

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

29th October 2009

<p>EVERY CHILD MATTERS: STAY SAFE AGENDA</p>

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

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

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. Since the annual report submitted to the board in November 2008, there has been a significant increase in children becoming looked after, which has been challenging for all services within Middlesbrough. There are a number of factors which may have contributed to this;
 - media coverage,
 - awareness raising as services increase – Parent Support Advisors
 - Preventative and early intervention strategies
5. Work is to be commissioned to determine the factors behind the increase. It is recognised however that there has been a national and local increase in both Children Looked After and Children subject to Child Protection Plans.
6. Plans for children who are looked after are robustly monitored by Independent Reviewing Officers who have their responsibilities set out in The Review of Children's Cases (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2004. The aim of which is to ensure that actions required to implement the care plan are carried out and outcomes monitored.
7. Over the last year there have been a number of changes to the staffing within the reviewing service. Vacant posts have been filled by agency Independent Reviewing Officers in order that timescales for reviews are met. Service delivery therefore was only marginally affected for the month of May.
8. Independent Reviewing Officers are responsible for monitoring plans of all children looked after, including those subject to Section 20 Voluntary Accommodation, those who have Care Orders under Section 31, including short breaks and young people who are placed under a Secure Order. The authority has had 1 child placed under a Secure Order in 2009.

ADVOCACY & SUPPORT

9. The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) and Spurgeon's Independent Visitors Scheme are two schemes contracted with Middlesbrough Local Authority. NYAS provides one to one support for children and young people and advocates on their behalf to ensure their rights and needs are met.
10. Independent Reviewing Officers have a responsibility to refer any child or young person to CAF/CASS under the Framework for Accountability if there is an identified unmet need in the planning process. To date there have been two young people referred with a positive resolution reached at stage 1 of the process.
11. 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

12. In October, Ofsted carried out an initial meeting with the fostering and adoption services ahead of a full inspection of the services which will commence in November.
13. In addition to discrete inspections within fostering and adoption services, they are subject to routine Ofsted inspections into Safeguarding services every three years.
14. Each year statistical data is collected and reported to the DCSF in relation to all children looked after. The purpose of which is 'to provide the government with the necessary information to evaluate the outcome of policy initiatives, and to monitor objectives on looked after children' (DCSF guidance notes for the SSDA 903 return).
15. In 2008 a 'strengths and difficulties' questionnaire relating to the child's emotional well being was introduced. Initial distribution of the questionnaire, which requires information being recorded by carers and social workers for all children between the ages of 4–16 years, was determined following interpretation of the accompanying guidance. Promotion of the questionnaires is continuing in line with a review into the distribution criteria and increases in submissions have been noted in the last three months. Independent Reviewing Officers have a responsibility to request the questionnaires during the looked after review process.
16. 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 2001 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)

17. There have been two cases referred in 2009 to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in relation to foster carers and residential provision. Their role is to coordinate activity around allegations against people who work with children and for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the procedures.

SOCIAL WORK VISITS

18. Social worker visits are carried out on a regular basis to children looked after. The visiting policy has recently been reviewed and covers children placed outside Middlesbrough. The frequency of visits is regulated and agreed during supervision sessions with line managers.

MISSING FROM PLACEMENT OR FROM EDUCATION

19. Barnardo's SECOS project provides a single point of contact on behalf of the local authority for all children missing from home. The information is monitored by the Children Missing from Education group which seeks to bring all information on missing children together. 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. A report has been written on children missing from placement and is to be submitted to the board.

PLACEMENT STABILITY

20. 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.

INDICATOR	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
NI 62 The percentage of CLA with three or more placements during the year.	11%	10.7%	12.3%
NI 63 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.	74.4%	69.5%	62.3%
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.	7%	4.8%	9.2%

21. A recent review of foster carer payments in order to establish some parity between Independent fostering services and Middlesbrough Council carers has been undertaken and an increase agreed. The payments will be rolled out in the next few weeks.

MOVING INTO INDEPENDENCE

22. Policies for joint working between Social workers, Housing and Youth Offending services in assessing young people's accommodation needs have been developed. The move to independence or supported lodgings for young people leaving care is carefully facilitated by the Pathways team in partnership with young people. The team also provides advice and guidance with regard to further education, employment opportunities and risk safety management.

INFORMATION SHARING

23. Work is developing around the Integrated Children's System (ICS) database in relation to documentation for looked after reviews. Over the next few months social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers will move to using the recommended forms.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

24. 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

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

REASONS

26. 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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