

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

20TH SEPTEMBER 2007

CARE MATTERS: TIME FOR CHANGE

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To advise the Corporate Parenting Board of the key proposals of the White Paper Care Matters: Time for Change. This report will consider the implications of the proposals for practice and delivery of services by the Council to its children looked after.

BACKGROUND

2. Care Matters: Time for Change was published in June 2007 and sets out the steps the government intends to take to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care. The White Paper was developed following extensive consultation and was informed by four working groups established to investigate best practice in supporting those in care.
3. The White Paper recognises that, despite the recent focus on improving services, children looked after have poorer outcomes than their peers and focuses on improvements in the following seven areas:
 - Corporate Parenting
 - Family and Parenting Support
 - Care Placements
 - Education
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Transition to Adulthood
 - The Role of the Practitioner

4. The White Paper concludes with a section on 'next steps' which sets out in some detail the plan for.
 - Strengthening the legislative and regulatory framework.
 - Establishing a national partnership with voluntary and statutory sectors to ensure outcomes are delivered.
 - Developing a detailed implementation guide.
 - Introducing a change fund to support implementation of the White Paper.
 - A new approach to working with the private sector to gather support for looked after children including access to apprenticeship programmes and other routes to employment.
5. The Government is currently supporting or proposing a number of pilot schemes to test out the proposals within the White Paper, for example Virtual Headteachers, Regional Commissioning Units, Independent Social Work Practices and Fostering at aged 18+.
6. The Government has identified £300 million over the next three years to support the implementation of the proposals. It is anticipated that the legislation will be issued in the autumn.
7. The White Paper has to date been well received by all stakeholders.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

8. Children looked after are already a high priority for the Council. In 2004, a Looked After Business Unit was created to bring all services for looked after children under one Service Manager and to develop a social work team to support children who are looked after on a long-term basis. This restructure has proved very successful as the quality of services has improved significantly and outcomes for children and young people are improving. The Looked After Business Unit produces an annual action plan (attached at Appendix 1) that is implemented and monitored via the Children Looked After Planning and Implementation Group. This is a multi agency planning group of key stakeholders that fulfils the role of Middlesbrough's MALAP (Multi-agency Looked After Partnership).
9. In reviewing the White Paper, there are some areas of practice where Middlesbrough Council already has systems in place. However there are a significant number of proposals which will require action by the Council. The rest of this report reviews the proposals in each chapter of the White Paper and identifies key priorities for action.

CORPORATE PARENTING

"Children in care should be cared about, not just cared for"

10. Corporate parents are expected to provide children looked after with the opportunity to develop secure attachments and build resilience. Placement stability is the fundamental basis upon which good outcomes for children are achieved. During 2007/08, the looked after unit will develop a multi agency

“Placements in Crisis” Panel to deliver multi agency intensive packages of support to prevent placement breakdown.

11. The White Paper emphasises the clear, statutory responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) and the Lead Member for improving corporate parenting. In Middlesbrough, the DCS and Lead Member are kept fully briefed on the issues for children looked after by the Council. The Corporate Parenting Board advises the Executive on all matters regarding children looked after. The Executive retains collective responsibility for decision-making to ensure that the Council discharges its duties to children looked after. New training packages on corporate parenting will be distributed.
12. The White Paper expects every Local Authority to put in place arrangements for a ‘Children in Care’ Council with direct links to the DCS and Lead Member, and to set out a ‘Pledge’ to children in care. The existing Corporate Parenting Policy covers most aspects of the proposed contents of the Pledge and is currently being revised. Work has started with children and young people to consider the development of a ‘Children in Care’ Council.

FAMILY AND PARENTING SUPPORT

“Wherever possible we should support children within their own families”

13. The White Paper stresses the need to develop and improve early intervention and prevention services to reduce the number of children becoming looked after. The current restructure for Children, Families & Learning and Family Services needs to take account of these priorities. The Government intends to make a small change fund available in 2007/08 for authorities that have audited their systems and identified priorities for improvement. Support will be offered to innovative proposals that are evidence based and linked to improved outcomes.
14. The White Paper advocates the use of Family Group Conferencing as a way of engaging the support of the wider family for parents and reducing the need for a child to enter care. This practice has been in place for several years in Middlesbrough, delivered by Empower, an independent organisation.
15. The family should also be regarded as the first option when seeking placements for children who cannot live with their parents. In Middlesbrough, this option is thoroughly explored before seeking a foster or residential placement for the child and there are a number of children in ‘family network care’ placements. The current review of fostering payment structures has identified the need to establish whether placement opportunities are being maximised within the child’s extended family. The government intends to make legislative change in relation to Residence Orders and the financial effect on the authority will need to be assessed.
16. Young people who become looked after as teenagers present a challenge for the Council. Services to meet their needs and placement options are often limited; it is usually necessary to commission placements for this group. The Government intends to fund the development of Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) as an effective specialist intervention for older children and young people on the edge of care. It

is intended that pilots will begin in Spring 2008 and it may be appropriate for the Council to consider bidding to be a pilot authority.

17. The Government intends to encourage local authorities to commission support care as part of their provision for children in need. It intends to provide funding to deliver a step change in the provision of short breaks for children with disabilities to support families and reduce stress. It will also review the circumstances around these children being deemed as looked after. Middlesbrough Family Services participated in a pilot project with Fostering Network but budget pressures meant the authority has not been able to fully explore or implement this popular and cost effective model. Gleneagles Resource Centre currently provides short break care for children with disabilities and has been judged as 'outstanding' by Ofsted.

CARE PLACEMENTS

"A successful stable placement is central to supporting the needs of children in care"

18. Placement stability is critical to achieving better outcomes for children looked after. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering has developed training materials for local authorities to audit their own performance and support them in taking action to improve the stability of particular groups of children they look after. These materials are to be made available to local authorities and to Government Offices later in 2007. This should be a useful tool for the Council to establish a baseline around current practice. Middlesbrough's performance in this area falls within the 'good' range but further improvement should be pursued.
19. The Government intends to introduce a statutory duty to secure a sufficient and diverse provision of quality placements in the local authority area. The White Paper identifies the need to improve local authority commissioning of placements by piloting Regional Commissioning Units. Middlesbrough is a member of the North East Regional Commissioning Unit and contributes to its work. The Unit aims to attract more providers to the region to enhance the range of services and placement options available and to maintain more children local to their home authority. The recent decision to participate in the Cost Calculator project will assist the Council in establishing the costs of care and aggregating information about the local population of looked after children.
20. The arrangements for payments to foster carers are currently under review. This work needs to take into account the recommendations of the White Paper. Foster carers need to be provided with the appropriate skills, training and support and be paid accordingly for the services they provide. The Government intends to require all fostering services to publish details of their payment structures for foster carers.
21. Children placed outside of their local authority boundaries are identified as being particularly vulnerable to poor outcomes as they often have difficulty in accessing local services such as education or CAMHS. The Government intends to strengthen the statutory framework so that local authorities may not place a child out of its area unless it is satisfied that such a placement is in the child's best interests. The White Paper also notes these children should be visited regularly

and new regulations will be introduced. Middlesbrough Council standards for visiting children looked after is on a minimum monthly basis regardless of where the child is placed. However the Council may need to review ways in which children can maintain contact with their social workers in between visits.

22. Approximately 20% of children looked after by the Council are placed outside of the Council boundaries. In most instances this relates to a 'matched' placement for children in long term foster care or commissioned specialist service not available locally which is required by the child. Every effort is made to maintain children locally but the size of the authority and range of provision on occasions means this is not possible.
23. The White Paper raises the issue of children missing from placement and the need for robust arrangements in monitoring and responding to this issue. The Corporate Parenting Board receives twice yearly reports on child missing from placement. The procedures for children missing from placement developed jointly with the Police and endorsed by the LSCB are currently under review and revised procedures will be available later this year.
24. Revised National Minimum Standards for fostering, children's homes and adoption will be issued in 2009 reflecting the vision and requirements of the White Paper. Middlesbrough Council residential care services are delivered through partnership arrangements with Five Rivers and the most recent inspections of fostering and adoption services have deemed these services as 'good'.

DELIVERING A FIRST CLASS EDUCATION

"A quality education provides the foundation for transforming the lives of children in care"

25. In Middlesbrough the education of looked after children remains a key challenge and an area where performance needs to be improved. There is an education looked after team but this resource is limited given the scale of need and challenges it faces. Recent joint work undertaken across service areas has improved outcomes but significantly more needs to be done.
26. The Government intends to introduce an expectation in care planning arrangements that, except where it is demonstrated that it is not in the child's best interests, the social worker will work with the carer and local authority to arrange high quality early years education as part of the child's care plan. Middlesbrough should not experience any significant difficulty in complying with this expectation. Work is currently underway within the fostering service to strengthen links with Sure Start and the vast majority of children looked after aged 3-5 access foundation stage education.
27. The White Paper states the intention to introduce a statutory requirement that local authorities ensure that a child's education is not disrupted as a result of care planning decisions, including a specific requirement that children in care must not move schools in Years 10 and 11 except in exceptional circumstances. In Middlesbrough, the aim is to ensure continuity of education and make planned arrangements for any change of school. This proposal however does have significant resource implications. Social work staff are frequently committed to

school transport arrangements, which impacts on their time and availability to undertake other core social work tasks. In the past year the Pupil Support Service has provided funding to ensure the continuity of education for children looked after in Year 11 who have moved placement and required commissioned transport to their education base.

28. The White Paper proposes that the role of designated teacher will be on a statutory footing, supported by training and statutory guidance. The arrangements for designated teachers are well established in Middlesbrough and comply with the proposals within the White Paper. This requirement will apply to Academies through their funding agreements. The government is currently piloting a 'virtual head teacher role' in 11 Authorities and intends to extend this role to all local authorities.
29. The White Paper proposes the provision of £500 a year for each child in care who is at risk of not achieving expected standards of attainment. This money should be used to provide a wide range of additional activities that support the educational development of the child. In the 2006/07 academic year, Middlesbrough Council participated in the 'What makes the Difference' pilot scheme which provided funding to commission additional services to support the education of looked after children. This pilot was extremely successful and as a result a budget of £50k has been committed by CF&L to continue the provision of this support.
30. The White Paper emphasises the need to improve attendance at school and reduce the need for exclusion. The Council currently commissions Welfare Call to monitor and report on attendance data. This enables any child's absence from school to be quickly identified and responded to by officers. The White Paper proposes to revise statutory guidance on exclusions setting out that children in care must only be excluded as a last resort and that schools, in conjunction with local authorities, should first consider alternative options for supporting the child. Within the Council, the education looked after team work hard with schools to prevent exclusions and make alternative arrangements. Where a child is excluded representation is made on behalf of the child.
31. The White Paper recognises the role of carers in promoting educational outcomes for children and makes recommendations around improving help for carers to support children in their education. Middlesbrough Council has established local performance indicators around this issue, including attendance at parents evening, and has commissioned specific training for carers. This will involve a limited number of carers being trained but the intention is to cascade learning through the service.

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELLBEING

“Good health makes an active and enjoyable life possible as well as underpinning achievement in school and the workplace”

32. The White Paper identifies a wide range of factors that contribute to promoting the health of looked after children and statutory guidance for local authorities and health care bodies will be issued in 2008. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

will be made statutory (subject to Parliamentary approval) and will strengthen the ability to identify and address the health needs of children looked after.

33. The existing guidance, 'Promoting the Health of Looked After Children' is fully implemented within the Council and forms the basis of the health assessment process for looked after children. The Health Assessment Protocol is currently under review through a joint South Tees working group and any changes will take into account proposals contained within the White Paper.
34. The White Paper states the intention to explore the potential benefits of a named health professional. Middlesbrough PCT in 2003 appointed a Named Nurse for children looked after who is co-located with the Pathways (Leaving Care) Team. The proposals around the responsibilities for the named health professional are to a significant extent in line with the work and remit of the named nurse.
35. Improved access to sex and relationship education is to be delivered by those in day to day contact with children and the government intends to provide foster carers with tailored guidance on providing quality sex and relationship education (SRE). This will complement the work of the Named Nurse, foster carer training events and the SRE policy of the Council.
36. The White Paper proposes the provision of funding for schools to give children in care access to 2 hours a week of extended school group activity and two weeks of holiday provision free of charge. Within the Council, a policy is being developed around arrangements for access to positive activities for all children looked after, identifying areas of interest, e.g. sport, music, arts and crafts and actively providing the opportunity for children to pursue these. The Youth Service currently provide a weekly Youth Club for looked after children with additional activities, e.g. residential weekends.
37. The White Paper introduces the expectation that local authorities will make their own leisure provision free for children and young people in care. Statutory guidance will clarify the responsibility of the DCS to ensure children and young people in care participate equally in positive activities along with their peers and that leisure activities are included within the care plan of every child in care. In 2006/07 the Leisure Service successfully bid for a Big Lottery Fund to deliver activities for looked after children. In the current year, young people have applied to the Big Lottery and secured funding for activities during the summer holiday. It is essential that these services and opportunities are mainstreamed; CF&L and Leisure Services are currently exploring options to promote leisure activities for looked after children.

TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

“Too often young people in care move into adult life without being prepared or support. Any good parent will continue to offer care and support to their children well beyond 18 giving them the greatest head start in life they can”.

38. The White Paper sets out proposals for young people leaving care with the intention of:

- Preventing local authorities from discharging young people prematurely from their care placements.
 - Extending the entitlement to the support of a Personal Adviser up to the age of 25 for all care leavers who are in education or wish to return to education.
 - Piloting ways to enable young people to remain in foster care up to the age of 21.
39. The Council's Pathways Team provides a high quality service for young people leaving care. Young people are rarely discharged from care prematurely and are provided support well into adulthood. Currently 95% of care leavers in Middlesbrough are in appropriate accommodation and the Pathways Team has developed a Supported Lodgings Scheme for young people aged 18+. This may often be with their previous foster carer.
40. Young people leaving care in Middlesbrough receive £1,500 setting up home grant which is a favourable amount when compared with other authorities. In addition the Council has recently agreed to contribute to the Child Trust Fund of children looked after to ensure the next generation of care leavers have some financial assets. Provision of a range of appropriate accommodation across the town remains an issue for care leavers and more work needs to be undertaken by the Council, in partnership with housing providers, to ensure young people have access to accommodation provision which meets their needs.

THE ROLE OF THE PRACTITIONER

“The Corporate Parent is embodied for children in care by the professionals they see on a day to day service”

41. Reforms to services for children in care depend on having a highly skilled, committed and stable workforce that delivers individualised support to children and young people. Children want more stability, social workers to listen to them and spend more time with them. The Government intends to work with the Children's Workforce Development Council and General Social Care Council on remodelling the social care workforce to enable social workers to spend more time with children.
42. The Children Looked After Team is dedicated to delivering services to children and young people in care. They do not have competing caseload demands such as child protection or Court work and as such are able to prioritise delivery of services to this group of children. They participate in and undertake training relating to this area of social work practice and the CLA Business Unit manages the delivery of a range of training relevant to looked after children for all social care staff and carers.
43. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is strengthened in the White Paper so that IRO's are expected to fulfil their role with credibility and independence. The Government intends to:
- Require Local Authorities to appoint a named IRO for each child.
 - Require IRO's to spend time individually with each child prior to any review.

- Strengthen guidance on 'significant events' when a review must take place before any proposed change can occur.
 - Update Guidance so that a referral by the IRO to CAFCASS is no longer seen as a last resort.
 - Amend Guidance to specify optimum caseloads for IRO's.
44. Practice within Middlesbrough as far as possible complies with the first two requirements. Currently the Review and Development Unit manages IRO's and Child Protection Conference Chairs with some members of staff covering both roles. The staffing capacity within the Unit is 4.6 staff which limits flexibility for more staff to be dedicated IRO's and have optimum caseloads. The Council will need to review the staffing and structure of the Review and Development Unit in response to the proposals for IRO's.
45. The White Paper proposes to ensure that all children in care who need and want them have access to independent visitors and, when making a complaint, independent advocates. The Council currently contracts with Spurgeons Independent Visitors Scheme and the National Youth Advocacy Service, these services are therefore already in place for looked after children in Middlesbrough.

CONCLUSION

46. The White Paper sets out the Government agenda until 2011 to reform services. It is anticipated the White Paper will become legislation in autumn 2007 and the reform programme will commence immediately.
47. There are some challenges for the Council in achieving these far reaching proposals. However, the service is configured and systems are in place which are already in line with the Government Agenda. Key priorities for action will be:
- Establishing a child in Care Council and developing the Council's 'Pledge'.
 - Strengthening the preventative agenda and responsiveness of services to prevent children entering the looked after system.
 - Improving the quality and choice of placement options.
 - Developing services to improve the education outcomes of CLA.
 - Improving access to leisure activities for CLA.
 - Strengthening the role of the IRO.
48. The programme of change within the Council needs to start at the earliest opportunity with a working group set up and an action plan developed to tackle the key priorities and manage the change process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

49. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
- a). Note the contents of this report.
 - b). Endorse the proposal to establish a work group or series of groups to take the key priorities forward.

REASONS

50. It is important that Members are aware of the implications of implementing the proposals set out in Care Matters: Time for Change. The establishment of a working group will facilitate the production of further reports on the steps being taken to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Care Matters : Time for Change – DfES 2007
- Waterman, C, 2007 Showing we Care Really Matters. MJ Focus 05/07/2007

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APPENDIX 1

PLANNED ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES FOR 2007/08

OUTCOME TO BE ACHIEVED	ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN	TIMESCALE	LEAD OFFICER
BE HEALTHY			
Improve performance against C19 indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit the health assessments completed for CLA • Review and revise Health Assessment Protocol • Quarterly partnership meetings with Designated Doctor and Named Nurse • Ensure accurate data recording within SWIFT • Develop and implement system for tracking health outcomes for CLA 	Sept 07 Dec 07 Quarterly Sept 07 March 08	Judy Yelder Sally Robinson Sally Robinson/Jane Wilson Sally Robinson/Anna Hornsby/Wendy Jones Chris Nugent/Sally Robinson
Review of CAMHS LACS Service and improve working relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contribute to review of CAMHS Service to be completed by external consultant • Members of CAMHS LACS Team and CLA/Pathways Teams to undertake day job swaps to gain experience of service areas 	Dec 07 March 08	Sally Robinson CAMHS LACS/Jill Blackwood/Jane Young
Enhance foster carers, staff and adopters understanding of promoting health of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Roadshow Event 	June 07	Chris Nugent/Jane Wilson

OUTCOME TO BE ACHIEVED	ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN	TIMESCALE	LEAD OFFICER
STAY SAFE			
Improve placement stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop multi agency placements in crisis panel • Increase number of foster carers by 8 to enable better matching • Enhance foster care links with Sure Start • Monitoring and analysis of placement stability indicators • Implementation and development of Permanence Planning Meetings • Develop adoption strategy and action plan 	March 08 March 08 Dec 07 Dec 07 June 07 Sept 07	Sally Robinson Jane Wilson Jane Wilson Judy Yelder Tony Kerr Sally Robinson/Karen Curran
Ensure that only those children who need to be looked after are within the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake audit of CLA placed with parents and make recommendations for action as appropriate • Improve and enhance the role of service provision • Service Managers consider decision to commence care proceedings • Development of services for teenagers 	Dec 07 July 07 July 07 March 08	Sally Robinson Sally Robinson/Paul Jackson As above As above
CLA have regular and appropriate contacts with those responsible for arranging their care and are kept safe from harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaire to be sent to all CLA aged 6+ re visiting arrangements • Audit to be undertaken of visiting frequency • Develop training programme in relation to CLA • Develop overarching bullying policy for CLA 	Sept 07 Sept 07 April 07 Dec 07	Judy Yelder/Sue Little Sally Robinson/Tony Kerr Sally Robinson/CK
Children and young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and implementation of CFL/STYOS 		

OUTCOME TO BE ACHIEVED	ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN	TIMESCALE	LEAD OFFICER
diverted from offending and anti social behaviour	Joint Working and information Sharing Protocol <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of Restorative Justice within children's homes 	April 07 Sept 07	Lisa Ellis/Sally Robinson As above/Carol Perkins
ENJOY AND ACHIEVE			
Improve education performance of children looked after by Middlesbrough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Future role and management of the education looked after team determined • Participation in What Makes a Difference Pilot and evaluation completed • Quarterly audit and monitoring of PEP's • Review education looked after Strategy 	Sept 07 June 07 Quarterly March 08	Dave Johnson/Jenni Cooke Caroline Kendrick Caroline Kendrick Caroline Kendrick
Improved CLA attendance at school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue of education transport to be resolved • Continue contract with Welfare Call • Analysis of circumstances of children missing education and identify themes 	Sept 07 Sept 07 June 07	Sally Robinson Dave Johnson Caroline Kendrick
CLA are encouraged in their education and provided with support assistance and guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roadshow event for foster carers, adopters and staff on education • Participation in regional Aim Higher initiative • Motivational visits to higher education establishments 	March 08 March 08 March 08	Jane Wilson /Caroline Kendrick Caroline Kendrick Caroline Kendrick
CLA receive opportunities to participate in extra curricular opportunities and other pastimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of protocol for promoting interests for CLA • Gather baseline data on CLA involvement in activities and increase number by 15% 	Dec 08 March 08	Jill Blackwood Jill Blackwood
MAKE A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION			
Ensure CLA and those leaving care are not excluded from the	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a Corporate Parenting Conference to 	March 08	Jane Young/Sean Kershaw

OUTCOME TO BE ACHIEVED	ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN	TIMESCALE	LEAD OFFICER
community and provided with opportunities to participate in and contribute to town life	be led by CLA and those leaving care <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold a Children Looked After Conference in Middlesbrough • Arrange further CLA Achievement Day 	March 08 Sept 07	Jane Wilson/Jill Blackwood/Sue Little Sally Robinson/Jane Young
ACHIEVE ECONOMIC WELLBEING			
Improve performance against indicator for young people in education, employment and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early identification of cohort and undertake direct work • Expand role of education looked after team to include those aged 16-19 • Increase joint working with Connexions • Increase joint working with teenage pregnancy and Sure Start plus 	June 07 March 08 Dec 07 Dec 07	Jane Young Sally Robinson/Dave Johnson Jane Young/John Kielty Jane Young
CLA are maintained in looked after setting post 16 and those leaving care have access to range of housing options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit 4 further Supported Lodgings Providers • Participation in Homeless Strategy group • Continued meetings with Homeless and housing providers to advocate housing needs of those leaving care Explore option of joint working with MIN to develop floating Support scheme around Tees Valley accommodation	March 08 Quarterly Quarterly March 08	Jane Young/Denise Poskett As Above As above Jane Young