

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

8th June 2006

<p>CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REPORT ON ACTIVITY: MAY 2005 – APRIL 2006</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 2005/2006 (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 2005-2006

3. The Corporate Parenting Board decided to have a series of meetings that considered the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes as they relate to children looked after. Each presentation looked at the ECM outcome in general terms and then focused on what was being done to support children looked after in relation to achieving that outcome. A summary of the key issues is included in the attached report (Appendix 1). In addition, the Board

received a number of reports in relation to specific issues to comply with requirements under regulations and guidance. A number of recommendations were made to the Executive Board, all of which were accepted and have been implemented. The attached report describes the work of the Board in more detail.

4. Two young people attended two meetings of the Board. However, the views of young people in relation to each of the Every Child Matters outcomes were included in the presentations made to the Board and in relation to some of the reports on specific issues.

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 June 2005 – April 2006

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Corporate Parenting Board

Report on Activity

May 2005 to April 2006

**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 2005-2006).

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 2005 and April 2006. Members considered reports and information provided by Children, Families and Learning, the Primary Care Trust, Connexions, the Youth Offending Service, the Five Rivers Project and Strategic Housing (see Appendix C for more details).

The Corporate Parenting Board considered the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes as they relate to children looked after. Each presentation looked at the ECM outcome in general terms and then focused on what was being done to support children looked after in relation to achieving that outcome.

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

Approval of:

- Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide for the Adoption Service
- Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide for the Fostering Service
- Smoking Policy for Middlesbrough Foster Carers
- Policy & Guidance Relating to Substance Misuse
- Financial Assistance Policy & Guidance (Care Leavers)

Concerns about:

- Education of children looked after
- Declining recruitment of foster carers and competition from independent fostering agencies
- Housing needs of care leavers

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. However, the views of children and young people were included within the presentations made in relation to the ECM outcomes. 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 do not wish to attend themselves.

4. Key Issues Considered by the Board

4.1 Stay Safe

There is a wide range of mechanisms in place to safeguard children looked after and the following points were made:

- The safeguards now in place, together with the enthusiasm of officers, were impressive.
- It was considered that all measures were now established to prevent any loopholes in the procedures and protocols to ensure the safe care of Children Looked After. These include a rigorous inspection regime, closer scrutiny of out of area placements and preferred provider arrangements.
- Robust systems were in place to determine both long term and short term plans for Children Looked After and to monitor the frequency and quality of Statutory Reviews of Care Plans.
- The importance of placement stability was emphasised and concern was expressed about the ongoing problems associated with recruitment and retention of foster carers.

4.2 Enjoy & Achieve

Education continues to be a key priority for the Board and the following points were made:

- It is important to note and celebrate the successes of children looked after.
- It is necessary to challenge and to support schools and other education providers in relation to fulfilling their responsibilities for meeting the needs of children looked after.
- 42% of children looked after require classroom support.
- Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are a key mechanism and must be prioritised and implemented with appropriate allocation of resources.
- Although few in number, it is very concerning that some children and young people are not receiving any education, as they are some of the most vulnerable children.
- Difficulties in finding placements and organising alternative education packages contribute to the problems of some young people.
- Early intervention and support are required to prevent exclusion.
- Foster carers must be encouraged to support children's education, however it was recognised that time constraints and children's other commitments were limiting factors.
- The value of the Educational Psychology service was acknowledged.
- Access to specialist services for children placed out of area can be problematic.
- Designated Teachers and Designated Governors for children looked after play a key role in supporting their achievements.
- Children looked after had taken part in a regional arts event making a wide range of contributions including artwork, poetry, personal stories and a large wooden jigsaw of Middlesbrough.

4.3 Be Healthy

During the year, the Corporate Parenting Board considered two key policies in relation to health – the Smoking Policy for Foster Carers and the Policy and Guidance Relating to Alcohol & Substance Misuse. Other points raised were:

- Problem parental alcohol and substance misuse was a key factor in causing children to become looked after and a specialist project had been successful in tackling these issues on a multi-agency basis. It was hoped that this scheme could be extended to cover the whole town.
- Children looked after had been involved in a regional football competition and one young person had received a team player award. The support given by Sport & Leisure to the regional football competition and provision of holiday activities was noted.
- It was suggested that Personal Education Plans be used to record whether children and young people had received the education on drug and alcohol awareness provided in school. Bespoke provision would be made available where necessary.
- Healthy lifestyles were actively promoted within regular health assessments
- Fast track referral systems had been developed in relation to specialist services.
- The importance of preparing and supporting care leavers moving into independence was emphasised.
- An evaluation of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for children looked after identified how successful this development had been in improving access to services. Waiting times for children looked after had been reduced to a maximum of eight weeks. Training for foster carers provided by CAMHS was considered very good, as was their 'open door' policy.

4.4 Achieve Economic Well-being

It was acknowledged that the economic well-being of children depends on the economic situation of their families. Most children looked after are placed with foster carers and it was noted that the economic situation of foster carers varied, with some carers being in employment and some not. Other points raised were:

- It was noted that the Banded Payments scheme for foster carers had not been updated for the most experienced carers, other than inflation related increases. Work is underway to review this situation.
- The Preparation for Independence group for care leavers covered a wide variety of topics, catering for all needs. It was confirmed that a bank account was established for each child and they were encouraged to manage their own finances.
- Unless they were particularly vulnerable, children were encouraged to travel to school independently and most walked. This was sometimes difficult however, especially when children were continuing to attend a particular school whilst other changes took place.
- Transport was recognised as an important issue for children looked after and it was recommended that the Executive consider this issue in more detail.

- Children Looked After of school age were able to undertake work experience within the Council, either through school work experience or by special arrangements designed to ensure that Children Looked After did not miss out because of their circumstances.
- The Leaving Care Service is developing an employability scheme for young people aged 16-19 and support will be sought from all services within the Council in relation to work placements.
- The Connexions Service has dedicated Personal Advisers for looked after young people, who are working closely with the Leaving Care Service.
- The relative benefits of school based or specialist Personal Advisers for Children Looked After aged under 16 were discussed. It was felt that a specialised PA would ensure support was accessed if necessary and resources were available, however much of this would be a co-ordination function. It was also acknowledged that provision needed to be tailored to individuals.
- A Supported Lodging scheme had been developed for care leavers but there were some issues raised in relation to accessing housing from registered social landlords. Work was underway to address these issues.

4.5 Make a Positive Contribution

The most direct and comprehensive way in which children looked after are involved is in relation to assessment, care planning and review processes within which key decisions are made about their lives. In relation to other aspects of this outcome, children and young people are supported in accessing mainstream specialist services. Other opportunities and issues raised include:

- Children and young people looked after are involved in the selection of social work and social care staff.
- There are opportunities to be involved in discussions about proposed changes and service developments.
- Specialist youth service provision has been developed to promote access to opportunities for personal development. The additional support provided by the Youth Service was acknowledged.

4.6 Family Placement Services & Local Residential Care

The Family Placement service was congratulated on the positive reports on the work of the fostering service and the permanence service. It was hoped that positive publicity might aid the recruitment of new foster carers. The loyalty of Middlesbrough foster carers was particularly noted.

Discussion of 'specialist placements' (those providing a package of more intensive support for children and young people with particular difficulties) included reference to the potential savings which could be effected by providing these placements in-house. It was pointed out that there was a need to look at the development of EBD provision in Middlesbrough. It was emphasised that children should not be brought back from settled placements and that as some children were likely to be in placements for as long as five years, then some pump-priming would be required to develop a local service. It was noted that work was ongoing on a South Tees

fostering service which would take on some of the principles of the Treatment Foster Care model.

The work of the Middlesbrough Council and Five Rivers Partnership Board in safeguarding and supporting children in local residential accommodation was acknowledged and appreciated. The importance of young people being encouraged, feeling cared for and feeling safe within residential care was highlighted and Five Rivers were commended for their work.

4.7 Corporate Parenting

The responsibility of all Councillors and Senior Managers to accept the role of a Corporate Parent was emphasised. The Executive had a detailed discussion of support for children looked after and the inclusion of information within service area performance plans was welcomed.

It was noted that in other regions and nationally there was a slight upward trend in the number of children looked after, which was mirrored in this region. A thorough examination of the reasons for children becoming looked after in Middlesbrough had ensured that children were only looked after if it were absolutely necessary. However, there was a growing trend for the Courts to place children looked after at home, which had cost implications for the Authority.

5. Conclusion

The Corporate Parenting Board has considered a wide range of issues and has identified a number of areas of concern. Consideration of the Every Child Matters outcomes identified a number of ways in which children and young people looked after were supported in achieving these outcomes. The provision of educational support and the recruitment and retention of foster carers were identified as key concerns. The Board continues to monitor progress on these issues and to press for further improvements.

Sue Little
Children's Participation Officer
May 2006

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 (2005 - 2006)

Councillor J Brunton	Chair
	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	Former Care Leaver
Brian Simpson	Foster Carer
	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 2005 to April 2006

- Presentations on the Every Child Matters outcomes:
 - Stay Safe
 - Enjoy and Achieve
 - Be Healthy
 - Achieve Economic Well-being
 - Make a Positive Contribution
- Children Looked After Educated within Middlesbrough Council's Complementary Education Service
- Caring for the Health of Children who are Looked After Away From Home
- Policy & Guidance Relating to Alcohol & Substance Misuse
- Smoking Policy for Middlesbrough Foster Carers
- Care Planning for Children – Risk Assessments and Packages of Support Arising from Problem Parental Drug Use
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, Children Looked After Team Evaluation
- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service - Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide 2005-2006
- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service – Annual Report
- Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service - Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide 2005-2006
- Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service – Annual Report
- Annual Inspection for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service
- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel Activity Report for October 2004 – March 2005
- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel – Activity Report for April to September 2005
- Summary Report – Middlesbrough Council/Five Rivers Partnership
- Five Rivers Annual Report
- Summary of Rota Visits and Reg 33 Reports
- Children Missing from Placement Report
- Analysis of Agency Placements for Looked After Children
- Middlesbrough Council Leaving Care Service – Annual Report
- Middlesbrough Council Leaving Care Service – Financial Assistance Policy and Guidance
- Connexions
- Housing Issues for Care Leavers