

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 17 September 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor McIntyre (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Carr, Dryden, and P Rogers.

OFFICERS: T Fewster, S Harker, C Kendrick, S Little, C Nugent, N Pocklington and J Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: B Simpson and T Tolmie.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Biswas, Budd, Rooney and B Thompson.

****DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 6 August 2009 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

POLICY ON HEALTH ASSESSMENTS FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

The Health Co-ordinator for Children Looked After presented a report to seek formal endorsement of the NHS Trust Policy on Health Assessments for Children in Care (CiC) of the Local Authority. The primary purpose of the multi-agency policy was to clarify the arrangements necessary to ensure that agencies co-operated fully in promoting the health and welfare of children in care. A copy of the Policy was attached to the submitted report.

The Policy had been developed in partnership by Middlesbrough Primary Care Trust, Redcar and Cleveland Primary Care Trust, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland Community Services, the South Tees Acute NHS Trust, Middlesbrough Council and Redcar and Cleveland Council.

The relevant Health Trusts had a duty to establish robust arrangements for carrying out health assessments on children in care. All young people and children in care had to have an initial assessment within 28 days of being accommodated. A health review assessment was also carried out at least 6 monthly with children aged 0-5 years and every 12 months for older children.

The Policy set out key definitions, the principles to be applied, responsibilities of agencies and individual officers within agencies, issues relating to consent and how performance would be monitored. The Policy also included detailed guidance for staff in relation to the procedures to be followed in a range of circumstances and clear guidance on which professional was responsible for various aspects of the process. Appendix 1 of the Policy detailed the process for the Initial and Review Health Assessments.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to endorse the Policy for Health Assessments for Children in the Care of the Local Authority.

HEALTH OF CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER - UPDATE

A report was presented to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with information on the consultation document: Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children, issued by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), and its effects on the duties of health care bodies and local authorities. The report also provided an update of progress on the

Middlesbrough Looked After Health Action Plan, including an update on consultations with Looked After Children and training delivered in 2008/2009.

It was highlighted that the health assessment offered to children and young people in Middlesbrough included all aspects of health, including emotional wellbeing, dental health, healthy eating and physical activity. It included the necessity of a child or young person being registered with a GP and a dentist and emphasis on primary prevention. Immunisations were recorded in the health assessment and if they were behind schedule this was clearly recorded in the health plan to action. Middlesbrough's immunisation rate was 90% compared with a rate of 82% for England, for children looked after continually throughout the year who were up to date with their routine immunisations.

All children and young people aged 4-16 who had been looked after for 12 months and more would have a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire completed to assess their emotional and behavioural health. This enabled swift referral into the appropriate service to provide effective provision in the same manner as other children and young people.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to note the information and work undertaken to promote the health of Looked After Children in Middlesbrough.

ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CHILDREN'S GUIDE

A report was presented to advise the Corporate Parenting Board about Middlesbrough Adoption Service's activity during the year 2008/2009 and plans for the year 2009/10, the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide.

A summary of the main areas of activity during the year was included in the submitted report. During the past year the new structure of the Adoption Team had taken effect. There had been no major staff changes, however a social worker who was on maternity leave had returned to work but on reduced hours. The team had benefited from having a final-year student on placement for 9 months.

The Adoption Service had had a steady flow of enquiries throughout the year. However, due to workload pressures and the fact that there were a number of approved adopters waiting for placements, the Service closed its list to new applicants in February 2009 and did not re-open it until June 2009. The Group for prospective adopters had been full in Spring 2009, the Group commencing in the Autumn was also full and there were people on the waiting list for the next one.

The level of activity relating to adoption plans and placements of children had increased throughout the year, due to the sharp increase in the number of Looked After Children. The number of children with adoption plans approved by Panel during 2008/2009 was 24, which was the highest level for the last 5 years. A summary of the profiles of these children was included in the submitted report. There had been an increase in the number of sibling groups requiring placements including one family of six and one of eight. Increasingly there were also a number of children whose ethnicity was not clear and the Service was currently seeking guidance in terms of family finding.

There was evidence that the increase in workload of the Adoption Service would continue throughout the year ahead as monitoring had shown that in the period from 1 April to 31 August 2009 there had been a total of 19 children who had had adoption plans approved by Panel. The main issue for the Adoption Service in the year ahead would be to maintain the high standard of service whilst taking into account a substantial increase in workload.

In the circumstances the capacity to develop new services would be limited. However, there were plans to introduce a mentoring scheme for prospective and newly approved adopters. This meant that people in assessment would be linked with adopters who already had children placed, so that experience could be shared and support offered when necessary. Ideally the Service wished to improve its post adoption support for birth families to ensure that their emotional health and well being was better in the long term.

The analysis of the profile of children needing adoption had provided evidence of the challenges that were associated with the provision of an adoption service in 2009 and the sharp contrast between current adoption practice and the traditional view of adoption. The British Association for Adoption and Fostering was holding a national conference in November on the topic of 21st Century adoption, which aimed to consider the current challenges and how these could be addressed. A representative from Middlesbrough would be attending the conference.

The Statement of Purpose for 2009/2010 for Middlesbrough Adoption Service was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report. This document was a requirement of the Local Authority Adoption Services (England) Regulations 2003 and was updated at least once a year. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2009/2010 was attached at Appendix 2 to the submitted report.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to:

1. note the information in relation to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service.
2. formally approve the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide for 2009-2010.
3. agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2010 or as soon as possible thereafter.

FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND CHILDREN'S GUIDE

The purpose of the report was to present the Corporate Parenting Board with information about Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service's activity during the year 2008/2009 and plans for the year 2009/10, the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide.

A summary of the main areas of activity of the Fostering Service during 2008/2009 was included in the submitted report. After a period of staff shortage, the Fostering Service appointed two new members of staff during 2008/2009 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 increased levels of activity, the benefits of being fully staffed were not really felt by members of the team.

The Fostering Service provided a programme of post-approval training for registered Foster Carers and during 2008/2009, the topics for the training sessions included: Care Matters and Emotional Well-being, Fire and Car safety and Understanding and Supporting your Child's Education. In addition to these quarterly sessions, foster carers also had opportunities to attend courses which were part of Middlesbrough Children, Families and 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.

In addition to formal training, the Fostering Service provided support to foster carers in a variety of ways and during 2008/2009 carried out a review of the way the support was provided. As a result the Service now ran monthly support groups with a choice of a morning or evening session. A guest speaker was usually invited to give a short presentation on a topic relevant to foster care. An additional support group was provided for the sons and daughters of foster carers and this had been re-launched in conjunction with Fostering Network, a national organisation for carers.

During the past year progress had been made on the issue of foster carers' allowances. An increase in the mileage allowances paid to foster carers was implemented in October 2008 with the payment being backdated to 1 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 met the rate recommended by Fostering Network and this increase was backdated to 1 September 2008. More recently, the banded payments paid to foster carers, which had not been increased since February 2000, were increased by £50 per week, backdated to 1 April 2009. These improvements represented a substantial investment by Middlesbrough Council in the Fostering Service.

Recruitment and retention of foster carers continued to be a challenge during 2008/2009. Whilst there had been a large increase in enquiries, this did not correlate with the numbers approved.

Only two assessments had been successfully completed during 2008. There had been a net decrease in the number of registered foster carers for the fifth year in succession. On the positive side grant funding had been used to increase the amount of recruitment advertising during 2008/2009. As a result, the number of enquiries about fostering had increased for the fourth year in succession, from 136 in 2005/2006 to 225 in 2008/2009. Subsequent requests for initial visits had also increased compared with previous years and the quality of enquiries had been very encouraging. There were grounds for optimism that some of these enquiries would result in new resources for the Fostering Service in 2009/2010 and the following year.

A key task during the coming year would 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 were required to comply with these standards by 2011 and compliance would be monitored by OFSTED as part of the inspection of the Fostering Service. However, there was a significant cost associated with the implementation of the CWDC standards, and the organisation and provision of the necessary training and support would cause pressure in terms of staff time and financial resources.

Recruitment and retention of foster carers was likely to remain a challenge in the year ahead. One issue that needed to be addressed in the year ahead was that of the budget for advertising. In the past two years, the standard budget had been supplemented by additional funding from other sources and without this extra funding, the level of advertising would drop considerably. Work on developing a new payments database, which was compatible with SWIFT and ICS, would continue during the year, as further testing was necessary before it was fit for purpose.

There were likely to be staffing pressures during the year ahead, as a social worker had recently left the team and another social worker was on sick leave. When these factors were combined with the introduction of CWDC standards and the significant increase in the numbers of children looked after, it would mean considerable extra work for the remaining members of the team. Some options for reducing the pressure were being considered at present, which would involve using a short-term secondment and using sessional staff to carry out some of the assessment of prospective foster carers.

The Statement of Purpose for 2009/2010 for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report. This document was a requirement of the Fostering Regulations 2002 and was updated at least once a year. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2009/2010 was attached at Appendix 2 to the submitted report.

In discussion, it was noted that foster carers appreciated the increases made in their allowances.

RECOMMENDED that the Executive be advised to:

1. note the information in relation to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service.
2. formally approve the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide for 2009-2010.
3. agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2010 or as soon as possible thereafter.