



CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD **4th November 2004**

INFORMATION FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To inform Members of "If this were my child... A councillor's guide to being a good corporate parent" (DfES & LGIU October 2003, enclosed) and to seek approval for its distribution.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. In September 1998, the Secretary of State for Health wrote to all elected Members in the country to launch the Quality Protects initiative and to set out the government's expectations in respect of corporate parenting. Quality Protects was a very successful initiative and the current Minister for Children, Young People and Families feels that the commitment of Members has been a key element of that success ('If this were my child...').
3. In Middlesbrough, the Corporate Parenting Board was established in February 2000 and the work of the board has been recognised in subsequent inspections of children's services carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate and the Audit Commission. To ensure that all Members and senior managers were aware of their corporate parenting responsibilities, Corporate Parenting Information sheets were circulated to all elected Members, Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service in 2001. These have since been revised to reflect change and the latest version is attached (Appendix 1). The continuing success of the Corporate Parenting Board has recently 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/>].

4. Since 1998, the government has maintained its focus on the needs of children looked after and has introduced new legislation and guidance to support local authorities in this work:
 - The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
 - 'The Education of Children and Young People in Public Care' (DoH & DfES, 2000)
 - 'Promoting the Health of Looked After Children' (Department of Health, 2002)
 - The Adoption and Children Act 2002
 - 'A Better Education for Children in Care' (Social Exclusion Unit, September 2003)
 - Choice Protects – an initiative to improve placement quality and choice
 - Education Protects – an initiative to improve educational opportunities for children looked after
 - 'Every Child Matters' – green paper 2003
 - 'Every Child Matters: Next Steps' – overview of the Children Bill 2004

“IF THIS WERE MY CHILD...”

5. The government feels that the concept of corporate parenting – the collective responsibility across services and across councils to safeguard and promote the life chances of children looked after - is widely understood. However, turnover in councillors and senior managers mean that this understanding needs to be maintained. This guidance is intended to assist elected Members to continue to play an active part in continuing the improvements to children's services that have taken place since 1998.
6. The guidance provides advice, key questions and checklists for Members to enable them to ensure that their authority is fulfilling its responsibilities effectively. It emphasises the importance of communicating effectively with children and young people and listening to their concerns. It identifies issues for consideration by Executive Members and the innovative ways that the scrutiny function can be used to fulfil corporate parenting responsibilities.
7. It is proposed that a copy of the guidance, together with the revised Corporate Parenting Information Sheets, will be distributed to all elected Members, Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service.

OPTION APPRAISAL

8. N/A

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

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

RECOMMENDATION

10. That the steps proposed to maintain levels of knowledge with respect to corporate parenting be approved.

REASON

11. The recommendation is supported by the following reason:
 - a. Dissemination of information and guidance will assist the local authority in ensuring that its responsibilities in respect of corporate parenting are fulfilled. This responsibility falls within the remit of the Corporate Parenting Board.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

“if this were my child... A councillor’s guide to being a good corporate parent” (Department for Education and Skills and Local Government Information Unit, October 2003)
Corporate Parenting Policy & Strategy May 2001

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What is Corporate Parenting?

When a local authority starts to look after a child or young person, the Council has a legal responsibility to share the duties of the child's parent. 'Corporate Parenting' is the collective responsibility across services and across councils to safeguard and promote the life chances of children looked after.

What does the Government Expect?

When the Quality Protects Initiative was launched in 1998, the Secretary of State identified 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. The government expects Social Services and Education authorities to:

- 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.

Extract from letter from Secretary of State for Health
to Councillors, 21st September 1998

Further guidance was jointly published by the Department for Education and Skills and the Local Government Information Unit in October 2003. This provides advice, key questions and checklists for Members to enable them to ensure that their authority is fulfilling its responsibilities effectively. It emphasises the importance of communicating effectively with children and young people and listening to their concerns. It identifies issues for consideration by Executive Members and the innovative ways that the scrutiny function can be used to fulfil corporate parenting responsibilities.

What has Middlesbrough Council done?

In February 2000, Middlesbrough Council set up a Corporate Parenting Board to look at how well the Council acts as a "good parent" towards the children it looks after. The Board was subsequently given delegated powers in respect of decisions relating to children looked after by the authority.

The implementation of the Local Government Act 2000 and changes in the democratic process mean that since October 2002, the Corporate Parenting Board has become an advisory body to the elected Mayor and the Executive Board.

What is the remit of the Board?

1. 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 Policy and Strategy' document.

Who is on the Board?

Membership 2004-2005

Councillor John Jones	Chair
Councillor Jan Brunton	Vice Chair, Executive Member – Early Years
Councillor Bob Brady	Executive Member - Deputy Mayor
Councillor Brenda Thompson	Executive Member - Social Care & Health
Councillor Paul Thompson	Executive Member - Education
Councillor Brian Hubbard	
Councillor Frances McIntyre	
Councillor Bernie Taylor	
Councillor Joan Taylor	
Councillor Liz Ward	

Observers

Foster Carer
Representative from the National Youth Advocacy Service
Representative from the Health Sector
Up to six young people looked after by Middlesbrough Council

Participation by Children and Young People

In addition to direct participation by children and young people in the work of the Board, their views are sought using a range of mechanisms including consultation activities and contact with elected members. These views inform the work of the Board. The views of young adults who were previously looked after are also taken into account.

Who is looked after by local authorities and why?

The National Picture

A national statistical analysis shows 60,800 children and young people being looked after by local authorities in England, (National Statistics Children Looked After Year Ending 31 March 2003, Statistics Division DfES 2004).

41, 100 live in foster placements, and the rest live in residential provision or with their families with social work support. 6,600 are looked after in children's homes or hostels which represents a much lower proportion than in the past. The proportion of boys in care has risen in recent years, as has the number of younger children. At 31 March 2003, 9,200 children in public care were under 5 years old.

The term 'looked after' was introduced by the Children Act 1989, and refers to children who are subject to care orders and those who are accommodated. 65% of all children currently looked after are subject to care orders. Whether children are subject to a Care Order or are accommodated, the local authority, wherever possible, should be working in partnership with parents – this is a principle of the Children Act [Section 22(4) (b)]. Parents retain primary parental responsibility for their children when they are accommodated though the local authority still has responsibilities as corporate parent. Many children and young people in public care retain strong links with their family, and return home to them after long and short periods in care.

Like young people everywhere, children who are in public care are individuals. They are not a homogenous group. They have distinct identities, aspirations and particular needs, which are influenced and shaped by their racial origins and religious beliefs, their gender and their sexuality, and whether or not they are in any way disabled. Their experiences of care, and of separation from their families and communities, will in turn be affected by these important dimensions of their identity. They all have the potential and the right to succeed.

Why are children in public care?

Children enter public care for a variety of reasons. Many will have been affected by distressing and damaging experiences, including physical and sexual abuse and neglect. Some will be in public care because of the illness or death of a parent or because their families are in some way unable to provide adequate care for them. The majority of young people in public care come from families who experience hardship and are separated from them because of some form of family upheaval or breakdown.

What does care feel like?

Very few children want to be in care even though they may understand that they cannot live with their families. Despite the legal requirement to ascertain their wishes and feelings, they often feel that they are not involved in the major decisions which are taken about their lives. Uncertainty about the immediate and long-term future is a major worry.

Some young people feel safer and well cared for in foster care and residential care, but all have to cope with significant losses – of family, friends, and in some cases of identity and

familiar neighbourhoods and communities. For some the most acute sense of separation is from brothers and sisters, who may have remained with their original family or be in care somewhere else. Some feel that they receive little help with their feelings about the experiences and events which led to separation from their family. They have 'unmet needs'.

They have a lot of changes to cope with: new carers, new surroundings and new ways of doing things; and perhaps no-one who is familiar to them. A child from an ethnic minority background, for instance, may be placed with carers from a different ethnic background. Many children experience numerous and sometimes unplanned moves of home. Each move may also mean a change of school.

A confident and competent adult would need considerable personal resources and robust support networks to withstand what young people in public care routinely experience. Yet many of the basic consequences of being taken into public care – rejection, loss, change and uncertainty – are not acknowledged or responded to once a young person is 'looked after'. Instead the stigma associated with public care often means that they feel excluded from normal activities and opportunities, and are assumed to be troublesome. Although there is often significant mental trauma associated with the experience of public care the general lack of support means there is a high level of unmet need.

Extract from 'Education of Young People in Public Care' (DfEE & DoH, May 2000)
NB Figures updated to reflect information available at November 2002

The Local Picture

At 31st March 2003, 265 children and young people were being looked after by Middlesbrough Council and were placed as follows:

- 69% in foster care;
- 7.5% placed for adoption
- 3.3% in local Children's Homes
- 9% in specialist out of area residential placements
- 9% placed home on trial or with extended family members.
- 2.2% were in independent living/supported lodgings or other.

The number of children looked after in Middlesbrough continues to increase, rising from 255 at March 2002, to 265 at March 2002.

Detailed examination of the reasons for children becoming looked after have revealed two major factors contributing to this increase. The impact of parental drug misuse is placing more children at risk and therefore more children are being removed from the care of their parents through care proceedings. Secondly, the discharge rate from care of young people aged 16 and over has decreased, resulting in more children staying in care longer.

Although the overall population of Middlesbrough is declining, the socio-economic factors which impact upon the residents of the Borough and the clear links between social exclusion and numbers of children looked after, would indicate that volumes of activity in the looked after population are unlikely to decrease within the next three to five years.



National Objectives, Local Implementation

What is Quality Protects?

The Quality Protects Programme was launched in 1998 and was designed to improve the management and delivery of children's social services. The main aims of the initiative were to improve the well being and life chances of children looked after by local authorities, children in the child protection system and other children in need. The key Quality Protects objectives relating to children looked after are:

- Objective 1** To ensure that children are securely attached to carers capable for providing safe and effective care for the duration of childhood.
- Objective 2** To ensure that children are protected from emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect (significant harm).
- Objective 4** To ensure that **children looked after** gain maximum life chance benefits from educational opportunities, health and social care.
- Objective 5** To ensure that young people leaving care, as they enter adulthood, are not isolated and participate socially and economically as citizens.
- Objective 6** To ensure that children with specific social needs arising out of disability or a health condition are living in families or other appropriate settings in the community where their assessed needs are adequately met and reviewed.
- Objective 8** To actively involve users and carers in planning services and in tailoring individual packages of care; and to ensure effective mechanisms are in place to handle complaints.
- Objective 9** To ensure through regulatory powers and duties that children in regulated services are protected from harm and poor care standards.

What is expected of Councillors?

As part of the Quality Protects programme, a range of research briefing papers were prepared and briefing packs were distributed to elected Members. Councillors were advised that particular care should be given to providing high quality services for children in the Council's care, for whom Members are the corporate parents. It was emphasised that sufficient priority and resources need to be given to this work.

In particular Members were advised to:

- have local objectives to improve services in line with the national ones;
- know which children need services and listen to their views;

- make sure that good management and quality assurance systems are in place which enable them to know what outcomes are being achieved by children;
- ensure that their political and management structures help councillors and officers to work together to provide good quality care for children;
- work corporately across all departments to provide services for children in need
- work in partnership and co-operation with the voluntary sector, the NHS and other local agencies.

Extract from Quality Protects Councillors Briefing Pack
(Department of Health, June 2000)

What is 'Every Child Matters'?

'Every Child Matters' is a Green Paper that was issued as a consultation document in Autumn 2003 following the enquiry into the death of Victoria Climbié. It proposed changes to the way in which services for children are organised and co-ordinated. The Children Bill and the accompanying document 'Every Child Matters: Next Steps' were issued in March 2004 and put into effect the legislative changes required to implement the Green Paper.

The key features of the Children Bill are as follows:

Children's Commissioner

A children's commissioner to be established for England to promote awareness of the views and interests of children.

Lead Member for Children's Services

Every Local Authority to designate an elected Member to lead on children's services.

Director of Children's Services

Every Local Authority must appoint a Director of Children's Services. This post will ensure clear accountability across the children's functions of the Local Authority and a more robust integration of services.

Duty to co-operate and make partnership arrangements

A new **duty** on Local Authorities to make partnership arrangements with key statutory agencies and other relevant agencies in order to improve the well-being of children.

Reciprocal duties are also placed on the Police, Health bodies, Probation, Connexions and Learning Skills Council to co-operate with the arrangement.

Information Sharing/Databases

All Local Authorities to establish databases containing basic information about all children. This will facilitate the sharing of information between all those who provide services to children.

Safeguarding Arrangements

The Bill seeks to place a new **duty** on Local Authorities and statutory agencies to 'have regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children'.

Duty to promote the educational achievement of Looked After Children

The Bill extends the Children Act 1989 to include a **duty** to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by local authorities.

Private Fostering

Measures are included to strengthen the private fostering notification scheme.

Key Outcomes

Every Child Matters identifies five main outcomes that the government wishes to achieve for all children. A Member and Officer Working Group, chaired by the Deputy Mayor, examined these outcomes and developed the following values for Children's Services in Middlesbrough, linked to the five desired outcomes:

➤ **Stay Safe**

Children and young people will be provided with services that are designed to protect them from harm and neglect and grow up able to look after themselves.

➤ **Be Healthy**

Children and young people will be provided with services which will enable them to enjoy good physical and mental health and be enabled to live a healthy lifestyle.

➤ **Enjoy and Achieve**

Children and young people will be enabled to get the most out of life and develop skills that equip them for adulthood.

➤ **Achieve Economic Well Being**

Children and young people will be enabled to overcome socio-economic disadvantages to achieve their full potential in life.

➤ **Make a Positive Contribution**

Children and young people will be enabled to make a positive contribution to the community.

In addition, the following value was included:

➤ **Child and Family Focus**

Supporting parents and carers will be at the centre of improving children's lives.

The Member and Officer Working Group also identified the key principles on which the establishment of Middlesbrough Council's Children's Services will be based.

➤ **Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People**

Practice will be based on clear evidence, research and continuous learning and will evidence improved outcomes for children and young people.

➤ **Early Intervention and Effective Protection**

The focus will be on the delivery of services at the earliest opportunity to prevent the need for more costly intrusive interventions.

➤ **Service Integration**

Services will be organised around the needs of children and young people and key services will be integrated within a single organisation.

➤ **Stakeholder Involvement**

Middlesbrough Council will be the lead agency in the implementation of Children's Services, however the development and continuous improvement of this service will take place jointly with other key agencies.

➤ **User/Carer Involvement**

Services will be responsive to individual need and therefore they will be based on a dialogue with children and young people and their carers which actively encourages their participation in the planning and evaluation of those services.

➤ **Valuing the Workforce**

The workforce of Middlesbrough Council will be key stakeholders in shaping the development and continuous improvement of Children's Services. This will mean a commitment to investing in their skills, competence and confidence.

➤ **Clear Accountability**

The management and organisational structure of Middlesbrough Council's Children's Services will reflect clear and unambiguous responsibilities and accountability for services for children, young people and their families.

➤ **Community Cohesion**

Middlesbrough Council's Children's Services will promote diversity and respect for individuals whilst being tolerant of differences.

➤ **Maximising Opportunities for Investment in Children's Services**

Middlesbrough Council's Children's Services will have a commitment to continued investment in the development and delivery of high quality, effective provision to meet assessed need.

In March 2004, the Executive approved the integration of Education and Children and Families Social Services to form the Children, Families and Learning Department. This new department will come into being on 1st January 2005.



What do young people in Middlesbrough say?

About what other people think of them....

"We are not all bad. We're just normal kids who are here through no fault of our own."

About going home.....

"You get homesick, your parents promise things will change, you go back and the abuse starts again."

About being in care.....

"When you are in care, you are not your parents' child, or your foster carer's child, you are Social Services child"

About foster care....

"It's just normal family life – a proper family"

"When you are having problems in your real home, it means you have someone to love you and care for you."

About residential care...

"I prefer being in a home to being in foster care."

"I like all the staff – they've helped me a lot."

About leaving care....

"When you leave care, you need someone from Social Services to stick by you in case things go wrong."

About people listening....

"I shouldn't have to fight to get people to listen to me."

What do they want us to do?

- **Advocate for young people, not adults.**
- Help young people to understand that they are not the cause of the problem but the victim of circumstance.
- Increase other people's knowledge of why young people live in children's homes so that they don't make assumptions about them.
- Give young people as much information as possible about what is happening and why they are being taken into care.
- Help foster carers to keep young people in their care until they are twenty-one.
- Give young people more information about the foster carers they are going to live with.
- Make it possible for staff to spend more one-to-one time with young people.
- Involve young people in providing training for different groups of staff both within Social Services and in other agencies.
- Provide practical help to every young person who is moving on from residential or foster care.
- Have a 'contingency plan' for each young person who is leaving care, in case things go wrong.
- Continue to give young people support until they no longer need it.
- Spend more money on looking after young people in care.
- **Take young people more seriously and listen to what they say.**

The above is a selection of young people's views and ideas taken from consultation activities carried out between 1998 and 2004.