

## **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**4<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2008**

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| <p><b>EVERY CHILD MATTERS: STAY SAFE<br/>AGENDA</b></p> |
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**MIKE CARR- EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN,  
FAMILIES & LEARNING**

**GILL ROLLINGS – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF  
CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

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### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an update on the issues for Children Looked After against the stay safe agenda.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. Each year the Corporate Parenting Board receives information in relation to Children Looked After and the issues affecting them under the Stay Safe agenda:
  - ◆ Safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence and sexual exploitation
  - ◆ Safe from accidental injury and death
  - ◆ Safe from bullying and discrimination
  - ◆ Safe from crime and anti social behaviour in and out of school
  - ◆ Have security, stability and are cared for
3. As corporate parents, it is the duty of the local authority to ensure that children looked after are protected against child abuse and neglect, and receive a high standard of care.

## **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICERS**

4. All children looked after are subject to a robust monitoring process. The Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2004 supported the introduction of an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO). It introduced guidance that gave IROs the responsibility for monitoring the local authority's review of the care plan, with the aim of ensuring that actions required to implement the care plan are carried out and outcomes monitored. IROs can also ensure the child's access to advocacy services and the complaints procedure. IROs are responsible for the monitoring of reviewing all child care placements, for those on Care Orders under Section 31 or Section 20 Voluntary Accommodation. This includes short term breaks, those receiving overnight stays that do not exceed 24 hours and Secure Orders. Over the last year there have been two young people subject to Secure Orders.
5. In addition, the documentation relating to children looked after, which records the visits made and the wishes and views of the children on all aspects of their care and placement, is reviewed by the Independent Reviewing Officers every six months. Audits are carried out by the Review and Development Unit and quarterly reports are submitted to the Deputy Director for Children and Family Services.

## **ADVOCACY & SUPPORT**

6. Middlesbrough Council has a contract with the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and Spurgeons Independent Visitors Scheme. NYAS provides one to one support for children and young people and advocates on their behalf to ensure their rights and needs are met. The Independent Visitors Scheme provides a befriending service for children and young people with little or no contact with their birth family. Individual Independent Visitors may also advocate for the children and young people they visit, at their request.

## **INSPECTION OF CARE SERVICES**

7. Regular inspections are undertaken of the care services. Adoption services are inspected every three years, the last inspection was carried out in October 2006 and, therefore, is not due until 2009.
8. The council's fostering service was judged as good in the annual inspection undertaken in October 2007. This resulted in the frequency of inspection reducing to a three year cycle. Data is reported annually to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) with regard to children's key stage SATS results, as well as all aspects of the service. Information relating to children's medical and health needs and other data set requirements are submitted routinely. This year there has been an introduction of a strengths and difficulties questionnaire relating to the child's emotional well being. Information is recorded by carers and social

workers and submitted to the DCSF for all children between the ages of 4–16 years.

9. The Council's respite service, provided at the Gleneagles Resource Centre, and the residential care service provided by the Five Rivers Project are inspected by Ofsted twice a year. In addition, independent inspections are made under Regulation 33 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2002 and Rota Visits are carried out by elected Members. The outcomes of these inspections are reported to the Corporate Parenting Board twice a year.

### **LOCAL AUTHORITY DESIGNATED OFFICER (LADO)**

10. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board has a responsibility for ensuring there are effective inter-agency procedures in place for dealing with allegations against people who work with children and for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the procedures. A Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role has been established. The LADO is responsible for co-ordinating all activity around allegations, including those made against staff and volunteers of any agency and in the Voluntary and Community Sector. The LADO provides advice and guidance on the procedures. Work will be undertaken to align the new procedures with the existing policy for Managing Allegations against Foster Carers.

### **SOCIAL WORK VISITS**

11. Children looked after receive regular visits from social workers. The frequency of visits is regulated and agreed during supervision sessions with line managers. This provides a safeguard for children and young people as they have a regular opportunity to raise any issues of concern with their social worker.

### **BULLYING**

12. The Bullying policy has recently been updated and there is an expectation that when commissioning a foster placement from another fostering service provider, the carer(s) comply with the policy and provide written undertakings to this effect. The policy recommends that a plan should be drawn up to attempt to ensure that should bullying take place, it ceases and does not re-occur. Each case would be monitored to ensure repeated bullying does not take place.

### **MISSING FROM PLACEMENT OR FROM EDUCATION**

13. The Missing from Placement guidance is currently being updated. Police and social work staff have incorporated procedures taken from The Management Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons, produced by the association of Chief of Police Officers, into the guidance for carers and social workers. Due to the Police Authority covering a Cleveland wide area, the documentation requires authorisation from all neighbouring authorities. It is envisaged that the guidance will be circulated January 2009.

14. Middlesbrough's procedures on Children Missing from Education or at Risk of Missing Education have been revised. The local authority has robust measures in place to identify quickly when a child is missing and follow through with tracking and enquiry systems. Being looked after is recognised as a possible trigger factor in the identification of those children at risk of going missing.

## **PLACEMENT STABILITY**

15. Placement Stability is recognised as contributing to keeping children and young people safe and is a key element of the Performance Indicator framework. The table below sets out key indicators in relation to placement stability and our performance over the past 3 years.

| <b>INDICATOR</b>   | <b>2005/06</b> | <b>2006/07</b> | <b>2007/08</b> |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| A1 The percentage of CLA with three or more placements during the year.  | 10%            | 11%            | 10.7%          |
| D78 The percentage of children continuously looked after for 2.5 years who were living in the same placement for 2 years or placed for adoption. | 65%            | 74.4%          | 69.5%          |
| C23 The number of children adopted during the year as a percentage of the number of CLA who had been looked after for 6 months or more.          | 11.1%          | 7%             | 4.8%           |

16. Placement stability remains steady with a slight reduction in long term stability. The figure for children placed for adoption shows a decline in the last three years. The figures for 2007/08 represent 10 children who were placed for adoption.
17. To contribute to maintaining placement stability, a review of foster carer payments is currently underway to establish some parity between Independent fostering services and Middlesbrough Council carers.

## **MOVING INTO INDEPENDENCE**

18. The transition into independence is a daunting experience, however, the Pathways Team provides practical support and advice for young people in relation to maintaining their own safety. The team also carry out risk assessments of new living situations and undertake a robust assessment of people wishing to offer supported lodgings to care leavers.

## **INFORMATION SHARING & DATA MONITORING**

19. A new Integrated Children's System (ICS) database has now been implemented. The aim of the database is to record all case information for children and young people. It provides a framework for assessment,

planning, implementation and review processes as well as providing a mechanism for deriving performance management information. This database is one element of a range of information sharing processes that have been introduced by the government to reduce the risks surrounding the projection and safeguarding of children and young people.

20. Middlesbrough Council provides statistical data relating to every aspect of the care of children looked after and care leavers to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) on a regular basis. This information is used to monitor performance against the national performance indicators.

## **FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS**

21. There are no financial, or legal implications arising from this report. As safeguarding is a key issue for Corporate Parents, this report will be of interest to all elected Members.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

22. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to keeping children looked after safe.

## **REASONS**

23. The Local Authority is responsible for keeping children looked after and those receiving Leaving Care Services safe. It is important that elected members are aware of and approve this aspect of Children, Families and Learning work in order that they can effectively fulfil their responsibilities as Corporate Parents.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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