

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

9th June 2005

<p>CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REPORT ON ACTIVITY: MAY 2004 – APRIL 2005</p>

**JAN BRUNTON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S
SERVICES**

**PAUL THOMPSON – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR EDUCATION &
SKILLS**

**TERRY REDMAYNE - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present to Members a summary of the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the year 2004/2005 (see Appendix 1).

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. Corporate parenting is a core statutory responsibility and central government continues to set clear targets and performance indicators in respect of services for children looked after by local authorities. Throughout the year, the Corporate Parenting Board has maintained a focus on improving services for those children and young people in the most cost-effective way.

ACTIVITY OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD 2004-2005

3. The Corporate Parenting Board considered a range of reports and information in relation to education, family placement services, residential care, leaving care services, health and advocacy. A number of recommendations were made to the Executive Board, all of which were accepted and are being

implemented. The attached report describes the activities of the Board between May 2004 and April 2005 in more detail (Appendix 1).

4. Two young people attended meetings of the Board, one of whom attended seven out of eight meetings. Young people showed the Board a DVD of a play that they had written and performed.

OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT

5. Not applicable to this report.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

6. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. This report is of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

7. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
 - a) Note the issues relating to corporate parenting.

REASON

8. The recommendation is supported by the following reason:
 - a) To recognise the work of the Corporate Parenting Board in enabling the authority to meet government expectations in relation to corporate parenting in a way that is inclusive, accountable, effective and efficient.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR, CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING – JENNI COOKE

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
Minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board April 2004 – March 2005

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Corporate Parenting Board

Report on Activity

May 2004 to April 2005

**JAN BRUNTON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S
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1. Introduction

This report sets out the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the past year. The Board has considered a wide range of issues and made recommendations to the Executive for action. Further detail about the work of the Board is set out below.

2. How the Board Developed

Middlesbrough Council established the Corporate Parenting Board in February 2000 (Cabinet, 8/2/2000). The aim was to provide a focus for activities arising from the responsibilities of Members and Officers to act as “good parents” in relation to children looked after by the authority. The Board was developed in response to specific expectations being placed on local authorities by central government within the Quality Protects Framework (see Appendix A).

After the first year of operation, the Cabinet (13/2/2001) gave the Board delegated powers so that it became the recognised decision-making body in respect of the Council’s corporate parenting responsibilities for children and young people looked after (see Appendix B for remit and membership for 2002-2003).

The Cabinet (13/2/2001) also approved the draft ‘Corporate Parenting Policy and Strategy’ which includes sections on:

- Children’s Rights and Children’s Participation
- Assessment, Care Planning and Review
- Placement
- Education and Personal Development
- Health
- Care Leavers
- Achieving Best Value

Each section contains national objectives and performance indicators and as such, the strategy is in keeping with the Performance Assessment Framework; Best Value Performance Indicators; Audit Commission Performance Indicators and the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. This document provides a framework for corporate parenting within the authority and is subject to monitoring and review by the Corporate Parenting Board.

In September 2002, following changes in constitutional arrangements, the Corporate Parenting Board was re-established as an advisory body to the Executive Board. As the Corporate Parenting Board does not consist entirely of Executive Board Members, it could no longer exercise delegated powers. Decisions made by the Corporate Parenting Board were, therefore submitted to the Executive for approval via the minutes.

From January 2003, the Executive sought to clarify decision-making processes by requiring the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board to present a report to the Executive Board as soon as appropriate after each meeting. This report details the business that has been considered and highlights the Board's recommendations to the Executive in respect of any decisions that are required.

3. The Work of the Corporate Parenting Board

There were eight meetings of the Board between May 2004 and April 2005. Members considered reports and information provided by Social Services, Education, Children, Families and Learning, the National Youth Advocacy Service, Connexions, Youth Offending Service, Sport and Leisure Services, the Five Rivers Project and young people who are looked after, or were formerly looked after, by the authority (see Appendix C for more details).

During the year, the Corporate Parenting Board advised the Executive on a range of decisions and issues:

Approval of:

- Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service and Children's Guide
- Statement of Purpose for the Adoption Service and Children's Guide
- Personal Relationships, Physical & Emotional Development and Sexual Health Policy
- Advocacy Policy for Children and their Families
- Getting Involved Strategy for Young People
- Supported Lodgings Policy

Concerns about:

- Education of children looked after
- Lack of specialist residential care in the locality
- Declining recruitment of foster carers and competition from independent fostering agencies

Recognition of:

- The hard work and commitment of a wide range of officers and carers in caring for children looked after and care leavers.

Only two young people attended meetings during the year, which is a significant decline on previous years. However, one young person attended seven out of eight of the meetings of the Corporate Parenting Board. The young people showed Members a DVD that had been made as part of an arts project. These young people had gone on to develop their own organisation, 'Art & That' and were hoping to produce more films.

The Youth Development Worker from the Leaving Care Service and the Children's Participation Officer attend to represent the views of young people when they are unable to attend themselves.

4. Key Issues Considered by the Board

4.1 Education

Education continues to be a key priority for the Board. Educational achievements continue to be below average with just 6% of care leavers aged 16 and over having gained five or more GCSE grades A*-C. Furthermore, of those care leavers contacted, 51% were not in education, training or employment and just 1% had progressed to university. Members were keen to ensure that individual and extra tuition was made available to those children who would benefit.

Difficulties in obtaining school placements had contributed to this problem for some young people. It was reported that 13% of children looked after had missed over 25 days of schooling during the year. Not all the children were educated in Middlesbrough but their education remains Middlesbrough's responsibility. Of these children, 39% had special educational needs. Work was being undertaken with primary schools to prevent children from being excluded.

The admissions criteria for Middlesbrough's schools gave priority to Looked After Children although it was usually more difficult to secure places in secondary education, particularly where children had returned from another area.

It was noted that work was currently being undertaken to explore the feasibility of offering complementary education packages to Looked After Children. A proper funding stream needs to be established to support it.

Members were pleased to note that the majority of children were accessing some level of education but felt it important to ensure that they were receiving a full programme of education

4.2 Family Placement Service

Middlesbrough has enjoyed high levels of commitment from its foster carers and retention rates have been good. However, recruitment is slowing down and some foster carers have retired or left the area, which will begin to impact on the service. Middlesbrough is now experiencing similar problems to other local authorities in the country. Discussions of the Family Placement Service highlighted the following issues:

- Despite concerted recruitment activities, a local target of recruiting 15 families for fostering per year was not met with just two foster carers being approved between the period 1 April to 30 September. A key factor was competition from independent fostering agencies.
- The difference between the number of enquiries and the number of foster carers approved was accounted for by people deciding at various stages that fostering was not for them.
- 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 underway to develop a mentoring scheme with existing carers to help new carers.

- Foster carers were de-registered for a variety of reasons, such as retirement, and Members recommended that the reasons for de-registration should be reflected in a more positive way when being reported.
- 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 Family Placement Panel for approval.
- Adoption support is available to Middlesbrough adopters and adoptive parents who move into the area would be assessed for a service.

- It is difficult for the local authority to compete with the rates paid by independent agencies but the service is aiming to close the gap and a review of the Banded Payments scheme was carried out in consultation with foster carers.
- Payments to Band A carers were increased by only 2%, the equivalent of £2.55 per child.
- Payments to Band B and Band C carers under the Banded Payments system had not changed (other than to reflect inflation) for five years.
- Foster carers were becoming dissatisfied but remained loyal to Middlesbrough - only two foster carers had moved from the Council to independent agencies in the past five years.

- Consideration has been given to the development of a fee-paying scheme, payment of retainers and a specialist service particularly for teenage children.
- Members suggested that foster carers might be allowed to join the local government pension scheme as carers sometimes give up full time employment to become foster carers and are, therefore denied the chance to contribute to a pension scheme. Consideration would need to be given to whether a matching contribution should be made by the local authority.

- Where it was not possible to accommodate children with Middlesbrough foster carers, independent agencies were used at a cost of approximately £800 per child per week.
- Of 20 children placed with independent agencies, 7–8 of these were due to issues of capacity.

- It is possible that a National Fostering Service, with prescribed procedures and protocols, will be developed.
- 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.

4.3 Leaving Care

Members supported a new supported lodging scheme. There was a gap in provision and bed and breakfast accommodation is considered to be unsuitable. There is a range of other options and support, including accommodation provided by Endeavour Housing, for those young people not in supported lodging.

Members wish to ensure that financial support and assistance is available to young people leaving care and moving on to higher education.

The provision of 'part-time' modern apprenticeships was welcomed and the Leaving Care service works closely with the Learning Skills Council to maximise opportunities for young people.

4.4 Residential Care

There is a shortage of local residential placements and high costs associated with specialist residential placements outside of the area. Various regional initiatives that were being undertaken to look at this issue.

Members commented on the very positive outcomes for young people who go home or move into independence from the Five Rivers accommodation.

4.5 Sport & Leisure

Middlesbrough was involved in a national research project, undertaken by the Who Cares? Trust in conjunction with the Football Foundation, which looked at how local authorities support and celebrate the participation of children looked after in sport and leisure activities. Some young people are able to access and benefit from mainstream sport and leisure activities and a range of mechanisms is in place to support this. However, it is important to recognise that others may need additional support and targeted provision, which can act as a stepping stone into mainstream activity.

Members supported the recommendations in the research report. These included:

- Appoint a Sports Liaison Officer for looked after children/assign this role to an existing person in every local authority.
- Ring fence money for young people who are looked after, to enable them and their carers to fully participate in sport and leisure activities.
- Promote opportunities through care planning and Statutory Reviews for young people to highlight their interests in particular sport and leisure activities. Ensure appropriate resources are allocated accordingly.
- Implement and resource transport arrangements to ensure young people can engage in out of school/weekend sport and leisure activities.
- Celebrate and reward achievements of young people in care in relation to their sport and leisure activities.
- Promote opportunities for young people in care to discuss and inform policy and practice around their inclusion on in sport and leisure activities.
- Ensure that Elected Members understand that it is part of their corporate parenting responsibility to promote the inclusion of young people in their care in sport and leisure activities.

4.6 Corporate Parenting

The Board discussed the broader implications of corporate parenting for local authorities and considered that every opportunity should be taken to remind Councillors of their responsibilities as corporate parents. Members considered the corporate parenting information sheets to be extremely important and felt their distribution would be an excellent start in promoting corporate parenting on a wider scale.

Suggestions made for ways in which Councillors could become more involved with young people included:

- Inviting more young people to the Corporate Parenting Board meetings.
- Organising regular events for young people and encouraging all Members to attend.
- Enabling young people to take part in a residential weekend for their own self-development and for consultation work to be undertaken.
- Developing a method of interpreting and celebrating the successes and achievements of young people. Reference was made to the importance of acknowledging not only academic achievements but also those steps taken to establish and lead independent and successful lives.

5. Conclusion

The Corporate Parenting Board has considered a wide range of issues and has identified a number of areas of concern. The Board continues to monitor progress on these issues and to press for further improvements.

Sue Little
Children's Participation Officer
May 2005

The Role of Members as Corporate Parents

Central government has very clear expectations of local authorities in respect of corporate parenting. These expectations were sent in a letter from the Secretary of State for Health to each elected Member in the country in September 1998. In summary, the Secretary of State had 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':

- 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

APPENDIX B

Remit of the Corporate Parenting Board

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 and Strategy' document.

Membership (2004 - 2005)

Councillor J Jones	-	Chair
Councillor J Brunton		Vice-Chair
Councillor R Brady		Deputy Mayor
Councillor B Hubbard		
Councillor F McIntyre		
Councillor B Taylor		
Councillor J Taylor		
Councillor B Thompson		Executive Member Social Care and Health
Councillor P Thompson		Executive Member Education
Councillor A E Ward		
Observers:		
Thomas Tolmie		Young Person's Rep
Brian Simpson		Foster Carer
Caroline Hilton		National Youth Advocacy Service
		Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust

The Board has places for up to 6 young people to attend.

APPENDIX C

Reports/presentations to the Corporate Parenting Board May 2004 to April 2005

- Presentation of Case Studies

- Overview of Education of Children Looked After
- Educational Attainments of Children Looked After
- Children Looked After who have Missed at least 25 days Schooling to date this Academic Year

- Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service Statement of Purpose & Children's Guide x2
- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service Statement of Purpose & Children's Guide x2
- Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service Annual Report
- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service Annual Report
- Developments in Adoption Support Services
- Family Placement Panel Activity Report 2003/2004
- Membership of Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel
- Family Placement Panel Activity Report April 2004- September 2004
- Payments to Foster Carers 2005-2006
- Fostering Service Review

- Leaving Care Service Annual Report
- Middlesbrough Leaving Care Service Supported Lodging Policy

- Five Rivers Partnership Board Summary Report
- Five Rivers Annual Report
- Summary of Rota Visits and Regulation 33 Reports

- Children Missing from Placement
- Update report on Children Missing From Placement

- Overview of Health of Children Looked After
- Update regarding Promoting the Health of Children Looked After
- Personal Relationships, Physical & Emotional Development and Sexual Health Policy

- Advocacy for Children and Young People
- Advocacy for Children, Young People and their Families – Policy and Guidance
- National Youth Advocacy Service - presentation
- Young People's Involvement Strategy
- Fun Day for Children Looked After
- "Back to Reality" – Presentation of DVD by young people

- The Current and Potential Involvement of Middlesbrough Sport and Leisure with Children Looked After
- Winning Team Consultation – verbal report

- Youth Offending Service
- Connexions

- Every Child Matters – verbal report
- Children’s Service Inspection Progress Report
- Canning Judgement – verbal report

- Children Looked After Profile and Trends
- Children Looked After Statistical Update

- Corporate Parenting Board Report on activity 2003-2004
- Information for Corporate Parents