

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
23 November 2006**

**EVERY CHILD MATTERS: STAY SAFE
AGENDA**

**JAN BRUNTON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
PAUL THOMPSON – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR
EDUCATION & SKILLS**

**TERRY REDMAYNE – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Corporate Parenting Board an update on the key issues affecting children looked after under the stay safe agenda.

BACKGROUND

2. In September 2005, the Service Review and Development Manager and the Service Manager, Children Looked After gave a presentation to Corporate Parenting Board on the Stay Safe agenda as it affects children looked after.
3. Every Child Matters sets the Stay Safe Agenda as follows:
Children and Young People are:
 - ◆ Safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation
 - ◆ Safe from accidental injury and death
 - ◆ Safe from bullying and discrimination

- ◆ Safe from crime and anti social behaviour in and out of school
 - ◆ Have security, stability and are cared for
4. It is the duty of the Council as corporate parents to ensure that children looked after by Middlesbrough Council are safe, well cared for and protected from the issues outlined above.

CURRENT SITUATION

5. Services for children in public care are highly regulated. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) inspects council's services for children and young people and registers and regulates all children's homes, foster care and adoption services. Since September 2005, the Council's fostering service has been inspected on two occasions and the adoption service on one occasion. The most recent inspections took place in October 06 and the reports for both the fostering and adoption service are awaited. In December 2005, the fostering inspection found as follows in relation the Stay Safe outcome:

'Middlesbrough Council's fostering service provides competent, well trained and well supported foster carers who meet children's needs very well and works hard to ensure that children are safe. Management arrangements for the shared care foster service however have not been effective enough in these areas and potentially places children at risk. The service is very thorough in its assessment and approval process to ensure that carers are suitable to work with children. The fostering panel is effective and makes good quality decisions about the approval of foster carers to promote and safeguard children's welfare. The organisation's recruitment procedure is generally robust enough to check on the background and suitability of the service's staff members'

Since this time, the shared care foster service has become the full responsibility of Redcar and Cleveland Council to address the concerns raised through the inspection and any placements required are commissioned by Middlesbrough Council.

6. Verbal feedback from the most recent fostering inspection has been positive and the feedback from the adoption inspection is to take place on 23rd November. The outcome of reports from both inspections will be shared with Corporate Parenting Board once they become available.
7. Where Middlesbrough Council commission placements for children looked after, CSCI Inspection reports are requested to ensure the safety of the provider and quality and standards of services provided. In the case of Five Rivers, who are commissioned to provide residential child care services to the Council, Regulation 33 reports on all the homes are received by the Head of Service and Service Manager on a monthly basis. These reports are also a standing agenda item on the Partnership Board meeting.
8. Middlesbrough Council continue to contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and Spurgeons Independent Visitors Scheme to

provide additional services to children looked after. NYAS deliver advocacy and support to all children looked after, should they require this service. Social workers are proactive in encouraging children to access NYAS should they feel this service would assist the child or young person. The Independent Visitors scheme is available to children who have very little or no contact with their birth family. This is a befriending service and provides children with a trusted adult with whom they can spend time and share any issues they may wish to outside of the professional arena. Proposals within the Green paper, Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care, include the strengthening of this role to become Independent Advocates for children and young people.

9. The Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) Regulations 2004 require each responsible authority to appoint an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). This recently strengthened role of the IRO aims to improve safeguards for children by ensuring effective care planning and implementation, and monitoring outcomes. IROs can also ensure the child's access to advocacy services and the complaints procedure. Again, the Green Paper is seeking views on achieving a greater degree of independence including the option of IROs being employed by an independent agency instead of the local authority. Performance Indicators relating to looked after reviews are improving with a strong push on reviews being held within timescales and children's wishes and views being provided to the meeting.
10. Placement stability and security continues to form a key part of the Performance Indicator framework. The table below sets out key indicators in relation to placement stability and our performance over the past 3 years.

INDICATOR	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
A1 The percentage CLA with three or more placements during the year	12.1%	10.1%	10%
D35 The percentage CLA looked after continuously for at least 4 years who are currently in foster placement where they have spent at least two years Replaced by D78 (2005/06) The percentage of children continuously looked after for 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption	63%	55%	65%
C23 The number of children adopted during the year as a percentage of the number of CLA who had been looked after for 6 months or more.	8.4%	14.9%	11.1%

Placement stability remains steady or has shown improvement. The council continues to be a good performing authority in relation to these indicators.

11. Placement stability remains a key focus of the work of the looked after service. Current developments underway include:
 - ◆ Review of foster care payments to ensure recruitment and retention of carers
 - ◆ Development of a support foster care scheme to maintain placements for children looked after and contribute to the preventative services
 - ◆ Banded payments scheme, which is in line with proposals contained in the Green paper
 - ◆ Consider introducing a mechanism to look at placements in crisis
12. To ensure children looked after are safe and protected, the Government has just issued a new edition of 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'. Over the coming year, new guidance from this inter agency document will be embedded into procedures and practice within Middlesbrough. In addition to this, the Council has a number of policies, procedures and processes for children looked after to address risk factors associated with their own behaviour or that of others, these include:
 - ◆ Thresholds and procedures for child protection
 - ◆ Procedures for allegations against staff and carers
 - ◆ Whistleblowing policy
 - ◆ Guidance on managing bullying and discrimination in the Foster Carers Handbook
 - ◆ Health and safety regulations and assessments
 - ◆ Missing from Placement Procedures
 - ◆ Information Sharing and Joint Working Protocol with the Youth Offending Service
 - ◆ Bullying policies and procedures for residential care.
13. Children are seen regularly by their social workers and in the near future, a piece of work is to be undertaken to look at our visiting frequency policy to establish whether this is appropriate and in accordance with children's wishes.
14. The protection and safety of children looked after remains a high focus for the looked after service and the independent reviewing unit. These children remain our priority and developments within the services are implemented with their needs and best interest in mind.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

15. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. This information will be of interest to all Ward Councillors.

RECOMMENDATION

16. That the Corporate Parenting Board advises the Executive to:
 - a) Note the information relating to the stay safe agenda for children looked after
 - b) Endorse the continued work of Middlesbrough Council with children looked after ensuring their safety and protection

REASONS

6. It is important that elected members are aware and approve of this aspect of Children, Families and Learning work in order that they can effectively fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents to children looked after and those receiving Leaving Care Services.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

AUTHOR: Sally Robinson, Service Manager Children Looked After
Ann Smith, Service Review and Development Manager
TEL NO: 01642 201941

*Address: Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre, Tranmere Ave,
Middlesbrough TS3 8BP
Website: <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk>*