

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
FOSTERING SERVICE – ANNUAL
REPORT FOR 2004-5**

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

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SKILLS**

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CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

21st July 2005

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with the Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for the year 2004-5, attached as Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND

2. The Annual Report of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service gives information on the principles, aims, objectives and functions of the Fostering Service, the services and facilities provided, the staffing during 2004-5, activity and developments during 2004-5, and developments and issues for 2005-6.
3. The Annual Report is intended to be a stand-alone document but some of the material is also contained in the Statement of Purpose for the Fostering Service, which has already been presented to members of the Corporate Parenting Board for approval. Sections 5, 6 and 7 of the

Annual Report contain information which does not appear in the Statement of Purpose.

OPTION APPRAISAL

4. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

5. There are no immediate financial or legal implications in this report. There are no specific ward implications as the Adoption Service covers the whole of Middlesbrough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Fostering Service Annual Report.

REASONS

7. It is important that elected members are aware of this aspect of Social Services' work in order that they can effectively fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents to children looked after.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

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MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE



ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2004-5

Issued in June 2005 by
Middlesbrough Fostering Service
Sandringham House
170a Overdale Road
Middlesbrough TS3 7EA


Middlesbrough
moving forward

1. The Principles of the Fostering Service

The work of Middlesbrough Fostering Service is based on the following principles:

- (1) Child focussed
The child's welfare, safety and needs are at the centre of the fostering process.
- (2) Partnership
The Fostering Service will work in partnership with parents and children, foster carers and their families, and social work staff and other professionals when delivering the service.
- (3) Anti-discriminatory practice
The Fostering Service will respect Human Rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism.

2. The Aims and Objectives of the Fostering Service

The main aim of the Fostering Service provided by Middlesbrough Council is:

- ◆ to provide suitable foster care placements for children who are looked after by Middlesbrough Council.

The Fostering Service will achieve this by:

- ◆ recruiting, preparing and assessing prospective foster carers and their families
- ◆ supporting, developing and retaining approved foster carers and their families
- ◆ working in partnership with the child's social worker to identify a suitable placement when it has been agreed that the child's assessed needs will be met by placement in foster care
- ◆ working in partnership with the child's social worker and other appropriate professionals to identify a suitable alternative placement from an Independent Fostering Agency, where appropriate and agreed by Middlesbrough Children's Panel.

3. The Standards of Care of the Fostering Service

The work of Middlesbrough Fostering Service is delivered in accordance with the following standards:

- ◆ UK National Standards for Foster Care 1999
- ◆ the Code of Practice on the recruitment, assessment, approval, training, management and support of foster carers 1999
- ◆ the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2002

In addition to the national standards, Middlesbrough Fostering Service has adopted local standards which underpin its approach to service delivery. These include:

- ◆ responding to enquiries from potential foster carers in a positive and welcoming manner and sending them an information pack within 2 working days of receiving the enquiry
- ◆ a requirement for social workers who join the team to be Level E workers with a minimum of 2 years experience of Children & Families work
- ◆ a commitment to the use of co-working by 2 social workers during the assessment process, in the belief that this leads to a high quality, thorough assessment
- ◆ the use of a banded payments system which recognises the valuable contribution made by foster carers as they develop skills and experience and relates the payment received to the skills and experience they have developed

4. The Services and Facilities provided by the Fostering Service

The services and facilities provided by Middlesbrough Fostering Service fall into 3 main areas:

(a) Those provided to prospective foster carers:

- Information and advice about fostering
- Initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming foster carers
- Preparation training for applicants
- Competency-based assessment of applicants using BAAF Form F
- The opportunity to attend the Family Placement Panel when their application is presented

(b) Those provided to foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service

- Supervision and support from a named social worker from the Fostering Service
- Practical support (such as transport and activities for children) from a Support Worker, according to need
- A regular newsletter specifically for foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service
- Membership of Fostering Network
- Support groups and social events for foster carers
- A support group (known as the Children Who Foster group) for the children of foster carers
- A directory giving details of other foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service (providing they have given their permission for their details to be included)
- A foster carers handbook containing information on policies, procedures and practice guidance
- Access to independent advice and mediation when necessary
- A programme of induction training for newly approved foster carers
- A programme of post-approval training specifically for foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service, consisting of 4 training events a year
- The hire of the training facilities at Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre or other appropriate facilities for use as a venue for the training events
- Financial support for placements, using a banded payments scheme
- Loan of essential equipment or household items to support specific placements

(c) Those provided to social work staff who need a placement for a child looked after by the Council.

These consist of:

- ◆ A duty social worker available during office hours Monday – Friday
- ◆ Provision of a range of foster care placements for children looked after by Middlesbrough Council
- ◆ Liaison with other agencies to identify suitable placements when none are available within Middlesbrough
- ◆ Provision of carers for use by the Emergency Duty Team for placements at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.

5. Staffing of the Fostering Service during 2004/5

There are 15 staff employed by Middlesbrough Council for the purpose of the Fostering Service, 6 in the Fostering Team, 6 in the Permanence Team and 3 shared between the 2 teams. In addition, there are 2 staff employed by Hyder Business Services who provide administrative support to the Fostering Service.

The Fostering Service was affected by staff shortages for the whole of the year. The Permanence Team began the year with 1 vacant social worker post and a second became vacant in June 2004. Due to difficulties in recruiting suitable staff and restrictions on filling vacancies due to budget

pressures, the vacancies were unfilled until new social workers were appointed in November 2004 and January 2005.

The Fostering Team had two social work vacancies from December 2004 onwards. One social worker left to take up a Team Manager post elsewhere in the Department. The other vacancy resulted from some temporary internal moves to provide maternity leave cover for a Service Manager's post.

Details of the staff in post on 31st March 2005 are as follows:

Name	Job title	Qualifications	Experience
Tony Kerr	Acting Team Manager, Fostering Team	CSS – 1990 Practice Teacher Award – 2002	With Social Services since 1983. With Fostering Service since 1997.
Jane O'Toole	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 1998	With Social Services since 1998. With Fostering Service since 2002.
Val Hampton	Social Worker, Fostering Team	CQSW – 1986	With Social Services since 1986. With Fostering Service since 2001.
Jill Fawcett	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 2000	With Social Services since 2000. With Fostering Service since 2003.
Liz Watson	Team Manager, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1976 B.T.E.C Management Studies – 2002	With Social Services since 1974. With Fostering Service since 1996
Karen Curran	Social Worker, Permanence team	DipSW – 2001	With Social Services since 2001. With Fostering Service since 2003.
Val Thompson	Social Worker, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1990	With Social Services since 1990. With Fostering Service since 2002.
Connie O'Neill	Social Worker, Permanence Team	CQSW – 1984 CMS – 2001	With Social Services since 1984. With Fostering Service since 2004.
Joyce Elliott	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 1999	With Social Services since 1993. With the Fostering Service since 2005.
Elizabeth Johnston	Social Worker, Permanence Team (part time)	CQSW – 1990	With Social Services since 1976. With Fostering Services since 2000.

Judy Yelder	Family Placement Development Officer	CQSW – 1976 Certificate in Training & Development – 1992	With Social Services since 1976. With Fostering Service since 1999.
Val Scott	Support Worker	NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People – 2003	With Social Services since 2000. With Fostering Service since 2000.
Aileen Pearce	Support Worker	NNEB – 1986	With Social Services since 1986. With Fostering Service since 2002.
Gill Bisp	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services	NVQ Business Admin. Level 2 – 1995 Level 3 – 1997 Level 3 Key Skills – 1997	With Social Services since 1981. With Fostering Service since 1996.
Sue Atkinson	Team Clerk, Hyder Business Services	B.T.E.C Business Admin – 1996	With Social Services since 1998. With Fostering Service since 2000.

6. Activity and developments during 2004/5

- (a) Levels of activity and requests for placements during the year have been high, reflecting the numbers of children looked after and the continuing use of foster care as the placement of choice when children become looked after. A summary of the main areas of activity is as follows:

Number of enquires received	139
Number of requests for initial visits	37
Number of applications	6
Number of foster carers approved	2
Number of foster carers de-registered	7
Total number of approved foster carers on 31 st March 2005	107
Number of children in foster care on 31 st March 2005	176
Number of children whose long-term fostering plans were approved	14
Number of children matched with long-term foster carers	11

- (b) The Fostering Service provides a programme of post-approval training for registered foster carers and during 2004/5, the topics for the training sessions were:
- ◆ Separation and Loss – June 2004
 - ◆ Identity and Life Story Work – September 2004
 - ◆ Health and Child Development – December 2004
 - ◆ Mental Health – Children and their Families – March 2005

These training sessions are well supported by foster carers and during the year, 93 individual foster carers attended the sessions, giving a total of 217 course attendances.

Due to the staff shortages mentioned in section 5, the plans to provide training for foster carers in the need of unaccompanied asylum seeking children were put on hold.

In addition to the above programme, foster carers also have opportunities to attend courses which are part of Middlesbrough Social Services in-house training programme and courses which are run by external organisations. Several foster carers took advantage of these opportunities during the year.

- (c) The Commission for Social Care Inspection carried out the 3rd annual inspection of Middlesbrough Fostering Service in February 2005. This inspection was carried out by Inspectors from the local office of the Commission who carry out a wide range of checks and interviews to determine whether the Fostering Services Regulations and National Minimum Standards are being met. In the main, the findings of the Inspection were very positive. Their overall conclusion was that 'Middlesbrough Fostering Service significantly contributes towards positive outcomes for the children placed with foster carers by the service'. Some problems with documentation were identified and an action plan has been put in place to address these issues.
- (d) One of the challenges faced by the Service during the year relates to the recruitment and retention of foster carers. After several positive and successful years, in 2004/5 the Service experienced a net decrease in the number of registered foster carers. Recruitment of new carers became extremely difficult and the number of applications and approvals dropped significantly. In response to this situation, a review of the recruitment strategy was started in January 2005 and was still in progress at the end of March.
- (e) The issue of providing placements for children over the age of 11 years has continued to be a challenge but progress has been made during 2004/5. A contract has been established with an independent agency, SWIIS, who are based within the Northern region and are now our preferred provider. This contract has enabled us to build up closer working relationships with the agency and helps us to keep children within the Northern region when we are unable to meet the child's needs within Middlesbrough.
- (f) In May 2004, the fieldwork teams within Children and Families were re-organised and as part of this, a Children Looked After team was created. This team focuses on working with children who are looked after and works closely with the Fostering Service to achieve better outcomes for children in foster care. Further structural change was implemented in January 2005 when the Fostering Service became part of the newly created Children, Families and Learning Department.
- (g) In summary, 2004/5 was a challenging year for the Fostering Service due to pressure of work and ongoing staff shortages throughout the year.

7. Developments and issues for 2005/6

- (a) At the end of May, the Fostering Service became fully staffed again, with a new social worker being appointed to the vacancy in the Fostering Team and other members of the team returning to their permanent posts. This means that plans and developments which were put on hold due to staff shortages are now being resurrected.
- (b) In August 2005, the Fostering Service will begin to pilot a Support Foster Care scheme, which aims to reduce the number of children becoming looked after by providing intensive support, including overnight stays. Middlesbrough is one of a number of local authorities who are taking part in a national evaluation of this type of provision. The Middlesbrough service will initially be provided by existing experienced foster carers and if successful, will be extended by recruiting new carers specifically for the scheme.
- (c) In order to increase the provision of foster care for children who have had very damaging experiences, there are discussions in progress with Redcar & Cleveland Fostering Service and the South Tees Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service about setting up a South Tees Fostering Service modelled essentially upon Treatment Foster Care. The aim of this service would be to provide placements for children and young people who need intensive packages of support, including education and mental health services, and who would otherwise be placed outside of Middlesbrough's resources. However additional funding will be needed to establish this service.
- (d) The review of the recruitment strategy has been completed and it has become clear that there is no quick solution to the recruitment problems. The growth of independent fostering agencies and the introduction by neighbouring local authorities of new schemes with increased allowances means that Middlesbrough has now fallen behind other agencies in terms of what it can offer to existing and prospective foster carers. Some actions can and will be taken to update recruitment material and make sure that our need for foster carers continues to be publicised. However the bigger and more complicated issue of payments and conditions of service for foster carers needs further consideration and this will be done by means of a Working Party consisting of staff and foster carers from the Fostering Service.
- (e) One area of recruitment which will be taken forward during the year is that of recruiting foster carers and adopters who can meet the needs of children from black and minority ethnic groups. A regional group has been formed to concentrate on this issue and a specialist agency with relevant experience and community contacts will be working with the group. A recruitment campaign for the Middlesbrough area is planned for January 2006.
- (f) Another new scheme which will be implemented is a mentoring scheme for foster carers. This will be launched with a training session on 19th July. The aim of the scheme is to improve peer support and to provide development opportunities for Middlesbrough carers.
- (g) There is a growing need for foster placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children within Middlesbrough. During 2005/6 training will be provided to raise awareness amongst existing foster carers of the specific needs of this group of children, and thus improve the quality of the placements that we can provide for them.

Judy Yelder
Family Placement Development Officer
June 2005

Jane Wilson
Fostering Team Manager