

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Corporate Parenting Board

<p>Use of National Youth Advocacy Service April 2009 to March 2010</p>

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

Director of Children, Families & Learning: Gill Rollings

3rd August 2010

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To inform the Corporate Parenting Board of the use made by children and young people of the advocacy services provided under contract by the National Youth Advocacy Service.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the use made of the National Youth Advocacy Service.

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. The Children, Families & Learning Department Policy on Advocacy for Children, Young People and their Families (updated 2008) sets out a clear commitment to supporting access to advocacy services. This enables the authority to comply with statutory requirements regarding access to advocacy for children and young people making representations to the department.
6. The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) is contracted to provide advocacy services to children looked after and children in need under a joint arrangement with a number of other authorities. For the year 2009-2010, the contract related to Middlesbrough, Darlington, Hartlepool, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton. The contract was recently subject to a tendering process, which resulted in NYAS being awarded the contract until March 2014 to provide services to seven local authorities across the north-east. The contract is monitored on a quarterly basis.
7. NYAS is an independent national organisation, which operates a web site, an on-line youth club, a free telephone help line and a text service. Each young person contacting NYAS has access to their legal team for information, advice and representation should this prove to be an appropriate intervention. NYAS also provides specialist, independent mental health advocacy to young people subject to the Mental Health Act 2007.
8. All NYAS advocates complete an accredited training course and some specialise in a particular area, such as working with young people with communication difficulties or disabilities. They provide support over the telephone or by visiting the young person. Advocates help young people by:
 - talking things over with them
 - helping them to sort things out by themselves
 - accompanying them to meetings and/or writing letters for them
 - going to see people on their behalf if asked
 - advising them about the different ways of dealing with their problems and what the consequences might beNYAS advocates arrange contact with service users at times that are suitable to the young person. The Senior Advocate accepts the majority of referrals.
9. NYAS advocates have been present at a wide range of meetings including, Court, Planning Meetings, Looked after Reviews, Placement Meetings, Child Protection Conferences, Family Group Conferences, Exclusion Panel Hearings, Mental Health Tribunals and point-of-contact referrals. Advocates have also assisted young people in making complaints.
10. In relation to complaints, the children's Comments, Compliments and Complaints leaflet includes information about NYAS and other support organisations for young people. In addition, a copy of the NYAS leaflet is sent out with the letter of acknowledgement of receipt of a complaint from any child or young person. Staff also actively offer assistance to enable a child or young person to access an advocate where they are aware that they are making, or are intending to make, a complaint.

11. NYAS posters are on display in residential children's homes and in relevant offices. Information about complaints and advocacy is given to children and young people at the time of their initial assessment and at subsequent review meetings. Staff are proactive in encouraging and supporting young people to contact an advocate if they wish to do so.

LEVELS OF ACTIVITY IN MIDDLESBROUGH

12. Between April 2009 and March 2010, there were 42 new cases, 21 of which arose from self-referral by the child or young person. Other referrals came from a variety of sources:

Social Workers	8
Advocates	5
Foster Carers	2
Family Group Conference Co-ordinators	2
Independent Reviewing Officer	1
Hospital (in relation to mental health issues)	1
Parent	1
Residential home manager	1

13. Most cases included advocacy in relation to the young person's wishes and feelings in addition to a range of specific issues, which included:

• Placement	9
• Children's Rights & entitlements	5
• Contact with family	5
• Education	5
• Leaving Care & accommodation	5
• Change of name	2
• To remain in foster care	2
• Complaints	2
• Support re Reviews	2
• Support during Family Group Conference	2
• Bullying & safety in residential placements	2
• Rights under Mental Health Act	1

14. 10 cases that were opened prior to April 2009 were closed during the year. 21 cases were opened and closed within the year and at the end of March 2010, there were 21 cases ongoing. 16 males and 26 females, aged between 10 and 20 years, used the service. Of these, 30 were aged between 13 and 17 years.

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

15. National Youth Advocacy Services are delivered in accordance with national standards (Appendix 1) and the organisation is wholly committed to the Articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. There are no specific issues arising from the information presented within this report.

OPTION APPRAISAL

16. Not applicable to this report.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND WARD IMPLICATIONS

17. The National Youth Advocacy Service is under contract to provide advocacy services to children looked after and children in need from within existing budgets. This approach enables the local authority to comply with legal requirements. This report will be of interest to all Members.

RECOMMENDATION

18. It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to use of the National Youth Advocacy Service during 2009-2010.

REASONS

19. It is important that Members are aware of the provision made by the local authority to enable children and young people to access advocacy services and the take up of those services. This provision also enables the local authority to comply with its statutory duty to provide advocacy services to children and young people making, or intending to make, a complaint under the Children Act 1989.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- *Annual Report for the Boroughs of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees and Darlington*, National Youth Advocacy Service, April 2010
- *Advocacy for Children, Young People and their Families, Policy & Guidance*, Middlesbrough Council, January 2008

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Appendix 1

National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy Services

NYAS was a lead agency in developing the framework for the National Standards for the Provision of Children's Advocacy, published by the Department of Health in 2002.

Standard 1

Advocacy is led by the views and wishes of children and young people.

Standard 2

Advocacy champions the rights and needs of children and young people.

Standard 3

All advocacy services have clear policies to promote equalities issues and monitor services to ensure that no young person is discriminated against due to age, gender, race, culture, religion, language, disability or sexual orientation.

Standard 4

Advocacy is well-publicised, accessible and easy to use.

Standard 5

Advocacy provides help and advice quickly when it is requested.

Standard 6

Advocacy works exclusively for children and young people.

Standard 7

The advocacy service operates a high level of confidentiality and ensures that children, young people and other agencies are aware of its confidentiality policies.

Standard 8

Advocacy listens to the views and ideas of children and young people in order to improve the service provided.

Standard 9

The advocacy service has an effective and easy to use complaints procedure.

Standard 10

Advocacy is well-managed and gives value for money.