

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 13 July 2006.

PRESENT: Councillor P Thompson (In the Chair), Councillors Davison and McPartland.

OFFICIALS: J Cooke, G Corbett, L Harrington, D Johnson, C Kendrick, S Little, I Nicholls, G Watson, J Wilson and J Young.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: B Simpson (Foster Carer)
T Tolmie (Young Person)

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Brunton (Chair), B Thompson and A E Ward.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point in the meeting.

****MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 8 June 2006 were approved as a true record.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE MIDDLESBROUGH FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL

The Fostering Team Manager presented a report to inform the Corporate Parenting Board of the current membership of the Family Placement Panel. The Panel met every two weeks and considered reports and made recommendations relating to adoption and fostering.

It was noted that the Panel's composition had to meet the requirements of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Fostering Service Regulations 2002. The implementation of the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 had had many implications for the Family Placement Panel's work and structure. However, Officers were satisfied that the Panel met the new requirements and could continue to consider both adoption and fostering reports. It was noted that Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel was remarkable in this respect as many agencies had separate panels for adoption and fostering.

The current membership of the Panel was outlined at Appendix 1 of the report. It was noted that, in order to comply with the new regulations, an Independent Chair and two Independent Panel Members had been appointed. Annual reviews of Panel Members' performance had been introduced and the membership agreement had been thoroughly revised. Training had also been reviewed to comply with the new regulations.

The work done by the members of the Family Placement Panel was commended. It was recognised that this was a very demanding Panel that dealt with difficult and complex issues.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to approve the membership of Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel, as outlined at Appendix 1 of the report.

MIDDLESBROUGH FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL – ACTIVITY REPORT FOR OCTOBER 2005 TO MARCH 2006

The Fostering Team Manager presented a report to provide the Board with an overview of the Family Placement Panel's activity during the period 1 October 2005 to 31 March 2006.

Members were informed that the Family Placement Panel had met on 10 occasions during this period and had considered a total of 74 items. A breakdown of the number of items considered in various categories was included in the report. It was highlighted that the number of children whose adoption plans had been approved and the number of children who had been matched with adopted parents had both increased. This was the result of a drive to ensure delays for

children were minimised. It was also noted that two foster carers had been de-registered during the period and the reasons for this were outlined. The report also contained data from the preceding 18 months for comparison purposes.

It was reported that the number of new foster carers recruited continued to be low. This was a national issue; however, there were specific problems for Middlesbrough, including the payment structure. Children Families and Learning would address this during 2006/2007 as part of a general review of services for children looked after.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that the number of adopters approved was lower than previous periods. It was anticipated that this would rise as more prospective adopters completed their preparation training.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Family Placement Panel.

CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STATISTICAL UPDATE

The Children's Planning Officer submitted a report presenting statistical information relating to children and young people looked after by Middlesbrough Council as at 31 March 2006. It was noted that Government guidance for elected Members on corporate parenting identified the need for Members to receive regular statistical updates on the number of children being looked after by the authority.

Statistics illustrating the placements of children looked after in Middlesbrough were given for March 2005 and March 2006. It was noted that the number of children looked after in Middlesbrough as a proportion of the population continued to be above the national average.

A presentation was then given, including graphical representations and explanations of the following:

- The total number of children looked after in Middlesbrough from 1996 to 2006
- The ages of children looked after
- The ethnic origins of children looked after
- Children who had been in more than three placements
- Children who had been adopted
- Children who had been looked after for over four years
- The education, training and employment of children looked after
- The health of children looked after
- The proportion of children looked after with final warnings or convictions

It was acknowledged that the data presented was not easy to interpret and in future additional information could be provided to make it clearer. Clarification was also given on the figures relating to children in out of area placements, the proportion of young people not in education, training or employment and the proportion of children looked after with final warnings or convictions.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the contents of the report.

SUPPORTED LODGINGS PROGRESS REPORT

The Leaving Care Team Manager presented a report to update Members on the progress of the Supported Lodgings Scheme. The Supported Lodgings Policy had been discussed by the Corporate Parenting Board in April 2005 and approved by the Executive in May 2005. The progress to date was outlined in Appendix A of the report. The scheme enabled young people to remain in a stable, supported placement until the individual was ready to live independently.

It was reported that six Foster Care placements had been converted to Supported Lodgings placements as the young people concerned had become 18 years of age. It was possible that a further six Foster Care transitions would be completed within the next 12 months.

It was stated that adverts had been placed in local press, which had generated 5 expressions of interest. Following these expressions of interest, one applicant had undergone the training and assessment procedure and had been accepted by the Family Placement Panel on 27 June 2006. A young person had since been identified for placement. Two applicants had completed their training and were currently undergoing assessment and two further applications had only recently been submitted. It was intended that the Supported Lodgings Scheme would be one of a range of resources for the Leaving Care Team.

Members were informed that a funding bid submitted to Supporting People had been successful. This would cover support and management costs for eight places on the scheme. When the contract with Supporting People was finalised, the grant would be allocated to the Leaving Care Team budget. In addition to this a Housing Benefit claim was made for any young person who might qualify and any payments were sent to the Leaving Care Team towards the cost of the placement.

A short presentation was given, illustrating young people's views on housing and becoming independent. The information had been gathered as part of a wider research project undertaken with children looked after. It was hoped that a video about housing would also be developed in due course.

Representatives from the Strategic Housing Team were present at the meeting to provide information relating to housing for care leavers. The Board was informed that the Children and Young People Strategic Partnership had launched a multi agency group to address housing issues for young people with Registered Social Landlords. It was acknowledged however, that the Council's corporate parenting responsibility needed to be prioritised and robustly addressed.

There was an opportunity for discussion and the following points were raised.

- It was felt that a strategic approach to working with Registered Social Landlords needed to be taken.
- The Supported Lodgings Scheme was a good way to assist individuals in moving forward.
- It was not anticipated that the Supported Lodgings Scheme would impact heavily on the number of Foster Care placements available. In many cases, Foster Carers had been providing this kind of support informally and the scheme would recognise the work they did.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information on the progress of the Supported Lodgings Scheme.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS OF URGENCY

In Accordance with Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Chair agreed to consider the following Item on the grounds of urgency in order to deal with the matter expeditiously.

Following concerns from a local resident regarding a residential home for children looked after raised with a Member of the Board, it was agreed that the concerns raised would be discussed with the appropriate member of staff after the meeting.

NOTED