

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

20TH SEPTEMBER 2007

**USAGE OF NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY
SERVICE - 2006-2007**

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

**JAN DOUGLAS – INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To inform the Corporate Parenting Board of the use made by children and young people of the advocacy services provided under contract by the National Youth Advocacy Service.

BACKGROUND

2. The Children, Families & Learning Department has a Policy on Advocacy for Children, Young People and their Families that was approved by the Executive in February 2005. This policy sets out a clear commitment to supporting access to advocacy services and enables the authority to comply with statutory requirements regarding access to advocacy for children and young people making representations to the department.
3. Since September 2000, the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) has been contracted to provide advocacy services to children looked after and children in need in line with national and local standards (see Appendix 1). The service is provided to children and young people across Teesside & Darlington under a joint arrangement between the five local authorities. NYAS is an independent national organisation, which operates a web site, a freephone help line and provides confidential legal advice and representation. NYAS also operates a text service and an on-line youth club, which is staffed by advisers and used by some young people to refer themselves for an advocacy service. NYAS

advocates arrange contact with service users at times that are suitable to the young person. Each young person contacting NYAS automatically has direct access to their legal team for information, advice and representation should this prove to be an appropriate intervention. NYAS has been awarded the *Community Legal Service Charter Mark* and also provides a legal service specifically for unaccompanied children who are seeking asylum.

4. Advocates are recruited and supported on a regional basis. All NYAS advocates have successfully completed the residential NYAS Advocacy Training course, which was accredited via the Open College Network in 2005. They provide support over the telephone or by visiting the young person. Advocates help young people by:
 - talking things over with them
 - helping them to sort things out by themselves
 - accompanying them to meetings and/or writing letters for them
 - going to see people on their behalf if asked
 - advising them about the different ways of dealing with their problems and what the consequences might be
5. In relation to complaints, the children's Comments, Compliments and Complaints leaflet includes information about NYAS and other support organisations for young people. In addition, a copy of the NYAS leaflet is sent out with the letter of acknowledgement of receipt of a complaint from any child or young person. Staff also actively offer assistance to enable a child or young person to access an advocate where they are aware that they are making, or are intending to make, a complaint.
6. Information about NYAS is included in the information packs for children and young people that are issued when a child first becomes looked after. NYAS posters are on display in residential children's homes and in relevant offices. Information about complaints and advocacy is given to children and young people at the time of their initial assessment and at subsequent review meetings. Staff are proactive in encouraging and supporting young people to contact an advocate if they wish to do so.

LEVELS OF ACTIVITY

Across Tees Valley

7. During 2006/2007, NYAS received a total of 93 referrals from across the five local authorities. This represents an increase from 60 referrals during 2005/2006. 48 of the 93 referrals were made by young people themselves, 21 were made by social workers and 16 were made by relatives. It is worth noting that NYAS require the person making contact to have the young person's consent before proceeding with a case. 45 of the 48 self-referrals were made by young people using the telephone service. Placement issues were responsible for the most referrals, and these issues varied from perceived ambiguity around when a young person was to move placement to actual placement breakdown. It is interesting to note that there were only two referrals relating to bullying. All contacts were responded to within three working days and contact was

made with the young person in 90 of the allocated cases within 24 hours of receipt of referral. There were three cases where the young person did not respond to repeated attempts at contact.

In Middlesbrough

8. Within Middlesbrough there were 31 referrals, 17 of which were made directly by the child or young person themselves. Eight were made by social workers, four by relatives and two by an Empower Family Worker. The issues raised included:

• Contact with parents	7
• Issues with placement	6
• Transition	3
• Where she/he will live	2
• Issue with children's home	2
• Assessment of needs	2
• Mental health	2
• Education	2
• Appeal against school exclusion	1
• Contact with siblings	1
• Complaint	1
• Children's Rights	1
• Bullying	1

19 of these issues related specifically to aspects of being looked after.

9. The service was used by 18 males and 13 females. The age range included 4 children aged between 9 and 10; 9 young people aged between 13 and 15; and 18 young people aged between 16 and 20 years. The preponderance of older young people fits with national trends (England & Wales), as they become more confident in expressing their wishes & feelings as they get older. Most of the children and young people were living in Middlesbrough but NYAS also supported five young people from Middlesbrough who were living in Darlington, Durham, Prudhoe and Brighton.
10. The majority of the young people were from White British ethnic backgrounds (18 of the 31 cases). NYAS has produced and distributed new multi-lingual leaflets to ensure children and young people from all ethnic backgrounds are aware of the aims and availability of the service. In addition to the multi-lingual leaflets, NYAS has supplied age-related information packs, posters and English-language leaflets. NYAS has also made awareness-raising visits to staff meetings and to residential children's homes.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

11. The National Youth Advocacy Service is under contract to provide advocacy services to children looked after and children in need from within existing budgets. This approach enables the local authority to comply with legal requirements. This report will be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to usage of the National Youth Advocacy Service.

REASONS

13. It is important that Members are aware of the provision made by the local authority to enable children and young people to access advocacy services and the take up of those services. This provision also enables the local authority to comply with its statutory duty to provide advocacy services to children and young people making, or intending to make, a complaint under the Children Act 1989.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- National Youth Advocacy Service Annual Report for the Boroughs of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington, May 2007
- Advocacy for Children, Young People and their Families, Policy & Guidance, January 2005

Author: Sue Little, Children's Participation Officer

Tel No: 01642 728706

Address: PO Box 69, Vancouver House, Gurney Street, Middlesbrough, TS1 1EL

Website: <http://www.middlesbrough.gov.uk>

Appendix 1

National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services

NYAS was a lead agency in developing the framework for the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy, published by the Department of Health in 2002.

Standard 1

Advocacy is led by the views and wishes of children and young people.

Standard 2

Advocacy champions the rights and needs of children and young people.

Standard 3

All advocacy services have clear policies to promote equalities issues and monitor services to ensure that no young person is discriminated against due to age, gender, race, culture, religion, language, disability or sexual orientation.

Standard 4

Advocacy is well-publicised, accessible and easy to use.

Standard 5

Advocacy provides help and advice quickly when it is requested.

Standard 6

Advocacy works exclusively for children and young people.

Standard 7

The advocacy service operates a high level of confidentiality and ensures that children, young people and other agencies are aware of its confidentiality policies.

Standard 8

Advocacy listens to the views and ideas of children and young people in order to improve the service provided.

Standard 9

The advocacy service has an effective and easy to use complaints procedure.

Standard 10

Advocacy is well-managed and gives value for money.