

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 4 November 2004.

PRESENT: Councillor Brunton (In the Chair); Councillors Brady, McIntyre, J Taylor, Mrs B Thompson and P Thompson.

OFFICIALS: J Cooke, D Johnson, C Kendrick, S Little, J Willis and J Wilson.

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

**** APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Jones, B Taylor and A E Ward.

DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs B Thompson declared a Personal and Non-Prejudicial Interest in matters relating to the Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust.

**** MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2004 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chair announced that Jenni Cooke had been appointed as Deputy Director of the Children and Families Service and congratulated her on behalf of the Board.

MEMBERSHIP OF MIDDLESBROUGH FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL

The Fostering Team Manager submitted a report advising the Board of the current Membership of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel.

The submitted report detailed the requirements for composition of Adoption Panels and Fostering Panels as set out by the Adoption Agencies Regulations and the Fostering Services Regulations.

It was noted that a Panel Member should hold office for a term not exceeding three years and may not hold office on the Panel for more than two consecutive terms, with exception of the Medical Adviser who remained as a Panel Member for as long as they were the agency Medical Adviser.

Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel held its meetings on a fortnightly basis for half a day and was serviced by Officers from Legal Services, Members Office and the Family Placement Service.

The matters considered by the Panel were outlined in the report, including whether adoption was in the best interests of a particular child or whether foster care was in the best interests of a particular child, whether a prospective adopter would make a suitable parent and whether a prospective foster carer would make a suitable carer.

Middlesbrough's current Panel membership met the requirements of the Regulations in relation to the adoption and fostering service provided by Middlesbrough Council and a copy of the current membership was appended to the report.

Reference was made to the recommendation contained at paragraph 10) of the report which sought the Board's approval of the Family Placement Panel membership. Clarification was provided in relation to the Corporate Parenting Board's remit. The Board was an advisory body

to the Executive and did not have delegated powers to make decisions but made recommendations to the Executive in the form of a report from the Chair following each meeting. The report outlined the issues considered by the Board and made recommendations, where appropriate, for approval or otherwise by the Executive. It was noted that responsibility for Elected Member representation on the Panel rests with the Council.

Reference was also made to paragraph 2) b) of the report which stated that the Adoption Agency Regulations required "at least one Member of the Authority's Social Services Committee". It was acknowledged that an Elected Member of the Executive with the appropriate portfolio represented the Council on the Family Placement Panel and that the Adoption Agency Regulations were produced prior to the revised Committee/Executive arrangements being implemented.

The Corporate Parenting Board wished to pay tribute to the hard work and commitment shown by those involved with the Family Placement Panel.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the membership of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report, be noted.
2. That the Executive be notified of the current membership of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel.

MIDDLESBROUGH FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL – ACTIVITY REPORT: APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2004

The Fostering Team Manager submitted a report presenting the Board with an overview of the activity of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel during the period 1 April to 30 September 2004.

Members were informed that the Family Placement Panel had met on 13 occasions during this period and had considered a total of 96 items. A breakdown of the number of items considered in various categories was included in the report.

The Board was advised that the National Minimum Standards for Adoption Services required that an annual joint training day with the agency's adoption staff be convened and this would be held within the next six months. Provision of training would also be required on the implications of the Adoption and Children Act in September 2005.

Discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- Clarification was sought with regard to the number of Foster Carers who had been 'de-registered'. It was confirmed that carers were de-registered for a variety of reasons such as retirement and it was recognised that the reasons for de-registration should be reflected in a more positive way when being reported.
- It was noted that a recruitment drive was scheduled to take place between 25 – 27 November to encourage prospective Foster Carers and raise awareness in relation to fostering.
- In response to a query, the Board was advised that four adopters had been approved between 1 April and 30 September and a new raft of adopters, having completed the necessary assessments and preparation groups, were waiting to come to Panel for approval.
- The Board was advised that there was a local target of recruiting 15 families for fostering per year and Middlesbrough had fallen far short of the target having approved just two foster carers between the period 1 April to 30 September. One reason for the decline in recruitment of Foster Carers was that local authorities were unable to compete financially with independent agencies.

- In response to a query, the Board was advised that in some cases, the Council had to use independent agencies to place children requiring foster care who could not be accommodated with Middlesbrough Council Foster Carers. Placements obtained with independent agencies cost the Council approximately £800 upwards for one child for one week. At the present time the Council had approximately 20 children fostered in independent placements, 7 – 8 of which were placed due to capacity reasons.
- Reference was made to establishing some form of salary scheme for Middlesbrough's Foster Carers in an attempt to compete with independent agencies as it would limit the amount of placements referred to independent carers. In response it was confirmed that the current Banded Payment Scheme was under review. Furthermore, it was advised that if Middlesbrough's Treatment Foster Carer bid was successful this would provide a specialist service. Details would be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board at its meeting on 16 December.
- It was noted that only two foster carers had moved from the Council to independent agencies in the past five years.

RECOMMENDED that the contents of the report be noted.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S INVOLVEMENT STRATEGY

The Children's Participation Officer submitted a report which presented the Board with the children and young people's involvement strategy, 'Getting Involved'.

The 'Getting Involved' Strategy was based on legal requirements, national objectives, current good practice and national, regional and local research into the views of children and young people. Young people in foster care and care leavers from Middlesbrough had contributed to the development of the Strategy which was appended to the report.

The 'Getting Involved' Strategy set out the ways in which children and young people could become involved in key decision making processes, including:-

- Their own lives.
- Planning Services and improving them.
- Policies.

Information was also included on access to records, advocacy, expectations and the comments, compliments and complaints process.

The Strategy was also available in the format of easy to read leaflets and examples were attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

The Board discussed the broader implications of corporate parenting for local authorities and considered every opportunity should be taken to remind Councillors of their responsibilities as corporate parents. Suggestions were made for ways in which the Councillors could become more involved with young people in their role as corporate parents, including:-

- Inviting young people to the Corporate Parenting Board meetings.
- Organising regular events for young people and encouraging all Members to attend.
- It was noted that plans were underway to hold an event before Christmas for young people leaving care and to explore developing something broader.

Particular reference was made to page 15 of the strategy which stated that Middlesbrough Council's policies were sometimes decided by senior managers. It was noted that policies of the Council were decided upon by the Mayor and Elected Members and it was agreed that the paragraph referred to would be re-worded accordingly.

RECOMMENDED that the 'Getting Involved' Children and Young People's Involvement Strategy be referred to the Executive for approval.

INFORMATION FOR CORPORATE PARENTS

The Children's Participation Officer submitted a report advising the Board of the guidance document "If this were my Child – A Councillor's Guide to Being a Good Corporate Parent" and to seek approval from the Executive for its distribution.

It was reported that, in September 1998, the Secretary of State for Health had written to all Elected Members in the country launching the Quality Protects Initiative and setting out the Government's expectations in respect of corporate parenting. The Initiative had proved to be very successful.

In Middlesbrough, the Corporate Parenting Board was established in February 2000 and the Board's work had been recognised in subsequent inspections of children's services carried out by the Social Services Inspectorate and the Audit Commission. Corporate Parenting Information sheets were circulated to all Elected Members, Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service in 2001 to ensure awareness of corporate parenting responsibilities was maintained. The sheets had been revised and were attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

The introduction of various legislation and guidance since 1998 supported Local Authorities in their work to maintain focus on the needs of children and was detailed in the report.

The Government considered that the concept of corporate parenting was widely understood but that turnover in Councillors and Senior Managers meant that understanding needed to be maintained. As a result, the guidance was intended to assist Members to continue playing an active part in continuing improvements to children's services.

Members were informed that the guidance contained advice, key questions and checklist to enable them to ensure the authority was fulfilling its responsibilities effectively.

It was proposed to distribute a copy of the guidance, together with the revised Corporate Parenting Information sheets, to all Elected Members, Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service.

The revised Corporate Parenting Information sheets were appended to the report and outlined the following:-

- What Corporate Parenting was.
- What the Government's expectations were.
- What Middlesbrough Council had done.
- The remit and membership of the Corporate Parenting Board.
- Who was looked after by Local Authorities and why.
- National Objectives and Local Implementation.
- Views of Young People in Middlesbrough.

Members considered the guidance and information sheets to be extremely important and felt their distribution would be an excellent start in promoting corporate parenting on a wider scale.

RECOMMENDED as follows:-

1. That the steps proposed to maintain levels of knowledge with respect to corporate parenting be referred to the Executive for approval.