

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 3 August 2010.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Brunton, Dryden, Mawston, McIntyre and Rooney.

**OFFICERS:** S Harker, S Little, N Pocklington and J Wilson.

**\*\*APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors P Rogers and J A Walker.

**\*\*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 24 June 2010 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

**FAMILY PLACEMENT PANEL ACTIVITY REPORT OCTOBER 2009-MARCH 2010**

The Interim Family Placement Manager presented a report to provide the Board with an overview of the activity of Middlesbrough's Family Placement Panel during the period 1 October 2009 to 31 March 2010.

Middlesbrough Council had an established Family Placement Panel that met the legal requirements in relation to fostering and adoption and could consider cases from both aspects of family placement work. The Panel played a key role in promoting the welfare of vulnerable children in public care. The Panel had ten members and was serviced by officers from the Legal Department, Members' Office and the Family Placement Service. It used to meet fortnightly for half a day, however in recent months the volume of work had been such that weekly meetings had been scheduled and this was likely to continue for the rest of the current year.

During the period 1 October 2009 to 31 March 2010, the Family Placement Panel met on seventeen occasions. Details of activity in each category during the six-month reporting period were included at paragraph ten of the submitted report. It was highlighted that one foster carer was de-registered and the reason for de-registration related to concerns about the standard of care provided. For comparison purposes a table showing items considered by the Panel over the previous eighteen-month period was also included in the submitted report at paragraph twelve.

It was highlighted that the Panel had received a report for consultation and this concerned a planned match that had not gone ahead. The Panel discussed the case in order to learn from the experience and OFSTED, who were in attendance at that meeting, had reported that the Panel had given robust consideration to the child.

The number of reports deferred had dropped from twelve to seven, and quality assurance checking of all reports continued. Mandatory training would be held in October for all staff to ensure they understood what was expected of them at Panel, and Team Managers would attend Panel meetings to observe.

It was noted that the number of new foster carers approved during the last eighteen months was low. Recruitment of foster carers was a national problem, however, there were specific issues relating to recruitment and retention of foster carers in Middlesbrough. Recent research had shown that Middlesbrough had a more transient population than other similar towns and the age profile of foster carers tended to be older. Joint working had taken place with Redcar and Cleveland on recruitment and training and this was going to be extended to Stockton to try and move people through the process quicker. It was anticipated that there would be up to four

preparation groups per year. On a positive note, there had been a noticeable increase in the number of applications in the last year and there were currently eighteen assessments in progress.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Executive be advised to note the information relating to the Family Placement Panel.

## **CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER STATISTICAL UPDATE**

The Deputy Director, Safeguarding, presented a report to provide the Board with statistical information regarding Children Looked After (CLA) by Middlesbrough Council.

As at 31 March 2010, there were 325 children looked after by Middlesbrough Council. This represented a 19% increase on March 2009, when there were 274 CLA and compared with a 1.5% increase between March 2008 and March 2009. The number of CLA per ten thousand 0-17 year olds had continued to rise, reaching 103 per ten thousand in 2009/2010. This compared with 88 for Middlesbrough in 2008/2009 when the average for England was 55 and the average for Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours was 79.

During 2009/2010, 187 children became looked after, compared with 152 during 2008/2009, which was a 23% increase. A table showing the wards in which those children were living at the time they were taken into care was included at paragraph nine of the submitted report. There were no significant changes to information presented previously.

With regard to placements, two categories showed a significant increase in the number of young people placed, which were adoption and independent living/lodgings. The number of children in Middlesbrough Children's Homes had dropped to 8, against the maximum capacity for local provision of 11. The proportion of children and young people placed with foster carers had remained fairly consistent over the past three years, reducing by 2% between 2008 and 2010.

Stability of placements had improved slightly but was still of concern because resources were stretched. Team Managers held a monthly performance clinic to identify those children on a second placement and the support needed to ensure that they did not have another move.

The significant increase in CLA had led to an increased workload, with insufficient social workers to maintain support levels for placements. Actions to improve performance in 2010/2011 included ensuring that plans to maintain stability were observed and agreed, that resources to maintain stability were discussed and identified and recruitment of foster carers was increased to reduce pressure on placements.

A number of foster carers had been reviewed as there were some who had not been caring for a while but were still registered. A recruitment campaign had been successful and it was anticipated that there would be approximately 19 new carers approved between April and October this year.

Educational achievement of CLA showed a significant improvement at Key Stage 2 in both English and Mathematics and the levels attained. Performance at Key Stage 2 had returned to levels above both the national and statistical neighbour averages for both subjects. Performance overall for GCSE needed further improvement and it was noted that the statistics related to very small cohorts of children.

The cohort of care leavers was also small each year and in 2009/2010 there were 21 care leavers compared with 16 in 2008/2009. This could result in significant changes in performance year on year, based on the outcomes for one or two young people. Both of the national indicators for care leavers showed year on year improvement. The percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation (NI 147) at 95.2% remained above the available national comparator level for 2008/2009 and was in line with statistical neighbours. All but one care leaver was deemed to be in suitable accommodation as at 31 March 2010.

The percentage of care leavers in employment, education or training (NI 148) at 66.7% showed sustained improvement and remained broadly in line with both the available national and statistical neighbour comparators for 2008/2009.

In discussion, Members asked that future statistical information include a more detailed breakdown of the placements currently categorised as 'independent living/lodgings/other'. Members were informed that, of approximately 7,000 contacts made to Safeguarding Services in a year only 2,600 became referrals requiring specialist intervention. Work was underway to review access systems to support earlier intervention by preventative services via the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Executive be advised to note the statistical update on Children Looked After.

## **MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2010**

The Service Manager presented a report to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with:

- information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service during the year 2009/2010 and plans for the year 2010/2011.
- the Statement of Purpose for Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2010/2011.
- the Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2010/2011.

A summary of the main areas of activity of the Adoption Service during 2009/2010 was included at paragraph nine of the submitted report. During the past year, the new structure of the Adoption Team had taken effect. There had been significant staff changes, with two social workers leaving the team and a delay in appointing to their posts. The team benefited from having a final-year student on placement for nine months.

The Adoption Service had had a steady flow of enquiries throughout the year. However, there was less activity in terms of enquiries, applications and approvals. A contributing factor was that the service closed its list to new applicants in February 2009 and did not re-open it until June 2009. This decision related to having a number of approved adopters already waiting for placements. These adopters had gone on to be matched and there was now a shortage.

A preparation group was planned for June 2010, however there were no applicants to attend. It was anticipated that a group would run in September 2010 and a focussed recruitment campaign would be implemented during the summer.

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 children looked after. The number of children with adoption plans approved by Family Placement Panel during 2009/2010 was twenty-seven, which was the highest level for the last five years. In terms of the ethnicity of these children, twenty-six were white British and one was of mixed ethnicity. The figures presented in the submitted report illustrated that the Adoption Service was performing well and achieving very positive outcomes for children.

In the past year there had been a significant increase in the workload of the Adoption Service. Evidence from the past two years showed an increasing upward trend of children with adoption plans. There was already evidence that this trend would continue throughout the year ahead, as monitoring showed that in the period from 1 April to 31 July 2010, there had been a total of eleven children who had had adoption plans approved by Family Placement Panel. This meant that the main issue for the Adoption Service in the year ahead would be to maintain the high standard of service when taking into account a substantial increase in workload.

In the circumstances, the capacity to develop new services would be limited. However a mentoring scheme for prospective and newly approved adopters had been introduced. The service would continue to develop post-adoption services, working closely with After Adoption (an independent agency). The Service would also encourage birth families to maintain contact with their children. The Assistant Team Manager (Adoption) would offer to visit all birth families

where the plan was for adoption and explain about the processes, contact and Post Box arrangements.

The Statement of Purpose for 2010/2011 for Middlesbrough Adoption Service was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service for 2009/2010 was attached at Appendix 2 to the submitted report. These documents contained information as required by the Regulations.

It was suggested that the content and layout of the statement of purpose should be reviewed to assess whether it could be made more user-friendly whilst also providing the statutory information required.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive as follows:

1. to note the information relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service.
2. to formally approve the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2010-2011.
3. to agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.

### **SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 10 – ORDER OF BUSINESS**

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 10, the Committee agreed to vary the order of business to deal with the items in the following order: Agenda Item 8, Agenda Item 7, Agenda Item 9, Agenda Item 10 and Agenda Item 11.

### **MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2010**

The Service Manager presented a report to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with:

- information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service during the year 2009/2010 and plans for the year 2010/2011.
- the Statement of Purpose for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2010/2011.
- the Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2010/2011.

A summary of the main areas of activity of the Fostering Service during 2009/2010 was included in the submitted report at paragraph six. Over the last 12 months the Fostering Service had experienced a period of staff shortage due to two members of staff having extended periods of illness and one vacancy arising from the post holder leaving the team. From April 2010, the team had been back to full capacity. Despite staffing pressures, the team had run four fostering preparation groups and was currently meeting its recruitment targets for new carers. However, due to the number of carers who had either retired or been de-registered from the Service, this increased activity had not had the desired impact in terms of numbers of placements.

The Fostering Service provided a programme of post-approval training for registered foster carers and they also had opportunities to attend courses that 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 monthly workshops aimed at supporting carers to complete the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards. 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 foster carers.

A key task during the coming year would be the continued implementation of a new set of standards issued by the CWDC relating to the training and support of foster carers. All fostering services were required to comply with these standards by 2011 and compliance will be monitored by OFSTED as part of the inspection of the Fostering Service. Implementation of these standards meant that the Fostering Service had to review the way it provided training and support to foster carers. This process had already started and would continue during the year ahead. The service would no longer provide a programme of four group training sessions per year but instead would

offer a wider variety of topics with more flexibility in terms of the timing and the method of delivery. The training would be targeted to the individual needs of the foster carers and each carer would have a Personal Development Plan. There was a significant cost associated with the implementation of the CWDC standards, as the organisation and provision of the necessary training and support caused 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, despite the positive trend. Recruitment of foster carers was a competitive market and although there had been considerable progress in making Middlesbrough more attractive in terms of allowances, there was no room for complacency. In the last six months, Middlesbrough had collaborated with Redcar and Cleveland to facilitate preparation for training for foster carers. This had allowed the opportunity to maximise scarce staffing resources and reduce the time prospective carers had to wait for a group. Further collaboration which might include other neighbouring authorities was anticipated during the coming year.

Work on developing a new payments database, which was compatible with SWIFT and ICS, had continued during the last year, and it was now planned to be implemented in September 2010.

The Statement of Purpose for 2010/2011 for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service was attached at Appendix 1. The Children's Guide to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2010/2011 was attached at Appendix 2. Both documents complied with statutory regulations.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive as follows:

1. to note the information relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service.
2. to formally approve the Statement of Purpose and the Children's Guide for 2010-2011.
3. to agree that the next annual review of these documents should take place in April 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.

## **INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER'S ANNUAL REPORT**

The Deputy Director Safeguarding presented the Independent Reviewing Officer's Annual Report to provide the Board with an update on issues for Children Looked After (CLA) in Middlesbrough.

There were currently 4.6 Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) in Middlesbrough, responsible for reviewing all plans for CLA and those who were not subject to a Child Protection Plan. In addition, IROs carried out foster carer reviews and disruption meetings, trained staff, and provided quality assurance in auditing and case work. To support the IROs there were 1.6 admin support staff responsible for convening and recording the review details and distribution of the minutes from the review.

Staffing difficulties experienced in early 2008 had been resolved and in May 2009 the Unit was fully staffed. However, given the recent increase in CLA, reviews being held within required timescales were showing a significant decrease. The current caseload for the IRO was above average for the region at 150 cases per IRO, and this had resulted in other aspects of the role not being fully carried out, such as the training and development work. The number of reviews not held within the timescale was currently 30.1%.

IROs provided a quality assurance role and carried out audits of case files prior to reviews taking place. Difficulties were being experienced in relation to the new electronic system that was in its initial stages of implementation. By December 2010 the Integrated Children's System (ICS) would be fully implemented and one process would be embedded. At the present time the Authority was working with both paper and electronic records. Audit tools were being developed to accommodate the new changes.

Statutory Guidance for IROs and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review for CLA had been issued in the form of a handbook. The Handbook aimed to extend the functions of the IRO to ensure the child was properly consulted on matters relating to his/her care and was given time to contribute to the content of the review. The guidance highlighted the need for the IRO to see and speak to the child prior to the review taking

place. A further change of function was to give the IRO the flexibility to adjourn review meetings if they felt the process would be unproductive. This could be used if there was a lack of documentation or because the child had not been consulted about the process by their social worker.

During 2009, the numbers of children being made subject to a child protection plan and also for children becoming looked after had increased. This put increased pressure on the Unit to meet commitments in the reviewing processes. In order to deal with the lack of capacity the Local Authority agreed to employ agency staff who provided necessary cover to allow meetings for children to go ahead. These additional staff would be in place for a few more months and a review was underway to establish the necessary statutory functions of the IROs in an attempt to streamline caseloads and workflow.

A report had been submitted to the Council's Corporate Management Team to highlight the changes in the IRO Handbook and a proposal for additional IROs and support services to accommodate the changes. The report also highlighted the need for a market supplement to be considered to align the salary of the IRO to a comparable rate with other authorities for retention and recruitment purposes.

The increase in CLA had put considerable strain on social workers to effectively carry out visits. However, IROs reported that children were continuing to be seen and systems were in place to allow for communications to take place via text messaging or email. A review of the Authority's visiting frequency was being proposed.

The Local Authority held formal performance clinics in order to monitor team performance against national indicators. The clinics were invaluable in maintaining standards for children in the looked after system and avoiding delays in planning for children. A recent scrutiny panel was established in January 2010 which, among other purposes, served to provide an overview of cases in relation to kinship care, placement with parents regulations, or approval for long-term plans for children over 12 years of age. Once approved these plans were then referred to the Deputy Director, Safeguarding, for consideration and authorisation.

Placement stability was recognised as contributing to keeping children and young people safe and was a key element of the Performance Indicator framework. A table showing the key indicators in relation to placement stability and the Authority's performance over the past three years was included in the submitted report at paragraph twenty.

Capacity issues meant that the reviewing of Pathway Plans for young people leaving care did not take place at present. Discussion had taken place with the Manager of the Pathways Team to ensure this would happen when the current situation changed.

The Local Authority distributed weekly information updates to Case Managers about the activity of cases to social workers. This allowed for effective monitoring in supervision and kept social workers abreast of the national indicators they were working towards.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to Children Looked After and the reviewing processes.

#### **USE OF NATIONAL YOUTH ADVOCACY SERVICE APRIL 2009 TO MARCH 2010**

The National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) was contracted to provide advocacy services to children looked after and children in need under a joint arrangement with a number of other authorities. NYAS was recently awarded the contract to provide services to seven local authorities across the north-east until March 2014. The contract was monitored on a quarterly basis. Middlesbrough was by far the highest user of the service across the Tees Valley and young people were supported and encouraged to access the service.

NYAS was an independent national organisation, which operated a website, an on-line youth club, a free telephone helpline and a text service. Each young person contacting NYAS had access to their legal team for information, advice and representation. NYAS also provided specialist, independent mental health advocacy to young people subject to the Mental Health Act 2007. All

NYAS advocates completed an accredited training course and some specialised in a particular area, such as working with young people with communication difficulties or disabilities. They provided support over the telephone or by visiting the young person.

Advocates helped 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 and advising them about the different ways of dealing with their problems and what the consequences might be. All young people accessing the service were asked to complete an evaluation sheet.

NYAS advocates had been presented 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 had also assisted young people in making complaints.

In relation to complaints, the children's Comments, Compliments and Complaints leaflet included information about NYAS and other support organisations for young people. In addition, a copy of the NYAS leaflet was sent out with the letter of acknowledgement of receipt of a complaint from any child or young person. Staff also actively offered assistance to enable a child or young person to access an advocate where they were aware that they were making, or intended to make, a complaint.

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

**RECOMMENDED** that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information relating to the National Youth Advocacy Service.

## **PROGRESS ON VIRTUAL SCHOOL**

The Deputy Director, Safeguarding, updated Members on developments regarding the Virtual School for Children Looked After (CLA). The vision for the Virtual School was to ensure that CLA accessed the highest quality provision and support to meet their individual needs, and had barriers to their progress identified and removed to ensure they maximised their potential and achieved success.

The Virtual School would have features in common with any conventional school and the quality of teaching and learning, curriculum care and guidance and support would all be critical aspects. Following DfE advice, the Virtual School Headteacher role would be integrated with the Looked After Children Education Service and other Local Authority services to form the Virtual School.

Virtual Schools were required to have systems, including data tracking, which were consistent across all schools that the Authority's CLA attended. The way the Virtual School engaged with each school would follow a clear and agreed set of protocols within which both support and challenge would operate to secure the best outcomes for young people.

All Headteachers and Designated Virtual School Headteachers had recently been sent a letter outlining the Local Authority's Statutory duties in relation to CLA. The Authority had requested two specific actions from school leaders to enable the Virtual School to operate effectively as follows:

1. A Pupil Tracking System would be piloted working closely with the Local Authority's Data Management Team. Additional termly teacher assessment data on CLA had been requested in order to test the functionality of the system.
2. Completion of a CLA Audit Tool. The information provided would be used for individual school development of the role of Designated Teacher as well as informing knowledge of the wider picture across Middlesbrough. Information from the audit would be confidential and would help to inform the support that would be developed through the Virtual School.

**RECOMMENDED** that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to note the information provided in relation to the Virtual School Programme.