

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

21st June 2007

<p>CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REPORT ON ACTIVITY: MAY 2006 – APRIL 2007</p>

**BRENDA THOMPSON - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LEARNING**

**JAN DOUGLAS – INTERIM 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 2006/2007 (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 2006-2007

3. The Corporate Parenting Board followed the approach developed in 2005-2006 whereby five meetings considered the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes as they relate to children looked after. Members were provided with an update on each outcome. 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. One young person 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 reports submitted 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, and reports to, the Corporate Parenting Board June 2006 – April 2007

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Corporate Parenting Board

Report on Activity

May 2006 to April 2007

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

**PAUL THOMPSON – EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR EDUCATION
& SKILLS**

**TERRY REDMAYNE - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**



1. Introduction

This report sets out the origins and development of the Corporate Parenting Board and the work undertaken by the Board during the past year. The Board 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 2006-2007).

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. Summary of Activity

There were seven meetings of the Board between June 2006 and March 2007. Members considered reports and information provided by Children, Families and Learning, the Primary Care Trust, Sport & Leisure and Strategic Housing (see Appendix C for more details). It should be noted that one meeting of the Board was inquorate and no reports could be considered.

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

Approval of:

- Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme for 2006-2007
- Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide for the Adoption Service
- Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide for the Fostering Service
- Membership of the Family Placement Panel

Concerns about:

- Providing children and young people with support 'out of hours'
- Broadening the range of work experience placements for young people leaving care
- Fostering allowances and competition from independent fostering agencies
- Member involvement in Regulation 33 visits to children's homes
- Education of children looked after

Recognition of:

- The need for Members to take responsibility, as corporate parents, for meeting the housing needs of care leavers.
- The importance of developing strong protocols with housing providers.
- The importance of involving young people in developing possible solutions to housing issues.
- The hard work and commitment of a wide range of officers and carers in supporting children looked after and care leavers.

Only one young person attended two meetings during the year. However, the views of children and young people were included within the reports submitted 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 Discussed by the Board

Corporate Parenting

An overarching theme during the year has been the need to ensure that corporate parenting is uppermost in the minds of elected Members and senior managers when considering the use of Council resources. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board were proactive in ensuring that issues were regularly discussed by the Executive, individually and collectively. Officers have also made presentations to some groups of senior managers. Further activity is planned to raise awareness and secure commitment to meeting the needs of children and young people for whom the authority has parental responsibility.

The numbers of children looked after remained fairly constant during the year, being 240 at 31st March 2006 and 243 at 31st March 2007. The key issues that lead to children becoming looked after are parental drug misuse, domestic violence and mental health problems. Work to address these issues has been progressed on a partnership basis but there is unlikely to be a reduction in the numbers of children becoming looked after in the near future.

A safe, supportive and stable living environment

This consistently emerges as the most significant factor in achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people. Having a good home impacts on a child's mental health, success in education and their ability to become successful and independent adults. A continuing concern in this respect is the recruitment of foster carers in the face of competition from independent fostering agencies. The work of the Family Placement Panel is a key component of this process and Members feel that it is the most important, demanding and complex role in the Council.

The Council has a legal duty to provide a suitable living environment for young people looked after by the authority who are moving into independence. Changes in the provision of housing locally has increased the need to develop robust protocols and partnership arrangements with housing providers. A supported lodgings scheme has been developed which is meeting the needs of some young people but further resources need to be developed so that the Council can fulfil its responsibilities in this respect.

Education and employment

Despite clear improvements in outcomes, the educational attainment of children in care remains low and the pace of change means that the gap between those in care and all other children has in fact widened. Children in care are under performing significantly compared to their peers at all key stages of the education system.

Children and young people have told the Corporate Parenting Board that:

- they recognised the importance of receiving a good education, understanding the difference it makes to their future life chances;
- being in care can make young people susceptible to being bullied;

- school is important not just for getting good exam results, but also for making friends.

The authority was able to access additional funding from the national 'What Makes the Difference' Project. This achieved significant improvements in outcomes for children and young people and the Board will consider the final evaluation of the project in the forthcoming year.

'What Makes the Difference' also provided the focus for the development of an employability scheme for young people leaving care. This scheme targeted young people who were not engaged in education, training or employment and aimed to equip them with the skills needed to succeed in a working environment. A range of work experiences was developed within and beyond the Council and 8 young people successfully completed work placements during the year. Feedback was very positive:

- "The Employability Scheme has changed my life for the better. I really enjoy my new job and I wish to thank the Pathways Team and the MTLC for making this possible."
- "The support I received helped me a lot and I managed to complete something for the first time."

Building confidence and self-esteem

A Sports Development Officer worked with children and young people to build positive relationships. This enabled children and young people to take part in activities that they had never dreamt of attempting and, for many, they had to overcome personal apprehension and fears. An inability to swim had prevented some young people from participating in some of the activities. A free swim card has now been introduced to encourage children to learn to swim.

The Youth Service provided a special youth club session for children looked after. This has been very successful in building positive relationships that have enabled young people to develop their personal social skills and to gain accreditation for the work that they have done. It has also led to some young people becoming active in the operation of the Youth Opportunities Fund and the Youth Council. Others have moved into mainstream youth service activities.

5. Conclusion

During 2006-2007, the Corporate Parenting Board considered a wide range of issues and identified a number of areas of concern. Providing children with a good home and enabling them to become successful and independent adults is at the heart of being a good corporate parent. The Board will continue to press for council-wide recognition of this responsibility, it will monitor progress on these issues and continue to seek further improvements in outcomes for the children and young people in the Council's care.

Sue Little
Children's Participation Officer

June 2007

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 (2006 - 2007)

Councillor J Brunton	Chair
Councillor P Thompson	Vice-Chair
Councillor R Brady	Deputy Mayor
Councillor D Davison	
Councillor J Jones	
Councillor J McPartland	
Councillor BE Taylor	
Councillor J Taylor	
Councillor B Thompson	Executive Member Social Care and Health
Councillor A E Ward	
Observers:	
Thomas Tolmie	Former Care Leaver
Brian Simpson	Foster Carer
Chris Nugent	Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust
Steve Percival	National Youth Advocacy Service

The Board has places for up to 6 young people to attend.

APPENDIX C

Reports/presentations to the Corporate Parenting Board June 2006 to March 2007

- Corporate Parenting Overview
- Report on Activity May 2005 – April 2006
- Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme

- Update reports on the Every Child Matters outcomes:
 - Stay Safe Agenda
 - Enjoy and Achieve – Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council
 - Be Healthy Update
 - Achieve Economic Well-being - Update
- Every Child Matters – What Next?
- Green Paper on Looked After Children
- Care Matters Consultation

- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service - Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide 2006/07
- Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service – Annual Report 2005/06
- Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service - Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide 2006/07
- Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service – Annual Report 2005/06
- Fostering Service Inspection
- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel Activity Report for October 2005 – March 2006
- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel – Activity Report for April to October 2006
- Membership of the Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel

- Summary of Rota Visits and Regulation 33 Reports
- Children Missing from Placement – Update Report
- Children Looked After Statistical Update

- Leaving Care Service – Annual Report 2006
- Supported Lodgings Progress Report
- Housing Issues for Care Leavers
- Employability Project

- Sport & Leisure Involvement with Children Looked After