

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

**17<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009**

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL  
FOSTERING SERVICE – ANNUAL  
REPORT FOR 2009**

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

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FAMILIES AND LEARNING**

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**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with
  - (a) information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service during the year 2008/9 and plans for the year 2009/10.
  - (b) the Statement of Purpose for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2009/10.
  - (c) the Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2009/10.

**BACKGROUND**

2. The Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services were brought into force on 1st April 2002. One of the requirements of the Regulations and National Minimum Standards is that each fostering service should produce a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide to the Fostering Service.

There are clear guidelines about what should be included in these documents. The Regulations also require that, in the case of a local authority, the Statement of Purpose is formally approved by elected members and that it is reviewed, updated and modified at least annually.

3. In previous years, the Fostering Service used to produce an annual report, which was a separate document. However there were always several areas where the Statement of Purpose and the Annual Report contained the same material and in order to avoid unnecessary duplication, it was agreed that the annual report should take the form of a Committee Report rather than a stand-alone document.

### **ACTIVITY OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE DURING 2008/9**

4. A summary of the main areas of activity is as follows:

Number of enquires received	225
Number of requests for initial visits	76
Number of applications	8
Number of foster carers approved	2
Number of foster carers de-registered	13
Total number of approved foster carers on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2009	85
Number of children in foster care on 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2009	124
Number of children whose long-term fostering plans were approved	7
Number of children matched with long-term foster carers	3

5. After a period of staff shortage, the Fostering Service appointed 2 new members of staff during 2008/9 who both started work in July 2008. The team was then fully staffed, although one member of staff was working reduced hours due to attending a post-qualification course. However due to the increased levels of activity, the benefits of being fully staffed were not really felt by the members of the team.

6. The Fostering Service provides a programme of post-approval training for registered foster carers and during 2008/9, the topics for the training sessions were:
- ◆ Care Matters and emotional well-being – June 2008
  - ◆ Fire and car safety – September 2008
  - ◆ Understanding and supporting your child's education – December 2008

In addition to these quarterly sessions, foster carers also have opportunities to attend courses which are part of Middlesbrough Children, Families & Learning in-house training programme, those run by the Local Safeguarding Children Board, and some run by external organisations. Several foster carers took advantage of these opportunities during the year.

7. In addition to formal training, the Fostering Service provides support to foster carers in a variety of ways and during 2008/9, carried out a review of the way the support is provided. As a result, the service is now running monthly support groups, with a choice of a morning session or an evening session. A guest speaker is usually invited to give a short presentation on a topic relevant to foster care. An additional support group is provided for the sons and daughters of foster carers and this has been re-launched in conjunction with Fostering Network, a national organisation for foster carers.
8. In previous years, the annual report has always mentioned the fact that Middlesbrough's allowances have fallen behind those of other local authorities and that work is in hand to address this problem. During the past year, much progress has been made on this issue. An increase in the mileage allowances paid to foster carers was implemented in October 2008 with the payment being backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008. Also in October 2008, the weekly allowance paid to foster carers for the support of each child was increased so that it now meets the rate recommended by Fostering Network and this increase was backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008. More recently, the banded payments paid to foster carers, which were introduced in February 2000 and had not been increased since then, were increased by £50 per week, backdated to 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009. These improvements represent a substantial investment by Middlesbrough Council in the fostering service.
9. Recruitment and retention of foster carers has continued to be a challenge during 2008/9. There has been a net decrease in the number of registered foster carers for the fifth year in succession. On the positive side, we were able to make use of some grant funding to

increase the amount of recruitment advertising during 2008/9. As a result, the number of enquiries about fostering has increased for the fourth year in succession, from 136 in 2005/6 to 225 in 2008/9. Subsequent requests for initial visits have also increased compared with previous years and the quality of the enquiries has been very encouraging. There are grounds for optimism that some of these enquiries will result in new resources for the Fostering Service in 2009-10 and the following year.

## **PLANS AND ISSUES FOR 2009/10**

10. A key task during the coming year will be the implementation of a new set of standards issued by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), relating to the training and support of foster carers. All fostering services are required to comply with these standard by 2011 and compliance will be monitored by Ofsted as part of the inspection of the Fostering Service.
11. The implementation of these standards means that the Fostering Service has to review the way it provides training and support to foster carers. This process has already started and will continue during the year ahead. One of the major changes is in the way the Fostering Service delivers training to foster carers. The service will no longer provide a programme of 4 group training sessions per year but instead will offer a wider variety of topics with more flexibility in terms of the timing and the method of delivery. The training will be targeted to the individual needs of the foster carer and each carer will have a Personal Development Plan.
12. There is a significant cost associated with the implementation of the CWDC standards, as the organisation and provision of the necessary training and support will cause pressure in terms of staff time and financial resources.
13. Recruitment and retention of foster carers is likely to remain a challenge in the year ahead, in spite of the positive trend already mentioned. Recruitment of foster carers is a competitive market and although there has been considerable progress in making Middlesbrough more competitive in terms of the allowances it pays, there is no room for complacency. One issue that need to be addressed in the year ahead is that of the budget for advertising. In the past 2 years, the standard budget has been supplemented by additional funding from other sources and without this extra funding, the level of advertising will drop considerably.

14. Work on developing a new payments database, which is compatible with SWIFT and ICS, will continue during the year, as further testing is necessary before it is fit for purpose.
15. There are likely to be staffing pressures during the year ahead, as a social worker has recently left the team and another social worker is on sick leave. When these factors are combined with the introduction of the CWDC standards and the significant increase in the numbers of children looked after, it will mean considerable extra work for the remaining members of the team. Some options for reducing the pressure are being considered at present, which will involve using a short-term secondment and using sessional staff to carry out some of the assessment of prospective foster carers.

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CHILDREN'S GUIDE FOR 2009/10**

16. The Statement of Purpose for 2009/10 for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1. This document is a requirement of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and is updated at least once a year. It contains information about the principles, aims and objectives of the Fostering Service, the standards of care, management structure and staffing details, number of carers and number of children placed, numbers of complaints and their outcomes, the services and facilities provided, and a summary of the procedures and processes used by the Service in relation to recruitment, assessment, approval, support, training and review of foster carers.
17. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2009/10 is attached as Appendix 2. This document is also a requirement of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002 and is updated at least once a year.
18. The two documents are now being presented to Corporate Parenting Board for the 7th annual review.

### **OPTION APPRAISAL**

19. Not applicable to this piece of work.

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

20. There are no immediate financial or legal implications in this report. There are no specific ward implications as the Adoption Service covers the whole of Middlesbrough.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

21. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:
- (a) note the information relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service.
  - (b) formally approve the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2009-10
  - (c) agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2010 or as soon as possible thereafter.

## REASONS

22. This recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
- (a) the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide to the Fostering Service are documents which are required under Regulations 3 of the Fostering Services Regulations 2002
  - (b) the review and updating of these documents is required under Regulation 4 of the same regulations
  - (c) formal approval of these documents is required under standard 1.3 of the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

- (a) the Fostering Services Regulations 2002
- (b) National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services

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