

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

19TH JUNE 2008

<p>USAGE OF NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY SERVICE - APRIL 2007 to MARCH 2008</p>

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

**GILL ROLLINGS – 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. The policy was updated in January 2008 to reflect changes in legislation and guidance.
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. Interviews for advocates, that involved a young person's panel, were held at Newton Aycliffe Young People's Centre on 29th June 07. The successful applicants completed the accredited advocacy training course during October 2007. Those who successfully completed the course are now contracted by the regional NYAS service on a sessional basis. There are now 38 accredited Advocates throughout the North East Region. Advocates also regularly attend professional development sessions. Sessional Advocates working on Teesside & Darlington cases are offered support from the Senior Advocate in case discussions or via email/telephone.
6. 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.
7. 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

8. During 2007/2008, there were 108 referrals across the five local authorities. 48 were new referrals and 39 cases have been closed. All were contacted by a NYAS advocate within 72 hours of the referral being made (most within 24 hours). The young people in contact with NYAS during this reporting period were aged between 5 and 22 years old.
9. There are now three sessional Advocates who specialise in working with young people with communication difficulties or disabilities. NYAS have worked with 32 young people who have a physical or learning disability or difficulty during 2007-2008.

In Middlesbrough

10. Within Middlesbrough there were 21 new referrals, 13 of which were made directly by the child or young person themselves. Five referrals were made by social workers, three by carers and one by a parent. Some referrals related to more than one issue and the issues raised included:
 - Issues with placement 7
 - Contact with parents 6
 - Residency 2
 - Problem with Social Worker 2
 - Issues with carers 1
 - Choice in Education 1
 - Issues at special school 1
 - Mental health 1
 - Transition to adult services 1
 - Children's Rights 1
11. 4 cases that were opened prior to April 2007 were closed during the year. 12 cases were opened and closed within the year. There were 23 cases ongoing at the end of March 2008. During the year, the service was used by 26 males and 13 females. Ages ranged from 5 to 22 years.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

12. 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.

RECOMMENDATION

13. 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

14. 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, April 2008
- Advocacy for Children, Young People and their Families, Policy & Guidance, January 2008

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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.