

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Parenting Board

CARE MATTERS MINISTERIAL STOCKTAKE REPORT 2009

Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning: Cllr Mike Carr

Director of Children, Families & Learning: Gill Rollings

21st January 2010

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the recent ministerial stocktake of progress in relation to Care Matters.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Care Matters Ministerial Stocktake Report 2009.

IF THIS IS A KEY DECISION, WHICH KEY DECISION TEST APPLIES?

3. It is over the financial threshold (£75,000)
It has a significant impact on 2 or more wards
Non Key

DECISION IMPLEMENTATION DEADLINE

4. For the purposes of the scrutiny call in procedure this report is

Non-urgent
Urgent report

If urgent, please give full reasons.

BACKGROUND AND EXTERNAL CONSULTATION

5. A Green Paper, 'Care Matters: Transforming the lives of children and young people in care' was published in October 2006 by the Department for Education & Skills (DfES). It drew on the work of the national 'What Makes the Difference?' initiative, to which young people and staff from Middlesbrough had made a significant contribution. Further consultation on the Green Paper was undertaken nationally,

regionally and within Middlesbrough. The outcome of the local consultation process was reported to the Corporate Parenting Board in February 2007.

6. The subsequent White Paper, '*Care Matters: Time for Change*' (June 2007, DfES), set out the government's intentions in relation to transforming services for children looked after. It focused on making improvements in the following seven areas:
 - Corporate Parenting
 - Family and Parenting Support
 - Care Placements
 - Education
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Transition to Adulthood
 - The Role of the Practitioner
7. The implications of the Care Matters proposals for social work practice and the delivery of services in Middlesbrough were considered by the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2007. It was identified that children looked after were already a high priority for the Council and that many of the issues raised in Care Matters were already being addressed. This success was attributed to the development, in 2004, of a Looked After Business Unit that was created to bring all services for looked after children under one Service Manager and to create a social work team to support children who are looked after on a long-term basis. This restructure had proved very successful as the quality of services and outcomes for children and young people had improved significantly between 2004 and 2007.
8. A recent Scrutiny of Aspects of Corporate Parenting (21/10/2008) acknowledged the benefits of this approach and recommended that, in terms of Middlesbrough Council's staffing and management structure, existing support arrangements should at least be maintained.
9. In September 2007, the key priorities for action were identified as:
 - Establishing a Children in Care Council and developing the Council's 'Pledge'.
 - Strengthening the preventative agenda and responsiveness of services to prevent children entering the looked after system.
 - Improving the quality and choice of placement options.
 - Developing services to improve educational outcomes.
 - Improving access to leisure activities.
 - Strengthening the role of Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs).
10. Between autumn 2007 and now, the Corporate Parenting Board has considered a number of reports and presentations in relation to Care Matters. The Corporate Parenting Board also played a key role in the development of Middlesbrough's Pledge to Children Looked After. Progress in relation to Care Matters was reported to central government in September 2009.

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11. In autumn 2009, the government collated information from all local authorities in order to monitor progress. The report includes four key messages:
 - There has been steady progress in improving outcomes for children in care.
 - There is a need to go much further and faster.

- There is a need for strong leadership by Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children's Services, as corporate parents, to raise all local authorities to the standards of the best local authorities.
- There needs to be a change of culture in every local authority so that children are listened to more on all key issues.

For each aspect of Care Matters, the report identifies what the government has already done, what works well and priorities for action in 2010. The following provides a summary of the key issues and the implications for Middlesbrough.

CORPORATE PARENTING

12. What works

- The Director of Children's Services (DCS) and Lead Member for Children's Services (LMCS) take a personal interest in leading corporate parenting arrangements in the local authority and the Children's Trust.
- The Children and Young People's Plan sets out how the Children's Trust will address the needs of children looked after and care leavers, including transitions to adult services and the provision of adult services for parents and carers.
- Outcomes for children looked after are regarded as a barometer of success for the whole authority.
- Elected Members are trained, knowledgeable and regularly review services with officers on the basis of sound management information (both quantitative and qualitative).

13. Government priorities for 2010

- Work with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) to ensure corporate parenting is a priority.
- Review progress via inspection reports and, where an 'inadequate' judgement is given, consider whether support or intervention is appropriate.
- Continue to ensure the effective participation of children and young people in developing policy and practice.
- Ensure that the revised National Minimum Standards for foster care, residential care and adoption stress the importance of listening and responding to children in care.
- Hold a series of consultation events with children and young people to inform the stocktake report for 2010.

14. Implications for Middlesbrough

- Corporate parenting arrangements are being reviewed in light of the statutory guidance to the DCS & LMCS.
- The Children's Trust Board has signed up to the Pledge and the Children and Young People's Plan (which is currently being updated) already identifies some actions relating to children looked after and care leavers.
- The Corporate Parenting Board regularly advises the Executive on issues relating to the monitoring and review of services for children looked after.

FAMILY & PARENTING SUPPORT

15. What works

- The DCS & LMCS ensure that there is a comprehensive "Think Family" approach that includes Family Intervention Projects, Parenting Early Intervention

Programmes and the use of Multisystemic Therapy to support families where children are at risk of coming into care or custody.

- Supporting kinship care for children who are not looked after and placing children in 'family and friends' care in a planned and structured way.
- Having a robust 'reunification' strategy for supporting children to return home.
- Providing short breaks to families of disabled children.

16. **Government priorities for 2010**

- Work with the ADCS and a new National Family Intervention Strategy Group to drive the family support agenda. This will include the continued roll out of Family Intervention Projects to achieve a national target of 10,000 families per year from 2011, supported by additional funding of £26 million.
- Encourage local authorities, children's trusts and primary care trusts to commission evidence-based programmes (such as multi-systemic therapy) as part of the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) strategy.
- Amend the Children Act 1989, revise the associated statutory guidance and make additional regulations under the act with regard to:
 - ❖ Local authorities retaining legal and financial responsibility for children who meet the criteria for looked after status, even where the child is placed with a relative.
 - ❖ Expectations of an effective service to support family and friends carers, including regulations with regard to the provision of financial support.
 - ❖ Continuing to work with birth parents whilst children are in care and requiring that all children who return home have a child in need plan that is reviewed regularly.
 - ❖ Improving the regulatory framework around the use of short break care to support families under stress.

17. **Implications for Middlesbrough**

- The need to strengthen the role of preventative services has been recognised and is being addressed.
- Policies and procedures in relation to Family Network care have been in place for some time.
- A Resolution and Reunification Resource was established in partnership with Five Rivers in May 2009.
- Middlesbrough has already met its targets under the Aiming High initiative in relation to increasing the number of short breaks provided during 2009-2010.
- Any new regulations and statutory guidance will require careful consideration, particularly in relation to identifying potential financial implications.

CARE PLACEMENTS

18. **What works**

- The DCS & LMCS have good management information on placement stability. There is a clear understanding of local needs that informs market development and commissioning, supported by robust quality assurance mechanisms.
- Avoid emergency placements and invest in matching children with carers, including children with disabilities, black and minority ethnic children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- Contingency planning identifies potential difficulties and ensures a range of support services is available to prevent placement breakdown (e.g. CAMHS).

- Regular reviews ensure continuing suitability of placement and the views of children and their families are fully taken into account.

NB Middlesbrough's training and support for foster carers and their sons and daughters is included within the report as an example of 'Care Matters in Action'.

19. **Government priorities for 2010**

- Roll out the 'Fostering Changes' programme of training and support for foster carers to help prevent placement breakdown. Linked to Children's Workforce Development Council professional development framework and supported by National Minimum Standards for foster and residential care.
- Increase the number of local authorities commissioning multi-dimensional treatment foster care, which provides close supervision and therapeutic interventions.
- Amend regulations to require the annual review of foster placement agreements and to ensure clarity in relation to delegated decision-making.
- Develop new statutory guidance and regulations under the Children and Young Person's Act 2008. This will include expectations for the delivery of advice, support and assistance to children placed out of area.

20. **Implications for Middlesbrough**

- The training and support offered to foster carers has already been reviewed and changes are underway to comply with the new standards that will be monitored by Ofsted. As reported to the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2009, this will cause some pressure in terms of staff time and financial resources.
- Any new regulations and statutory guidance will require careful consideration, particularly in relation to identifying the potential financial implications.

DELIVERING A FIRST CLASS EDUCATION

21. **What works**

- The DCS and LMCS prioritise the improvement of children's educational attainments, as a barometer of success.
- Children are in stable care placements with stable school placements.
- The Virtual School Head monitors children's progress, holds schools to account and works with designated teachers to ensure children receive individual tutoring and personalised support that lasts into higher education, where appropriate.
- Children with special educational needs receive integrated assessments and support. The particular needs of excluded groups and black and ethnic minority groups are taken into account in assessments and Personal Education Plans.

22. **Government priorities for 2010**

- Ensure each local authority has a senior official or Virtual School Head who promotes the educational achievements of children in care on the basis of good data collection and performance management.
- Embed evidence-based approaches to raising attainment identified by the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) and the Virtual School Head pilot projects.
- Ensure school initiatives on narrowing the gap and improving attainment focus on children in care and that they are a priority in the roll-out of one-to-one tuition.
- Issue statutory guidance for designated teachers.

- Introduce new regulations and statutory guidance to strengthen the role of Independent Reviewing Officers in ensuring educational needs are met. Emphasise that significant changes to care plans, such as a change of school, should take place only following a review.

23. **Implications for Middlesbrough**

- An Adviser for Vulnerable Children was appointed in September 2009 and will take on some of the responsibilities of a virtual head teacher.
- The Deputy Director for Achievement is working with School Improvement Partnerships to ensure children looked after receive the support that they need.
- The Education of Looked After Children team already provides training and support to designated teachers.

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

24. **What works**

- The DCS & LMCS ensure that Children's Trust arrangements support the effective co-ordination and commissioning of health services, including Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Strategies to address health inequalities and health promotion include specific actions to support children in care. Foster carers receive training on health, hygiene and health promotion.
- There is dedicated CAMHS provision for children in care. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is used to support referrals to targeted and specialist mental health services.
- All staff understand referral pathways to specialist services including substance misuse services and CAMHS.
- Health assessments inform care plans and systems are in place to ensure that children are registered with a GP and a dentist.
- Systems are in place to monitor whether the needs of children placed out of area, children with disabilities and black and minority ethnic children are being met.
- Pathway plans include actions relating to health and access to positive activities.

25. **Government priorities for 2010**

- Issue revised statutory guidance on the commissioning, delivery and inspection of health services for children in care.
- Promote the use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to support improvements in the planning, commissioning and delivery of local services.
- Ensure consistency and quality of health assessments.
- Work with stakeholders to improve health services for children placed out of authority.
- Ask the Centre for Excellence and Outcomes (C4EO) to build the capacity of Children's Trusts to improve the emotional health of children in care.
- Ensure children in care benefit from free positive activities delivered through the extended school subsidies for vulnerable groups.

26. **Implications for Middlesbrough**

- There are already robust systems in place for health assessments supported by the provision of a designated nurse/health co-ordinator for children looked after who also supports staff and foster carers in relation to health matters. (Reported to the Corporate Parenting Board in September 2009.)

- There is a dedicated Looked After Children CAMHS and close working with health commissioners to ensure appropriate services are available.
- Substance misuse services and the treatment plan have been commissioned and developed with direct input from young people in care. Most staff and foster carers have received relevant training on identification and referral.
- Access to positive activities is addressed within Personal Education Plans and Pathway Plans.

TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

27. What works

- The DCS & LMCS have high aspirations for care leavers and there is a philosophy that 'leaving care' is a gradual process.
- Commissioning strategies ensure that care leavers have a range of suitable supported accommodation options that include the option of supported lodgings with their existing foster carer. Strategies and plans take into account guidance on joint working between housing and children's services.
- A staged tailored programme of accommodation is in place whereby young people can learn from mistakes without limiting their future housing options.
- There are robust care planning and Pathway planning processes in place.
- Particular priority is given to supporting groups such as disabled young people, unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and those who have challenging or risky behaviour.
- The local authority takes an active part in the From Care2Work programme.

28. Government priorities for 2010

- Roll out From Care2 Work to all local authorities.
- Continue to fund the Staying Put: 18+ Family Care pilots.
- Share best practice and challenge poor performance.
- Consult on revised statutory guidance on planning transitions to adulthood, including specific guidance on vulnerable groups.

29. Implications for Middlesbrough

- Middlesbrough's active involvement in the national 'What Makes the Difference?' project means that most of the above issues have already been addressed. The Pathways Team has been asked to be a comparator authority, as part of a national research programme, because its work has been recognised as good practice.
- The Pathways Team has been responsible for supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking young people for some time.
- Close working between the Pathways Team and Connexions Personal Advisers supports access to employment. The team has signed up to 'From Care2 Work' and is currently developing a work plan.

GOOD PRACTICE ON THE FRONTLINE

30. What works

- The DCS & LMCS ensure there is a comprehensive approach to the recruitment, retention and development of staff and carers based on good management information, including user feedback on the support they receive from staff and carers.
- Induction training for all staff includes a module on children in care.

- Foster carers are trained and supported to develop their skills and have a supervising social worker.
- Children and young people are involved in training and development.
- Every child has a named Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO).

31. Government priorities for 2010

- Work with the Local Government Association and the Association of Directors of Children's Services to strengthen the role and skills of practitioners in light of the Social Work Task Force recommendations.
- Finalise and issue regulations and guidance which strengthen the role of the IRO and that children are entitled to the support of an independent advocate to make their views heard.

32. Implications for Middlesbrough

- Induction processes for staff and carers are being reviewed in the light of national minimum standards.
- The pre-existing 'Parenting the Public Child' mandatory staff training is being reviewed and will be delivered during 2010-2011.

SUMMARY

33. Overall, Middlesbrough is benefiting from the proactive approach that has been taken in relation to Every Child Matters and Care Matters, in that work has already been undertaken in respect of most of the key issues raised in the stocktake report. However, careful consideration will be needed to ensure that new statutory guidance is implemented appropriately. Further progress on Care Matters will be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board in due course.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

34. All social care services are delivered within a framework of anti-discriminatory practice and there are no specific issues arising from the information presented within this report.

OPTION APPRAISAL

35. Not applicable to this piece of work.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

36. There are no immediate financial or legal implications arising from this report. However, the introduction of new statutory guidance may have financial implications for the authority and this will be addressed once more information is available. This report will be of interest to all elected Members in their role as corporate parents.

RECOMMENDATION

37. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the Care Matters Ministerial Stocktake Report 2009.

REASONS

38. It is important that Members are aware of the findings of the Care Matters Ministerial Stocktake and the implications of the proposals for further changes, particularly in relation to new regulations and statutory guidance.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

39. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
- Care Matters Ministerial Stocktake Report 2009, Department for Children, Schools and Families
 - Reports to Corporate Parenting Board in February 2007 & September 2007
 - Report of Scrutiny of Aspects of Corporate Parenting October 2008

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