirements of the Regulations and National Minimum Standards was that every adoption agency or service should produce a Statement of Purpose and every Local Authority should produce a Children's Guide to the Adoption Service. Both documents had clear guidelines prescribed within the Regulations regarding their content. In the case of Local Authorities, the Statement of Purpose must be formally approved by Elected Members and be reviewed, updated and modified at least annually.

On 4 September 2003, the Statement of Purpose of Middlesbrough's Adoption Service for 2003/04 and the Children's Guide were formally approved by the Corporate Parenting Board. It was also agreed the documents would be reviewed on an annual basis by the Board.

The Statement of Purpose was appended to the report and detailed the following key areas:-

- Principles
- Aims and Objectives
- Functions of the service
- Organisational/Management Structure
- Staff Details as at 1 June 2004

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- Services and Facilities provided by the Adoption Service
 - Procedures used by Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service for recruiting, preparing, assessing, approving and supporting prospective adopters.
 - Systems used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of the Adoption Service.
 - Summary of the complaints procedure
 - Details of the Commission for Social Care Inspection

A copy of the Children's Guide was also appended to the report.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2004/05 in relation to Middlesbrough's Adoption Service be approved.
2. That the next annual review of the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide in relation to Middlesbrough's Adoption Service take place in April 2005 or as soon as possible thereafter.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE – ANNUAL REPORT 2003/04

The Permanence Team Manager presented the Board with the Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council's Adoption Service for 2003/04.

The Annual Report was appended to the report and provided details on the principles, aims, objectives and standards of care of the Adoption Service, the services and facilities provided, staffing during 2003/04, activity and developments during 2003/04 and developments and issues for 2004/05.

It was noted that the Annual Report was intended to be a stand-alone document, however, some of the material was also contained in the Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service.

Sections six and seven of the Annual Report contained information which did not appear in the Statement of Purpose, namely Activity and Developments during 2003/04 and Developments and issues for 2004/05.

A summary of the main areas of activity, including the total number of approved adopters, the number of children whose adoption plans were approved, the number of children matched with adoptive families, and the number of enquires received about adoption, were detailed under Activity and Development 2003/04.

It was noted that Middlesbrough was one of the first authorities to be inspected under the new arrangements for Local Authority Adoption Service (England) Regulations 2003 and the National Minimum Standards for Local Authority Adoption Services in England. Feedback from the inspection had been very positive and an Action Plan was devised from the issues identified in the inspection report as requiring address. Attendance of applicants at meetings of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel had been considered as good practice.

An Inspection of the whole of Children's Services by the Social Services Inspectorate in July 2003 had also produced positive feedback on the Adoption Service.

It was explained that Adoption Support Regulations 2003 were implemented in October 2003 as part of the Government's drive to modernise adoption services. As part of the new requirements placed on authorities it was noted that Middlesbrough's Adoption Service had already developed a contract with the voluntary agency After Adoption and funding had also been provided for several packages of services to support adoptive placements where the child/children had significant emotional or behavioural problems. A year's membership of Adoption UK (self help organisation run by adopters for adopters) was offered, including the opportunity to attend post-adoption training.

Under the heading Developments and Issues for 2004/05, information was provided on the following:-

- Creation of a Children Looked After Team
- Re-advertisement of vacant posts within the Permanence Team
- Recruitment of Adopters working more closely with neighbouring authorities.
- Implementation of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 scheduled for September 2005 – consultation to take place.
- Raising awareness and training in relation to the new legislation.

In response to a query it was explained that adoptive families moving to Middlesbrough could access post-adoption support by contacting Middlesbrough's Adoption Service where an assessment for adoption support would be carried out.

RECOMMENDED that the contents of the report be noted.

DEVELOPMENTS IN ADOPTION SUPPORT SERVICES

The Permanence Team Manager submitted a report outlining the requirements of the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) 2003 and the current provision of the Council.

It was noted that the Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 2003 came into force on 31 October 2003. The regulations were the first phase of a new national framework for adoption support placing duties on local councils to maintain a core set of adoption support services, including the right for people to request an assessment of their need for adoption support services.

The Department for Education and Skills had issued further draft regulations for consultation, 'The Adoption Support Services (Local Authorities) (England) Regulations 200x' which would replace the current regulations once finalised.

The minimum set of adoption support services to be maintained by local authorities was set out as follows:-

- Counselling, advice and information
- Modernised system for financial support
- Support groups for adoptive families
- Assistance with contact arrangements between adopted children and birth relatives
- Therapeutic services for adopted children
- Services to ensure the continuance of adoptive relationships
- Adoption Support Services Adviser to help those affected by adoption to access adoption support services
- Entitlement for adopted children and their families to receive an assessment of their needs for adoption support services
- Development of adoption support plans for adoptive families

Action taken by Middlesbrough Social Services was detailed in the report and included:-

- A second tier officer to be identified as Adoption Support Services Adviser
- Development of a Welcome Pack for newly approved prospective adopters
- Service Level Agreement with independent agency, After Adoption
- Offer of one year's free membership to Adoption UK for newly approved adopters
- Commissioned Adoption UK to provide 'It's a Piece of Cake' training for adopters locally
- Creation of additional half post in Permanence Team to assist in meeting the regulation requirements
- Specialist training on counselling adopted adults provided to Social Workers in Permanence Team
- Development of practice guidance notes
- Continuation of arrangements for adoption allowance payments, with more flexibility

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- Provision of therapeutic service for children/families from universal services

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Board support the continued development of services in order to meet requirements of the regulations as currently set out.

MIDDLESBROUGH FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL – ACTIVITY REPORT FOR 2003/04

The Fostering Team Manager presented a report outlining the activity of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel during the period 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004.

The report set out the requirement for each Local Authority providing a fostering service or acting as an adoption agency, to establish a panel consisting of social work practitioners experienced in adoption and family placement matters, elected members and independent persons. The panels' composition was prescribed by the Adoption Agencies Regulations 1983, amended by the Adoption Agencies and Children Regulations (Arrangements for Placement and Review) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulation 1997 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

Middlesbrough Council's Family Placement Panel met the legal requirements in relation to fostering and adoption and was able to consider cases from both aspects of family placement work.

The Panel consisted of ten members and their details were included at Appendix One of the report. The Panel met every fortnight for half a day and was serviced by officers from the Legal Department, Members Office and Family Placement Service. The role of the Panel was also outlined in the report.

Details of Family Placement Panel activity during 2003/04 was featured in the report and it was noted that the Panel had met on 22 occasions between 1 April 2003 and 31 March 2004. Meetings were usually lengthy due to the complex nature of the cases under consideration. Also detailed was the number of items considered in each category during the year, including:-

- Number of adopters approved – 14.
- Number of children whose adoption plans were approved – 26.
- Number of children who were matched with adoptive parents – 26.
- Number of foster carers approved – 9
- Number of children who were matched with long term foster carers – 7
- Number of foster carer reviews considered – 42

It was explained that the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services required that an annual joint training day with the agency's adoption staff be held. Such training was held on 27 February 2004.

RECOMMENDED that the contents of the report be noted.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS, PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT & SEXUAL HEALTH POLICY

G McGready, Middlesbrough Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Co-ordinator, and P Bunce, Health Promotion Consultant, were welcomed to the meeting and presented a report to Members which outlined the work undertaken by the Middlesbrough Teenage Pregnancy Strategy Team in partnership with the Children Look After SRE (Sex and Relationship Education) Policy Steering Group to develop and produce an appropriate SRE Policy and Guidelines.

The Board was advised that the report on Teenage Pregnancy from the Social Exclusion Unit (1999) identified two main goals:-

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- i) Reducing the rate of teenage conceptions with the specific aim of halving the rate of conceptions among under 18s by 2010.
 - ii) Getting more teenage parents into education, training or employment to reduce their risk of long term social exclusion.

Every Local Authority was required to produce a ten-year strategy to address these goals.

Members were informed that the Independent Advisory Group on Teenage Pregnancy Annual Report (2002) recommended that all Social Services departments had an SRE Policy (LAC) in place, based on indications that children looked after were vulnerable to early pregnancy and parenthood. Research highlighted that children who had been in care or fostered were almost two and a half times more likely to become teenage parents.

The report outlined some of the difficulties and experiences in relation to pregnancy, sexual health and contraception encountered by young people in care.

The Board was advised that a multi-agency steering group had been established in Autumn 2003 to identify content, consultation, development and production of an appropriate SRE Policy (LAC). P Bunce, Health Promotion Consultant, was commissioned to undertake the work on behalf of the Steering Group.

Consultation with young people had been considered crucial to the development of the Policy and as a consequence, two events were held to ascertain views and experiences of young people in relation to SRE and teenage parenthood. Findings from the events informed the SRE Policy and Guidelines. The Policy and Guidelines also reflected guidance from DfES, Healthy School Standard, fpa and NCB recommendations on SRE Policy (LAC).

Copies of the documents 'Personal Relationships – Physical and Emotional Development and Sexual Health Policy for Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council' and 'Guidelines for Carers and Staff' were appended to the report.

A discussion ensued and it was acknowledged that the emotional aspect of relationships was very difficult to look at as a single element but would be beneficial in initiating discussion groups for more intensive work. Members commended the work which had been undertaken in developing the Policy and Guidelines.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the Personal Relationships, Physical and Emotional Development and Sexual Health Policy for Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council be approved.
2. That the Guidelines for Middlesbrough Council's carers and staff on the Personal Relationships, Physical and Emotional Development and Sexual Health Policy for Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council be approved.