

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 23 October 2008.

**PRESENT:** Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors Carr, S Carter, J Hobson, Kerr, McPartland (as substitute for Councillor Brunton), P Rogers, B Thompson

**OFFICIALS:** C Kendrick, S King, S Little, S Mitchell, T Moody, J Wilson

**PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER:** B Simpson (Foster Carer)

**\*\*APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors Brunton, Dryden

**\*\*DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No Declarations of Interest were made at this point of the meeting.

**\*\*MINUTES**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 11 September 2008 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

The Chair noted that during her term of office she would concentrate her efforts on the theme of developing the local authority pledge for children looked after. The Pledge would clearly set out the services and support that all children in care can expect to receive.

It was noted that there was to be a pledge information day on 30 October, all Members were invited to attend.

**PERFORMANCE DATA**

The Deputy Director for Intervention & Safeguarding presented a report to provide the Board with statistical information regarding Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council.

It was reported that the provision of services to children looked after was a core statutory function and corporate responsibility. Since the introduction of the Quality Projects Initiative, the Government had maintained a clear focus on improving services for this group of young people. This was reflected in the range of local government targets and performance indicators relating to children looked after.

At 31 March 2008 there were 272 children looked after by Middlesbrough Council, which compared with 242 children looked after at 31 March 2007, representing a 12% increase. The figure as at the 23<sup>rd</sup> October was 264. The figures reflect the work undertaken by Children, Families & Learning to stabilise the situation. The following information identified placements of children at March 2007 and placements at March 2008:

**As at March 2007**

with foster carers	188(78%)
placed for adoption	5(2%)
in Middlesbrough Children's Homes	12(5%)
placed home on trial, or with extended family members	24(10%)
in specialist residential placements outside of the area	12(5%)
independent living / lodgings/other	1(0.4%)

**As at March 2008**

with foster carers	213(78%)
placed for adoption	10(4%)
in Middlesbrough Children's Homes	11(4%)
placed home on trial, or with extended family members	17(6%)
in specialist residential placements outside of the area	17(6%)
independent living / lodgings/other	4(1%)

The number of children looked after as a proportion of the population was still above the national average of 54/10,000 0-17 year olds, Middlesbrough was 84.7/10,000 (a significant increase compared to 78.2/10,000 in 2007).

The number of children young people placed with foster carers had decreased by approximately 2%, which equated to 4 children young people. The majority of foster placements were with Middlesbrough foster carers but an increasing number were in agency foster placements, particularly out of area.

<b>Foster Placement Breakdown</b>	<b>March 2008</b>
Middlesbrough Foster Carers – In Middlesbrough	79
Middlesbrough Foster Carers – Outside of Middlesbrough	45
Agency Foster Care in Middlesbrough	4
Agency Foster Care outside of Middlesbrough	60
Foster Placement with Relatives or Friend	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>213</b>

A question came from a Member why Middlesbrough had particularly high numbers of children looked after. In response it was stated that Middlesbrough had high levels of child poverty compared to the rest of the country but performed well as an authority compared to its statistical neighbours.

It was clarified that support for parents with substance misuse problems was provided by Families First and that Platform provided intensive support for drug users.

It was reported that foster carers' allowances had been updated, and increases were commensurate to the age of child in care. It was noted that this was welcome news, with the hope that foster carers would not leave the authority in future.

Best wishes were given to the Deputy Director for Intervention & Safeguarding as she was leaving the Authority.

**NOTED**

## FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL ACTIVITY REPORT

The Team Manager of the Family Placement Service presented a report to give the Board an overview of the activity of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel during the period 1 April to 30 September 2008.

Each local authority which provided a fostering service and/or acted as an adoption agency was required to establish a panel consisting of social work practitioners experienced in adoption and family placement matters, elected Members and independent persons. The composition of the panel was prescribed by the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Fostering Services Regulations 2002.

There were 10 members of the Panel and each member had a specific term of office. It was noted that two members of the Panel would need to be replaced in the near future.

Middlesbrough Council had established a Family Placement Panel which met the legal requirements in relation to fostering and adoption and therefore could consider cases from both aspects of family placement work. The Panel played a key role in promoting the welfare of vulnerable children in public care.

The role of the Family Placement Panel was to consider whether:

- Applications from prospective adopters
- Plans for children to be placed for adoption
- Proposals to place a specific child or children for adoption by particular prospective adopters
- Reviews of the approval of prospective adopters
- Applications from prospective foster carers
- Reviews of the approval of foster carers
- Plans for children to be placed in long-term foster care
- Proposals to place a specific child or children in a long-term foster placement with particular foster carers
- Termination of the approval of foster carers
- Applications for approval as supported lodgings

There had been a steady throughput of adoptions and a preparation group for potential adopters had just taken place. The service focused on recruiting adopters specifically for children aged 3 years and over.

It was noted that the number of foster carers had dipped but that a preparation group for potential foster carers was underway and there should be some new carers approved by spring 2009.

The Panel dealt with very complex cases and Panel meetings had been extended to a full day to reflect the level of work undertaken.

A Member reported that the Panel was often onerous to those involved, and highlighted the importance of the decisions made. In response to a question, it was clarified that recruitment to the Panel was a rigorous process, undertaken in light of statutory requirements and the skill mix within the Panel.

A Member questioned the level of allowances paid to foster carers and it was clarified that the rate did not match the private sector but that the non-financial benefits were felt to be good.

**NOTED**

## **YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE – FEEDBACK FROM INSPECTION AND ACTION PLAN**

The Deputy Head of Youth Offending Service (YOS) presented a report to inform the Board with a summary of findings from the 2008 Youth Justice Board Inspection and to outline the areas for development as described in the Post Inspection Improvement Plan.

It was reported that South Tees Youth Offending Service was a multi-agency service established as a result of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998. Their aim was to prevent and reduce offending by children and young people aged 10 to 17 years across the boroughs of Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland. The Service worked closely with partners from the Police, Probation, Children, Families & Learning, Health, Safe in Tees Valley and the Youth Service as well as a number of voluntary organisations.

In February 2008 South Tees YOS was subject to a Joint Inspection by HMP Inspectorate of Constabulary, HM Inspectorate of Probation, Healthcare Commission, Social Care Inspectorate and the Office for Standards in Education. This was carried out in conjunction with the Joint Area Review and Corporate Assessment Processes for both the unitary authorities of Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland.

The final report was balanced with many strengths being identified and no surprises in relation to areas for improvement. The Inspectorate commented on the positive attitude of staff.

There were no specific findings in relation to the supervision of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough. The inspectorate welcomed the addition of a qualified, experienced Social Worker with a child protection background being seconded into the YOS from Middlesbrough CFL as an aid to improving communications and enhancing YOS staff development.

It was reported that bed & breakfast accommodation was used for homeless young people on rare occasions, where no other suitable alternative could be made. It was noted that a full copy of South Tees YOS Inspectorate Report was available through HM Inspectorate of Probation web site.

In response to a question, it was clarified that suitable accommodation would be defined as supported accommodation.

**NOTED**