

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**6<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2009**

**USAGE OF NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY  
SERVICE - APRIL 2008 to MARCH 2009**

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

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

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**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. The contract was renewed in 2005 and will end in 2010. A process is currently underway to issue a new invitation to tender for the service in conjunction with other local authorities across the region [Redcar & Cleveland, Darlington, Hartlepool, Stockton, South Tyneside and Newcastle].

4. NYAS is an independent national organisation, which operates a web site, an on-line youth club, a free telephone help line and a text service. Each young person contacting NYAS has access to their legal team for information, advice and representation should this prove to be an appropriate intervention. NYAS also provides specialist, independent mental health advocacy to young people subject to the Mental Health Act 2007.
5. Advocates are recruited and supported on a regional basis. All NYAS advocates have successfully completed the residential NYAS Advocacy Training course, which is accredited via the Open College Network. 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 beNYAS advocates arrange contact with service users at times that are suitable to the young person.
6. The Senior Advocate accepts the majority of referrals. Sessional Advocates are contracted by the regional NYAS service. Issue-based advocates can provide particular specialisms, for example there are three advocates who specialise in working with children and young people who have communication difficulties or disabilities.
7. 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.
8. 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**

9. During 2008/2009, there were 59 referrals across the five local authorities. With cases that were carried forward from the previous year, this makes a total caseload of 148 for 2008-2009. All new referrals were contacted by a NYAS advocate within 72 hours of the referral being made (most within 24 hours).

10. During 2008-2009, the young people in contact with NYAS were aged between 6 and 22 years old. 24 of the young people had a physical or learning disability or difficulty. Of the 148 children and young people supported during the year, 36 were placed outside of their local authority area.
11. NYAS advocates have been present at a wide range of meetings including, Planning Meetings, Looked after Reviews, Placement meetings, Child Protection Conferences, Family Group Conferences, Exclusion Panel Hearings, Mental Health Tribunals and point-of-contact referrals. Advocates have also assisted young people in making complaints.

### **In Middlesbrough**

12. Within Middlesbrough there were 12 new referrals, 6 of which were made directly by the child or young person themselves. Four referrals were made by social workers, one by a parent and one by a voluntary sector organisation. Some referrals related to more than one issue and the issues raised included:
  - Wishes and feelings 4
  - To remain in foster care 2
  - Complaints 2
  - Access to specialist Further Education 1
  - Access to Disability Services 1
  - Bullying and issues at home 1
  - Family issues 1
  - Access to accommodation 1
  - Access to specialist placement 1
13. 16 cases that were opened prior to April 2008 were closed during the year. 14 cases were opened and closed within the year. There were 23 cases ongoing at the end of March 2009. 35 males and 19 females used the service and were aged between 6 and 21 years.

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

14. 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**

15. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to usage of the National Youth Advocacy Service during 2008-2009.

## REASONS

16. 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:

- *Annual Report for the Boroughs of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington*, National Youth Advocacy Service, April 2009
- *Advocacy for Children, Young People and their Families, Policy & Guidance*, Middlesbrough Council, 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.