

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

9th June 2005

<p>ANALYSIS OF AGENCY PLACEMENTS FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN</p>

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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to give the Corporate Parenting Board information relating to the current use of agency residential placements and agency foster-care placements in respect of Looked After Children.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

2. Achieving a balance between meeting service requirements within available resources has always presented a challenge to management. Increasing demands upon finite budgets, coupled with raised expectations and the reduced availability of direct service provision has further increased this challenge.
3. Historically Middlesbrough Social Services had always attempted to meet the needs of 'looked after children' within their own foster-care service and in the majority of cases this was achieved. There have however always been a smaller number of children who had more complex needs, which required residential placement, and with the move away from direct Local Authority provision, it became increasingly necessary to purchase services from the

independent sector. The pursuit of highly specialised service had by necessity involved placements far and wide.

4. In November 2002, Middlesbrough Social Services created and appointed to the post of Agency Placement Manager. The focus of this post was to manage the independent sector placements via the looked after review process, develop consistency and quality in terms of arrangements with service providers and seek to reduce the number of high cost placements at a significant distance from Middlesbrough. A Best Value Review in Agency Placements was completed in January 2004 which led to a reduced reliance on residential care provision in distant placements and a shift to making better use of local resources, particularly Agency Foster placements.
5. A Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children was produced in April 2004 to formulate a clear strategy to reduce reliance on spot purchase residential placements out of area and increase the proportion of children placed in foster care. This strategy was not only more cost effective but more importantly led to better outcomes for the children and young people.
6. The Children's Agency Panel (a monthly multi - agency forum) has established appropriate procedures to control the use of resources and the purchase of essential agency services. Placements now require clear agreements and contracts for service, are subject to regular planning and review, with clearly defined goals, which can be measured.
7. Middlesbrough has also played an active role in the North East Contracting and Commissioning Group initiative, which has sought to establish a list of preferred service providers with a consistent accreditation and monitoring process.
8. This combined management activity has resulted in a significant reduction in the number of children placed in agency residential provision outside the area, a more appropriate use of agency foster care and most importantly improved our ability to care for children within their home area.

ANALYSIS OF AGENCY PLACEMENTS

9. The analysis of Agency Placements (Appendix 1) clearly shows that the majority of our 'looked after children' are now placed within our Region. Placements outside our Region now represent a very small proportion and have only occurred when specific circumstances have required this. Since early 2003 there has been a major reduction in Agency Residential Placements from 35 to the current 12 and significantly 7 of these children are now placed within our Region. The number of children placed in Agency Foster Care over the same period has remained constant but again the majority of placements have been established with our Region.

10. There are currently 245 children looked after by Middlesbrough Council. The vast majority of these (61%) are placed within our own foster care service. Agency Residential and Agency Foster Care placements provide care for 48 children (19%) and the remaining children (20%) are accommodated with family or in independent living options.

OPTION APPRAISAL

11. Not applicable to this analysis.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

12. The cost of Agency Residential Care is within the range £2,000 to £4,000 per week, with even higher costs for exceptionally complex care packages. The cost of Agency Foster Care is within the range £700 to £1,250 per week and therefore represents a substantial (50%) saving. The full cost of Agency Placements must also take account of the many additional on-costs of travel and subsistence, for family contact, social work support visits, reviews, planning meetings and Court attendance. In placements outside our Region these on-costs can be very considerable and place inappropriate pressures on our resources.

Legal Implications

13. Adherence to the guiding principles laid down in The Children Act 1989 must influence our choice of placement for the child. Particularly:
 - a). Arrangements should be made to enable a child to live with a person connected with the child unless that would not be reasonably practicable or consistent with his welfare. S23 (6), i.e. parents, persons with parental responsibility, person with residence order, a relative or friend.
 - b). Accommodation should be provided which is near to the child's home. S23(7)(a).
 - c). Where accommodation is provided for siblings they should be accommodated together. S23(7)(b).

Ward Implications

14. This report will be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

15. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
 - a). Note the issues relating to agency placements
 - b). Note this work as an example of positive progress in the care of our looked after children.

REASON

16. The significant reduction in the number of children placed in out of area Agency Placements has created substantial budgetary savings and more importantly has enabled the majority of Middlesbrough 'looked after children' to live within their home area.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

Best Value in Agency Placement, Stuart Bamford, Agency Placement Manager, January 2004.

Commissioning Strategy For Children Looked After, Sally Robinson, Service Manager, April 2004.

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ANALYSIS OF AGENCY PLACEMENTS

FOSTER CARE PLACEMENTS

Total number of children/young people	36
Age range	7 – 18 years
Average age	13 years
Placement Location	<p>Middlesbrough – 1 Hartlepool – 2 Local – 8 Redcar and Cleveland – 2 Stockton – 3</p> <p>Darlington – 2 Co Durham – 8 Tyne and Wear – 2 North Yorkshire – 4 Region -23 Sunderland – 2 Northumberland – 3 Scottish Borders –1 South Shields – 1</p> <p>East Sussex – 2 Manchester – 1 Outside - 5 Sheffield – 1 Worcestershire – 1</p>
Placement by Fostering Agency	SW//S – 10 (Preferred Provider Contract) NCH –7 (Contract for Challenging Behaviour) Barnardos –6 Foster Care Association – 3 Team Fostering – 2 Outlook Fostering – 2 CARES – 2 Orange Grove – 1 Parallel Parents – 1 Fostering Solutions – 1 Foster Care Solutions - 1
Anticipated Duration of Placements	12 months or less – 6 1 – 5 years – 18 5 years + - 12
Cost Range of Placements	£700 - £1250 per week

RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENTS

Total number of children/young people	12																		
Age range	7 – 17 years																		
Average age	15 years																		
Placement Location	<table style="border: none; width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 60%;">Middlesbrough – 3</td> <td rowspan="2" style="font-size: 2em; vertical-align: middle;">}</td> <td rowspan="2" style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">Within</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Darlington – 4</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Region -7</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="height: 20px;"></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cheshire – 3</td> <td rowspan="3" style="font-size: 2em; vertical-align: middle;">}</td> <td rowspan="3" style="text-align: center; vertical-align: middle;">Outside Region</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rochdale – 1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>-5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Northampton – 1</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Middlesbrough – 3	}	Within	Darlington – 4	Region -7						Cheshire – 3	}	Outside Region	Rochdale – 1	-5	Northampton – 1		
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Placement by Specialist Nature	Psychiatric Hospital – 2 Physical Disability – 4 Secure Accommodation – 1 Severe Attachment Disorder – 1 Severe Behavioural Disorder – 4																		
Anticipated Duration of Placements	12 months or less – 9 1 –5 years – 3																		
Cost Range of Placements	£2,000 - £4,000 per week																		

Stuart Bamford
 Agency Placement Manager
 25.05.05