

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

25th June 2009

<p>CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD REPORT ON ACTIVITY: MAY 2008 – APRIL 2009</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 2008/2009 (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 2008-2009

3. A key focus for the has been the development of a Pledge for children looked after in line with the White Paper, 'Care Matters: Time for Change'. The Pledge is now awaiting approval by the Executive and will then be implemented. The Board also received a number of reports in relation to specific issues to comply with requirements under regulations and guidance. The recommendations of the Board were submitted to the Executive for approval and have been implemented. The attached report describes the work of the Board in more detail.

OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT

4. Not applicable to this report.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

5. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. This report is of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

6. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the issues relating to corporate parenting.

REASON

7. 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 and to achieve the best possible outcomes for children looked after and care leavers.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
Minutes of, and reports to, the Corporate Parenting Board June 2008 – April 2009

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Corporate Parenting Board

Report on Activity

May 2008 to April 2009

**Mike Carr - Executive Member
for Children, Families & Learning**

**Gill Rollings - Executive Director of
Children, Families and Learning**



1. Introduction

This report sets out the work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Board during the past year. The origins and development of the Corporate Parenting Board are attached at Appendix A. The Government's expectations of Councillors as corporate parents are detailed in Appendix B. Information about the remit and membership of the Corporate Parenting Board for 2008-2009 is set out in Appendix C. Details of the reports considered by the Board are included at Appendix D.

2. Summary of Activity

There were eight meetings of the Board between June 2008 and April 2009. 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 considered a wide range of issues and advised the Executive on a range of decisions and issues including:

Approval of:

- Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme for 2008-2009
- 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
- A seminar for Members on improving the educational outcomes of children looked after

Concerns about:

- The frequency of social work visits to children looked after, particularly to children based outside Middlesbrough
- Levels of post adoption care.
- Recruitment, screening and training of members of the Family Placement Panel.
- The shortage of foster carers and the importance of appropriate financial support. Concern was also expressed in relation to recruiting foster carers from a range of ethnic origins.
- The education of children looked after and consideration of the support provided by Middlesbrough compared with our statistical neighbours.
- The numbers of children educated outside of Middlesbrough (49% in March 2008) and the difficulties this may create.
- The appointment and role of a Virtual Head Teacher for children looked after.
- The difficulties of accessing an NHS dentist, where children are based outside Middlesbrough.
- Appropriate housing solutions for care leavers and the importance of avoiding placements in hostels or in Bed and Breakfast accommodation.
- Support for care leavers with learning disabilities.
- Access to support in relation to mental and emotional health.
- The possibility of giving children looked after free access to Council-owned sport and leisure facilities.

Recognition for or endorsement of:

- 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 clarity and usefulness of the Children's Guide to Adoption.
- The need to develop further training opportunities for care leavers.
- The achievement of a second 'outstanding' rating by Ofsted for the Gleneagles Resource Centre.
- The positive feedback from parents and children in relation to Gleneagles Resource Centre and the value of the service in supporting families of children with disabilities.

One care leaver made a presentation to the Board in relation to care leavers' views of the Pledge. Members of the Board also had three meetings with a total of twenty-seven children and young people in relation to developing the Pledge. In addition, the views of children and young people were represented within the reports submitted in relation to the Leaving Care Service, Advocacy, Five Rivers and Regulation 33 visits.

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.

3. Key Issues Discussed by the Board

Corporate Parenting

The development of the Local Authority Pledge has involved Members of the Corporate Parenting Board working with children and young people to agree the content of the Pledge. This entailed discussions about the nature and significance of making a promise; Members and officers responding to questions from children and young people; explorations of the issues of concern to children and young people; and the final drafting of the Pledge for approval by the Executive.

Once this has been approved, further work will be required to ensure that staff implement the Pledge via each child's care plan. In addition, it is hoped that children and young people will be willing to establish a Children in Care Council that would complement the work of the Corporate Parenting Board.

A safe, supportive and stable living environment

The recruitment and retention of foster carers, in the face of competition from independent fostering agencies, continues to be of concern to the Board. A review of payments to foster carers has not yet been finalised.

The Corporate Parenting Board continues to express concern about the availability of suitable accommodation for young people looked after by the authority who are moving into independence. Members welcomed the development of the 'Crash Pad', in partnership with Community Campus, to alleviate the problem of short-term placements in Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

In relation to the residential accommodation provided in partnership with Five Rivers, Members noted the positive views of young people and commented on the positive benefits of the partnership.

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. In 2007-8, just 13% of children in care achieved five A*-C GCSE (or equivalent) passes compared to 62% of all children. 36% of children in care did not achieve any GCSE passes, compared to 1% of all children. Unsurprisingly given this background, care leavers are more than twice as likely not to be in education, employment or training (NEET) at age nineteen. The Corporate Parenting Board is keen to ensure that the role of the Virtual Head is robust in relation to supporting the educational attainments of children looked after.

In relation to employment, the Board re-emphasised the importance of all services providing work experience placements to children looked after and the need to ensure there is a wide range of training opportunities available.

5. Conclusion

During 2008-2009, the Corporate Parenting Board started work on developing the local authority's Pledge to children looked after and care leavers. This Pledge is based on the views and ideas of children and young people and reflects their concerns. It will provide a framework for the provision of services to individuals such that each child's Care Plan will constitute a Pledge on the part of the local authority. The Corporate Parenting Board played a key role in reassuring children and young people that their views and ideas have been taken seriously.

The Corporate Parenting Board is committed to ensuring that the local authority strives to be a good corporate parent by enabling children looked after to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Sue Little
Children's Participation Officer
June 2009

APPENDIX A

The Origins and Development of the Corporate Parenting Board

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 B).

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 C for remit and membership for 2008-2009).

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 National Performance Indicators for Children, the Every Child Matters Outcome Framework 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.

APPENDIX B

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

In 2003, the Government issued further guidance entitled, *"If this were my child...A Councillor's Guide to Being a Good Corporate Parent"* (Crowe J, 2003, Department for Education and Skills and the Local Government Information Unit). This guidance re-emphasised the importance of elected Members being Good Corporate Parents. It provided guidance and examples of good practice in relation to the role of all Members, Members of the Executive and Members of Scrutiny Panels in enabling children looked after to achieve the Every Child Matters outcomes:

- Be Healthy
- Stay Safe
- Enjoy & Achieve
- Make a Positive Contribution
- Achieve Economic Well-being

In particular, the guidance highlighted the role of Members in providing clear leadership to ensure corporate parenting is addressed by all services within the local authority, working in partnership with other agencies and ensuring that resources are targeted appropriately.

The overarching message was that, when thinking about the services they provide as corporate parents, Members should ask themselves "Is this good enough for my child?".

APPENDIX C

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 (2008 - 2009)

Councillor F McIntyre	Chair
Councillor J Brunton	Vice Chair & Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Board
Councillor M Carr	Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning
Councillor S Carter	
Councillor E Dryden	Chair of Health Scrutiny Panel
Councillor J Hobson	
Councillor R Kerr	Deputy Mayor
Councillor J McTigue	
Councillor P Rogers	
Councillor B Thompson	Executive Member for Public Health & Sport

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 D

Reports/presentations to the Corporate Parenting Board June 2008 to April 2009

- Overview of Corporate Parenting and the Corporate Parenting Policy & Strategy (presentation)
- Corporate Parenting Board Report on Activity May 2007 – April 2008
- Corporate Parenting Board Work Programme
- Elected Members Making a Difference
- Local Authority Pledge to Children Looked After
- Middlesbrough Pledge Update (x3)
- After Care Views on the Pledge (presentation)
- Scrutiny Panel on Aspects of Corporate Parenting Action Plan
- Take up of Advocacy Services 2007-2008

- Children Looked After Strategy Part 1
- Children Looked After Strategy Part 2
- Performance Data (x2)
- Children Looked After Profile and Trends (presentation)
- Children Looked After Statistical Update

- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel – Activity Report for Oct 2007-March 2008
- Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel Activity Report for April to Sept 2008
- Adoption Service Annual Report, Statement of Purpose and Children’s Guide
- Fostering Service Annual Report, Statement of Purpose and Children’s Guide
- Foster Carer Recruitment Campaign

- Gleneagles Resource Centre
- Five Rivers Annual Report (& presentation)
- Summary of Regulation 33 Reports January to December 2008 & Update on Rota Visits
- Update on Children Missing from Placement (October 2007 and September 2008)

- Health of Children Looked After
- Every Child Matters Stay Safe Agenda
- Educational Attainments of Children Looked After by Middlesbrough Council Academic Year 2007-2008
- Supporting the Education of Children Looked After (presentation)

- Leaving Care Service – Annual Report 2008

- Connexions Support for Children Looked After
- Youth Offending Service Feedback from Inspection & Action Plan
- Substance Misuse Treatment Plan – Implications for Children Looked After (& presentation)