

## CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2010

### Corporate Parenting Arrangements in Middlesbrough

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#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Corporate Parenting Board on proposed changes to the corporate parenting arrangements in Middlesbrough.

#### BACKGROUND

2. In 1998, the government's 'Quality Protects' initiative made it clear that all elected Members have a responsibility to ensure that the Council fulfils its *“legal and moral duty to try to provide the kind of loyal support that any good parents would give to their children”*.
3. Subsequent guidance for Councillors reinforces this message:
  - *“Think Child”* (2000, Department of Health & Local Government Association)
  - *“If this were my child...”* (2003, Department for Education & Skills & Local Government Information Unit)
  - *“Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice”* (2008, National Children's Bureau)

In addition, guidance on Safeguarding, the *Care Matters* White Paper and recent guidance for Lead Members and Directors of Children's Services make specific reference to the corporate parenting responsibilities of elected Members and senior officers. Relevant guidance is summarised below.

***“If this were my child...”***

(2003, Department for Education & Skills & Local Government Information Unit)

4. This guidance linked certain responsibilities with certain roles within the Council as follows:
  - **All councillors**

“...have a basic level of responsibility for the children in their authority’s care. This requires there to be mechanisms for all councillors to receive accurate information and be able to find out about the basic issues faced by such children in their area.”
  - **Executive Members**

“The new political management structures place increasing responsibility on executive members to play a corporate leadership role as an individual, rather than as a leading member of a service committee. In taking this role forward, there are four major themes to consider:

    - ❖ the increasing importance of political leadership
    - ❖ the increasing emphasis on partnership and joined-up working
    - ❖ opportunities offered by the new structures to work in a more cross-cutting way, now formalised in the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* proposals for a lead member for Children [subsequently incorporated within the Children Act 2004].
    - ❖ issues around funding, setting priorities and commissioning.”
  - **Members involved in Scrutiny**

“The scrutiny function offers councillors a range of different and potentially exciting and innovative ways to fulfil their corporate parenting responsibilities. In some respects, councillors fulfilling their scrutiny function are closest to the vision set out in the original Secretary of State’s letter on corporate parenting, where he described councillors as the people in the system who have a responsibility to “bring a fresh look and common sense” and “ask demanding questions about the services and resources for children in your community”. (Dobson, 1998)”

***“Working Together to Safeguard Children”***

(2006, Department for Education & Skills)

5. This guidance sets out the responsibilities of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) in co-ordinating and ensuring the effectiveness of what their member organisations do individually and together to safeguard children. The scope of this role includes, *“work to safeguard and promote the well-being of groups of children who are potentially more vulnerable than the general population, e.g. children living away from home, children who have run away from home, children in custody or disabled children”*. The role of elected Members was identified as, *“to hold their organisation and its officers to account for their contribution to the effective functioning of the LSCB”*.

### **“Care Matters: Time for Change”**

(2007, Department for Education & Skills)

6. The *Care Matters* White Paper set out the steps the government intended to take to improve the outcomes of children and young people in care. The overall aim in relation to corporate parenting was to ensure *that “Children in care should be cared about, not just cared for”*. *Care Matters* emphasised the clear, statutory responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for improving corporate parenting, as embodied in the Children Act 2004. In particular, *Care Matters* introduced the concept of a local authority Pledge and recommended the introduction of a ‘Children in Care Council’.

### **“The Roles and Responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children’s Services and the Director of Children’s Services”**

(2009, Department for Children, Schools and Families)

7. The implications of this guidance for corporate parenting arrangements were previously considered by the Executive (15/9/09), at a Members’ seminar (15/10/09), and by the Corporate Parenting Board (29/10/09). The guidance clarifies the respective roles of the Lead Member (LM) and the Director of Children’s Services (DCS) and states that,  
“All members of the local authority have a shared responsibility for corporate parenting, but the LM [Lead Member] has the lead political role in ensuring that children looked after by the local authority have their interests protected, their opportunities maximised, their educational achievement enhanced, their voices heard and care services shaped to meet their needs.”  
The Lead Member’s responsibility for leading on corporate parenting is shared with the Council Leader, the Chief Executive and the Director of Children’s Services.
8. All of the above guidance and some regulations specify a range of information that elected Members should expect to receive on a regular basis.

## **ARRANGEMENTS IN MIDDLESBROUGH**

9. In summary, the existing arrangements for corporate parenting in Middlesbrough are as follows:
  - The Corporate Parenting Board advises the Executive on matters relating to children looked after.
  - The full Executive makes any decisions arising from the recommendations of the Corporate Parenting Board.
  - The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel fulfils the overview and scrutiny function on matters relating to children looked after.
  - Middlesbrough’s Constitution includes role profiles for all elected Members (as corporate parents) and for rota visitors.
  - Rota Visitors visit children’s residential facilities and a summary report is submitted to the Corporate Parenting Board.
  - The Middlesbrough Council & Five Rivers Partnership Board monitors the partnership arrangement and reports to the Corporate Parenting Board.

- The Family Placement Panel makes recommendations concerning children and carers.
- Elected Members act as champions for children looked after, as Ward Councillors and as school governors.
- The Corporate Management Team is responsible for ensuring that all services provide support to children looked after and contribute to fulfilling the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities.

## **Administration**

10. In terms of administration, full Council approves the remit of the Corporate Parenting Board, which includes requirements for membership. These include:
  - All Members of the Corporate Parenting Board are required to have initiated an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check within one month of their appointment to the Board, if a current enhanced check is not already in place.
  - The position of Chair of the Board may be held by any elected Member and membership should normally include the Lead Member for children's social care services, the Lead Member for adults' social care services and the Deputy Mayor.
  
11. In addition, meetings are usually attended by key officers acting in an advisory capacity. These include the Deputy Director, Safeguarding, the Specialist Services Manager, the Children's Participation Officer and an officer from Legal & Democratic Services. Other officers from within the Council and representatives of relevant external organisations attend on a regular basis to make reports to the Board. Children and young people who are looked after by the local authority also attend to present their views or to inform Members of activities.
  
12. The Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board reports to the Executive, as soon as is practical, following each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board. This report details the business that has been considered and highlights the Board's recommendations to the Executive in respect of any decisions that may be required. Decisions are made by the full Executive to ensure effective corporate decision-making and accountability in respect of the authority's corporate parenting responsibilities. The Deputy Mayor monitors the work of Executive Members with respect to corporate parenting.
  
13. Full Council approves the remit of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel, which reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Board. The Overview and Scrutiny Board makes recommendations to the local authority on the discharge of its functions.
  
14. Middlesbrough's Constitution which includes role profiles for Members, is reviewed on a regular basis by the Constitution Committee.
  
15. All elected Members are periodically invited to put themselves forwards to be a Rota Visitor. Rota Visitors must have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check and undertake training prior to carrying out their visits.

16. Membership of the Middlesbrough Council & Five Rivers Partnership Board includes the Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning and the Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board. The partnership board also includes the Deputy Director Safeguarding, the Specialist Services Manager and the Commissioning Manager from Children, Families & Learning, together with officers from Five Rivers.
17. The Family Placement Panel is an outside body and the Council's representative is selected by the Executive on an annual basis.
18. The Corporate Management Team receive copies of the Chair of Corporate Parenting Board's report to the Executive, for information, prior to its submission.

## **RATIONALE FOR CHANGE**

19. Corporate Parenting arrangements in Middlesbrough have consistently been recognised as good practice in previous external inspections and performance assessment processes.
21. However, such processes, which include Ofsted Inspections, existing and proposed Joint Inspections and the Comprehensive Area Assessment, now have a clear focus on services relating to safeguarding vulnerable groups, particularly children looked after. Indeed, performance in relation to services for children looked after is being used as a 'litmus test' for performance across the local authority and in a range of other statutory agencies.
22. Recent statutory guidance requires the Mayor, the Chief Executive, the Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning and the Director of Children, Families & Learning to fulfil specific roles in respect of safeguarding children and corporate parenting. This guidance was considered by the Executive on 15/9/09. In respect of corporate parenting, it was confirmed that the Corporate Parenting Board would continue to advise the Executive in relation to enabling the Council to fulfil its corporate parenting responsibilities and that the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel will continue to consider relevant safeguarding issues in its programme of work.
23. Some changes to administration in relation to corporate parenting are, therefore, necessary as a result of revised statutory guidance. This also provides an opportunity to ensure that all corporate parenting arrangements continue to be robust and effective and ensure that the Middlesbrough Children in Care Council is linked to corporate parenting arrangements.

## **PROPOSED CHANGES**

24. It is proposed that:
  - The Executive Member for Children, Families & Learning will undertake the role of Chair of Corporate Parenting Board.
  - The Chief Executive, the Director of Children, Families & Learning and the Deputy Director, Safeguarding will be ex officio members of the Corporate Parenting Board, acting in an advisory capacity.

- The Corporate Parenting Board will continue to meet six weekly to receive reports and hold issues focused events, involving others such as the Children in Care Council, on an alternating basis. Recommendations to the Executive will on made a quarterly basis.
- Following each meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board, any recommendations made by the Board will be referred to the relevant department, statutory agency or partnership organisation to enable their response to be included in the Chair's report to the Executive.
- Clear links between the Corporate Parenting Board and the proposed Children in Care Council will be established. This will include representation from the Children in Care Council on the Corporate Parenting Board and occasional forums on issues raised by children and young people.
- Further work is undertaken to review all other arrangements and mechanisms relating to corporate parenting. This will include:
  - ❖ The implementation and review of the Pledge.
  - ❖ Rota Visitors
  - ❖ Training for elected Members
  - ❖ Links with the Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children Board & the Children and Young People's Trust
  - ❖ Options for developing Champions for Children Looked After amongst officers across the Council and in partner organisations
  - ❖ Information provision

## **OPTION APPRAISAL/RISK ASSESSMENT**

25. Option 1 would be to do nothing and to continue with existing arrangements. This might lead to a lack of clarity about respective roles and responsibilities and possible confusion or duplication of effort. This option is not recommended.
26. Option 2 would be to accept the proposed changes. These changes will bring corporate parenting arrangements in line with the latest government guidance. Further work on existing arrangements will ensure that Middlesbrough continues to perform well in external inspection and performance assessment processes.

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

27. There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report and services for children, young people and their families affect all wards. The proposals in this report will enable the Council to comply with current statutory guidance on corporate parenting.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

28. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advised the Executive to approve the proposed changes in corporate parenting arrangements.

## REASON

29. Adopting this approach will clarify the roles and responsibilities of elected Members and senior managers and consolidate arrangements in relation to the authority's corporate parenting responsibilities.

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

30. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
- *Think Child* (2000, Department of Health & Local Government Association)
  - *If this were my child...* (2003, Department for Education & Skills & Local Government Information Unit)
  - *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2006, Department for Education & Skills)
  - *Care Matters: Time for change* (DfES, June 2007)
  - *Middlesbrough's Scrutiny Handbook* (2007, Middlesbrough Council)
  - *Putting Corporate Parenting into Practice* (2008, National Children's Bureau)
  - *The Roles and Responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services* (2009, DCSF)
  - Reports to the Corporate Parenting Board (25/6/2009 & 29/10/2009) and to Executive (15/9/2009)

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