

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**  
**7<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL**  
**FOSTERING SERVICE – ANNUAL**  
**REPORT FOR 2005-6**

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SERVICES**

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CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

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**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 2005-6, 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 2005-6, activity and developments during 2006-7, and developments and issues for 2006-7.
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 the Children Families and Learning Department's 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 2005-6

Issued in August 2006 by  
Middlesbrough Fostering Service  
Middlesbrough Teaching & Learning Centre  
Cargo Fleet Lane  
Middlesbrough TS3 8PB

  
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 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
- A peer mentoring scheme, provided by foster carers who had had relevant training

##### **(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
- ◆ 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 2005/6

There are 14 staff employed by Middlesbrough Council for the purpose of the Fostering Service, 6 in the Fostering Team, 5 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 fully staffed from May to October 2005 when the Permanence Team Manager became ill, leading to her being absent on a long term basis. The Fostering Team Manager managed both the Fostering and Permanence teams from October 2005 to June 2006 and a social worker from the Fostering Team was appointed in January 2006, on a temporary basis, as a Senior Practitioner across the Service. The latter appointment meant that a social work post was actually deleted from the Fostering Service and a necessary reduction in the Senior Practitioner's case load (to permit him to progress development activities) meant that the case loads of the remaining four Fostering Team Social Workers increased. In addition to this, a decision was made in April 2006 to transfer the Supervising responsibility for all Foster Carers from the Permanence Team to the Fostering Team. The purpose of this was to create space within that team to undertake work in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

In June 2006 a part time Social Worker based in the Permanence team retired on the grounds of ill health and, that same month, another worker from within that team was (temporarily) appointed to cover the work of the Permanence Team Manager. There were then, effectively, two and a half Social Worker posts vacant across the service but, due to the sickness monitoring process, it has not been possible to appoint to one of the posts and the other one and a half need further discussion. The part-time Support Worker has been on long term sick leave from 5<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

Details of the staff in post on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2006 are as follows:

Name	Job title	Qualifications	Experience
Jane Wilson	Team Manager, Fostering Team	CSS – 1987 CMS – 2001	With Social Services since 1984. With Fostering Service since 1996.
Tony Kerr	Temporary Senior practitioner, Family Placement Service	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.

Lesley Farquharson	Social Worker, Fostering Team	DipSW – 1994	With Social Services since 1994. With Fostering Service since 2005.
Liz Watson	Team Manager, Permanence Team  (Absent on long term sick leave)	CQSW – 1976 B.T.E.C Management Studies – 2002	With Social Services since 1974. With Fostering Service since 1996
Karen Curran	Temporary Team Manager, 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 Virth	Social Worker, Permanence Team	DipSW – 1999	With Social Services since 1993. With the Fostering Service since 2005.
Judy Yelder	Family Placement Development Officer	CQSW – 1976 Certificate in Training & Development – 1992 B.T.E.C Management Studies – 2005	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.
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## 6. Activity and developments during 2005/6

- (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	136
Number of requests for initial visits	37
Number of applications	9
Number of foster carers approved	5
Number of foster carers de-registered	11
Total number of approved foster carers on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2006	100
Number of children in foster care on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2006	143
Number of children whose long-term fostering plans were approved	8
Number of children matched with long-term foster carers	18

- (b) The Fostering Service provides a programme of post-approval training for registered foster carers and during 2005/6, the topics for the training sessions were:

- ◆ Mental Health – Children and their families – April 2005
- ◆ Moving On – June 2005
- ◆ Mentoring – July 2005
- ◆ Drug Awareness and local services – September 2005
- ◆ Caring for emotionally damaged children – ('specialist' course run over 6 weeks) – September 2005
- ◆ Communication and Play - December 2005
- ◆ Child Protection – March 2006

These training sessions are well supported by foster carers and, during the year, 94 individual foster carers attended the sessions, giving a total of 288 course attendances. The CSCI inspection of the Fostering Service in December 2005 highlighted that "it (the service) is very good at checking out and training new Foster Carers".

In addition to the above programme, foster carers also have opportunities to attend courses which are part of Middlesbrough Children, Families and Learning 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 4th annual inspection of Middlesbrough Fostering Service in December 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. As with previous inspections, the findings of the Inspection were very positive. Their overall conclusion was that 'Middlesbrough Fostering Service does a good job at helping children live good lives with Foster carers and is well run'. Some problems were identified in relation to the 'Shared Care' element of the service, which have since been addressed.
- (d) The recruitment and retention of foster carers has remained a challenge in 2005/6. There has, as last year, been a further net decrease in the number of registered foster carers. The review of the recruitment strategy was completed in April 2005 and concluded that there is no quick solution to the recruitment problems. There are some methods of recruitment, particularly internet publicity, which are proving to be very effective and will be developed further. However 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. It was agreed that the issue of payments and conditions of service for foster carers needed further consideration and this was done by means of a Working Party consisting of staff and foster carers from the Fostering Service.
- (e) Connected with the recruitment issue is the ongoing challenge of providing placements for children over the age of 11 years. The contract with SWIIS as our preferred provider is still in place and the Council now has a Contracts Manager in post whose work includes 'mapping' services for children looked after and developing a specific, Middlesbrough, contract for use when commissioning any other Independent Fostering Agency placement. The existing contracts (eg with NCH and SWIIS) will be scrutinised and monitored by the Contracts Manager to ensure that our children are receiving a good and 'best value' service.
- (f) In summary, 2005/6 was again a challenging year for the Fostering Service as its resource base of registered foster carers decreased whilst the numbers of children becoming looked after increased – albeit slightly.

## **7. Developments and issues for 2006/7**

- (a) From October 2005 the Fostering Service was under staffed, having been fully staffed for only a four-month period prior to this. The focus of the service has therefore been to maintain safe, high quality placements for children and to continue to offer plenty of training and support to existing carers, in a bid to value and therefore retain them. The plans to pilot a Support Foster Care Scheme and the work in respect of Treatment Foster Care have not progressed beyond the research stage, due to the potential high start-up costs of both - and the Council's limited budget. Each would require additional staffing to ensure their success.

- (b) Recruitment of new foster carers will remain a priority and our approach of a 'drip-feed' of various types of publicity and information will continue. The biggest growth area, in terms of effectiveness, is internet publicity and plans are being developed to increase our use of this method, including expanding the amount of information available from the Council's website.
- (c) The outcome of the Working Party review of Foster Care payments, which included those made to Middlesbrough carers, those to carers of Independent Fostering Agencies and those to Carers in neighbouring Authorities, showed that Middlesbrough does not offer comparable or competitive allowances. A 'mapping' exercise was then undertaken, the aim of which was to illustrate how the Council may be able to deliver children's services differently and/or more cost effectively. This may lead to a return to the original proposal of the Foster Carer and Social Work led Working Party i.e. a streamlining of the Foster Care payments system and an increase in payments to carers.
- (d) After initial doubts as to the effectiveness of the recruitment campaign undertaken by the Sahara project, whose purpose is to assist us in recruiting black and minority ethnic carers, there has been a recent significant increase in enquiries from that community. The Fostering Team hopes to run its second Foster Care preparation group of the year in autumn 2006, which will include those enquirers.
- (e) After approximately twelve months of not being able to run a Foster Care preparation group, in June 2006 a group of eight prospective foster care resources successfully completed a course. Their assessments are to commence in September and, if positive, they will be approved as Foster Carers by April 2007.
- (f) The Foster Care Mentoring scheme has been very successful and the inspection of December 2005 quotes carers as saying that it "is a good idea and helps them". The mentor training will run again in October 2006 and will give more approved carers the opportunity to be involved in the recruitment and support of new applicants.
- (g) The Senior Practitioner for the Fostering Service has implemented new developments which have improved various aspects of the service, chiefly; planning for children and the transparency of allowance systems to adopters and other carers. The next year will see an embedding of both processes; the Permanence Planning process, which has effectively ceased 'drift' for children looked after and the monitoring and review system for all long-standing allowances. The latter will save the Council considerable sums of money and assist our budget projections for adoption support.
- (h) The post of Senior Practitioner will become permanent by autumn 2006.

Judy Yelder  
Family Placement Development Officer  
August 2006

Jane Wilson  
Fostering Team Manager