

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD
6TH MARCH 2008**

**ANNUAL INSPECTION OF MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
FOSTERING SERVICE**

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

**GILL ROLLINGS- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR
CHILDREN, FAMILIES & LEARNING**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to share, with members of the corporate parenting board, the findings and outcome of the most recent Ofsted inspection of Middlesbrough's Fostering Service. The inspection took place from the 8th to the 12th October 2007. The final Inspection report was received on 31st of October 2007 and is attached (Appendix 1).

BACKGROUND

2. This is the sixth inspection of the fostering service which, this year, was undertaken by Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Ofsted is the body now responsible for ensuring that the Council (and other agencies) is compliant with the National Minimum Standards for fostering services and the related Fostering Service Regulations (2002.)

3. The new Ofsted came into being on 1st April 2007 and brings together four formerly separate inspectorates. Its role is to inspect and regulate care for children and young people, and inspect education and training for learners of all ages.
4. Ofsted states that it “wants to raise aspirations and contribute to the long term achievement of ambitious standards and better life chances for service users...their educational, economic and social well-being will, in turn, promote England’s national success.” The inspection, therefore, sought evidence that Middlesbrough’s Fostering Service aspires to this tenet for its own children and their families.
5. There were two inspectors, one ‘lead’ Inspector and a co-worker. The methodology of the inspection, which has previously changed year on year, was relatively unchanged on this occasion in terms of the initial data collection. What did change was the written style and presentation of the final report, for which Ofsted sets very strict parameters. The report is, as a consequence, much more succinct than previous documents, hence it being attached in its entirety. What it might be said to lose is the ‘human impact’ of combining evidence with the expressed views of our children, foster carers and social workers, which have helped to reinforce messages, previously.
6. The overall rating for Middlesbrough from this inspection is, once again, “Good” from the new (under Ofsted) range of “Inadequate”, “Satisfactory”, “Good” or “Excellent”. The rating means that ‘this aspect of provision is strong’ and is supported by evidence provided by the children, their foster carers and social workers, supervising social workers and the Manager of the service.

The service was rated as ‘Good’ in the following areas:

- Helping children to be healthy
- Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe
- Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do
- Helping children make a positive contribution

The service was rated as ‘satisfactory’ in the area of:

- Achieving economic wellbeing

7. The inspector has listed the improvements made by the service since the last inspection as:
 - Staff files
 - Schedule 7 monitoring
 - Reviews
 - Safety checks
 - NVQ3 up take
 - Records of training

- This means that all but two of the good practice recommendations of the 2006 inspections have been met – the exceptions being related to ‘achieving economic well-being’ and expediting kinship care assessments.
8. There were 7 statutory requirements from the 2006 inspection, all of which had been implemented prior to this (2007) inspection.
 9. There was only one statutory requirement arising from the recent inspection, that being:

‘Prepare a written policy on acceptable measures of control, restraint and discipline of children placed with foster parents (Regulation13(1))’
 10. There are 9 good practice recommendations, as follows;
 - Ensure CLA reviews monitor whether or not children have had an annual health check
 - Provide foster carers with periodically updated health and safety training
 - Ensure children’s placements are planned and matched
 - Reduce number of children placed in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and ensure they are placed due to need rather than lack of ‘in-house’ capacity
 - Implement a process to ensure all placements made with IFAs result from a full exchange of relevant information
 - Bring all long term matches of children with carers to Family Placement Panel
 - Pay all carers at the National Minimum Allowance
 - Recruit sufficient carers to meet the needs of children
 - Ensure children’s files contain accurate and comprehensive information
 11. The statutory recommendation has been implemented in that a ‘behaviour management’ policy has been written. Foster carer’s views are being canvassed in relation to the policy and will be given to corporate Parenting Board Members when this report is presented.
 12. The good practice recommendations form the basis of an action plan to be implemented in 2008, across the service. Each team manager within Family Services has received a copy of the inspection report and the associated plan to ensure that there is a ‘team care’ approach to implementing the required changes.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

13. There are financial implications arising from this report in terms of:
 - a) The need to complete the review of foster carer payments and allowances. This work has been outstanding now for three years and several reports have already been presented to Senior Management/ the Directorate in respect of

the need to invest in the service in order to retain and recruit foster carers. There is currently a recruitment drive underway, the strategy for which will be presented to this meeting but the fundamental issue of the payment of fair and 'attractive' allowances is yet to be resolved.

- b) The Fostering Service is to employ one additional social worker and a senior practitioner to the workforce. The cost of this has been agreed and is met from the vacancy which arose when the Adoption Team Manager left the service in September 2007.

There would have been legal implications had the service failed to implement the statutory requirement outlined earlier in this report. As the service covers the whole of Middlesbrough, this report will be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

15. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Fostering Service Annual Inspection Report.

REASON

15. The Council is responsible for providing high quality care for its children.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- *The National Minimum Standards and Fostering Services Regulations 2002*
- *The CSCI report of October 2006*
- *The Ofsted report of 12th October 2007*

AUTHOR: Jane Wilson, Team Manager, Fostering and Adoption

TEL NO: 01642 201960

*Address: Middlesbrough Teaching and Learning Centre, Tranmere Avenue,
Middlesbrough, TS3 8PB*

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