

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

19th June 2008

<p>CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REPORT ON ACTIVITY: MAY 2007 – APRIL 2008</p>

**MIKE CARR - EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN,
FAMILIES & LEARNING**

**GILL ROLLINGS - 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 2007/2008 (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 2007-2008

3. During the year, the Corporate Parenting Board considered the implications for Middlesbrough Council of the Government White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change'. Members were provided with information on various elements of the White Paper. 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. During the year, one former care leaver attended two meetings of the Board. In addition, the views of children and young people were included in a number of the reports submitted to the Board.

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 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.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
Minutes of, and reports to, the Corporate Parenting Board June 2007 – April 2008

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Corporate Parenting Board

Report on Activity

May 2007 to April 2008

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

**GILL ROLLINGS - 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 2007-2008).

The Cabinet (13/2/2001) also approved the first draft of the ‘Corporate Parenting Policy and Strategy’, which included 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

This document was revised and updated in January 2008 to reflect changes in legislation, guidance and performance indicators. 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 eight meetings of the Board between June 2007 and April 2008. Members considered reports and information provided by services within the Children, Families and Learning Department, the Primary Care Trust, the Five Rivers Project, South Tees Youth Offending Service, the Sport & Leisure Service and the Strategic Housing Service (see Appendix C for more details).

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

Approval of:

- Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme for 2007-2008
- An annual contribution to the Child Trust Funds of children looked after, who meet the eligibility criteria. The amount to be £50 per year initially.
- Policy and practice guidance for staff on the Child Trust Funds of children looked after.
- Issues relating to the provision of suitable housing for young people leaving care being considered in greater detail.
- Membership of the Family Placement Panel
- Adoption Service Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2007/08
- Fostering Service Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2007/08
- The active support of all elected Members for the foster carer recruitment campaign

Concerns about:

- The shortage of foster carers, the lack of choice of placement, the need to recruit and retain foster carers as a precious resource whose contribution is greatly appreciated.
- Middlesbrough's payments to foster carers being rated 8th of the twelve local authorities in the north-east region.
- The education of children looked after, including issues relating to exclusion and support for attendance at college
- The effect of the decline in the number of NHS dentists in relation to the authority having to pay for private dental care, particularly where children are based outside Middlesbrough.
- Appropriate housing solutions for care leavers.
- The frequency of social work visits to children looked after.

Recognition for or endorsement of:

- The hard work of the children and young people who made the Education DVD and the 'Home from Home' DVD, both of which were really, really good and very moving.
- The hard work and commitment of a wide range of officers and carers in supporting children looked after and care leavers.
- The need for Members to take responsibility, as corporate parents, for meeting the housing needs of care leavers. This includes developing strong protocols with housing providers and involving young people in developing possible solutions to housing issues.
- The effect that competition from Independent Fostering Agencies has on the recruitment of foster carers to the Council's Fostering Service.
- The time, commitment and emotional resilience required of Members of the Family Placement Panel and the importance of the panel in changing children's lives for the better.
- The need, as good corporate parents, to develop appropriate systems to provide support to children and young people out of office hours.
- The need for all service areas within the Council to respond positively to requests for work experience placements.
- The importance of the proposal in relation to Child Trust Funds for looked after children in sending a very strong message of equal treatment for children looked after and improving the financial situation of future care leavers.
- The importance of undertaking rota visits with the utmost diligence.

One former care leaver attended two meetings during the year. However, the views of children and young people were represented within the reports submitted in relation to the Education DVD, the 'Home from Home' DVD, involvement in decision-making, social work visiting frequency, the Leaving Care Service, the 'What Makes the Difference' project and DVD, Advocacy, Five Rivers and Care Matters.

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

The Corporate Parenting Board aimed 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 have been proactive in ensuring that Members of the Executive regularly discussed corporate parenting issues, individually and collectively.

A safe, supportive and stable living environment

Whilst Middlesbrough performs well in relation to stability of placements, a key concern during the year has been the recruitment of foster carers in the face

of competition from independent fostering agencies. Consequently a new recruitment campaign was launched during the year and there is work ongoing in relation to a review of payments to foster carers.

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. The Corporate Parenting Board has discussed this issue on several occasions and watched with interest a DVD prepared by care leavers and former care leavers. The issue has been raised with the Executive to prompt further action.

Education and employment

Despite some improvements in outcomes, the educational attainment of children in care remains low in comparison with their peers at all key stages of the education system.

Work is ongoing in relation to re-aligning existing services and consideration will be given to the creation of a 'Virtual Head Teacher' and a 'Virtual School'.

Building confidence and self-esteem

The Sport & Leisure service has continued to provide support for children and young people to access developmental opportunities. This has included taster sessions and the continuation of the provision of a free swim card.

The Youth Service provision of a special youth club session for children looked after 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.

During the year, three young people have gained sectional awards for the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Six young people have gained accreditation for the Boro Award level 1. Two young people have achieved OCN level 1. Three young people are waiting for external moderator decision. Four young people have had involvement with the Youth Council and the Youth Opportunity Fund.

5. Conclusion

During 2007-2008, 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 2008

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 (2007 - 2008)

Councillor B Thompson	Chair & Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning
Councillor J Brunton	Vice Chair & Executive Member for Social Care
Councillor E Dryden	
Councillor R Kerr	Deputy Mayor
Councillor J McPartland	
Councillor P Rogers	
Councillor B Taylor	
Councillor P Thompson	Executive Member for Economic Development
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 2007 to April 2008

- Corporate Parenting Overview
- Report on Activity May 2006 – April 2007
- Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme
- Joint Area Review
- The Corporate Parenting Board's Impact on Outcomes for Children Looked After - Discussion Paper

- Child Trust Funds
- Children Looked After Statistical Update

- Care Matters White Paper:
 - Care Matters: Time for Change
 - Delivering a First-class Education
 - A Home with People Who Care
 - Care Matters and the Health of Children Looked After
 - Transition to Adulthood
 - Enriching Children's Lives

- Usage of National Youth Advocacy Service 2006-2007
- Involving Children and Young People in Decision-making
- Survey on Visits and Involvement

- Membership of the Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel
- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel – Activity Report for October 2006-March 2007
- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel Activity Report for March 2007-September 2007
- Adoption Service Annual Report, Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide
- Fostering Service Annual Report, Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide
- Payments to Foster Carers
- Annual Inspection of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service
- Behaviour Management Policy, Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service
- Foster Carer Recruitment Campaign
- Special Guardianship Policy & Procedure

- Five Rivers Annual Report
- Five Rivers Presentation on Every Child Matters Outcomes
- Five Rivers 6 Month Report
- Summary of Rota Visits and Regulation 33 Reports (October 2006-February 2007)
- Summary of Regulation 33 Reports March-September 2007 & Update on Rota Visits

- Children Missing from Placement – Update Report (September 2006 and March 2007)
- Children Missing from Placement – Update Report (April 2007-September 2007)

- Education DVD
- Enjoy & Achieve , Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council
- Every Child Matters Stay Safe Agenda

- Children Looked After Planning & Implementation Group
- Youth Offending Service Support for Children Looked After
- Connexions Support for Children Looked After
- The Involvement of Sport & Leisure with Children Looked After
- Youth Service Provision to Children Looked After

- Leaving Care Service – Annual Report 2007
- What Makes the Difference DVD
- Housing Issues for Care Leavers
- 'Home from Home' - Art n That Accommodation DVD
- Work Experience for Care Leavers