

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 10 November 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillors Budd, Brunton, Dryden, P Purvis, Rooney and J A Walker.

OFFICERS: A Coulson, S Harker, I Parker, N Pocklington, J Wilson and L Woodhouse,

****ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr B Simpson.
Representatives from the Children in Care Council.

****APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Harvey, C Hobson, G Purvis and Thompson.

****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 29 September were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011

A report was presented to provide the Board with information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service during the year 2010/11 and plans for 2011/2012, the Statement of Purpose and the draft Children's Guide for 2011/2012.

The draft Children's Guides to Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service for 2011/2012 were attached as Appendix 2 and Appendix 2B to the submitted report. There were two guides; one for the younger age group and one for the older age group. Both documents had been updated and were linked to The Pledge.

Representatives of the Children in Care Council (CICC) who were present at the meeting provided the following comments:

- Both documents were too big in size and too long in content.
- The booklets needed to be smaller in size and designed using The Pledge branding.
- There was no mention of The Pledge or the Children in Care Council in the booklets.
- It would be helpful to have photographs of the people who worked in the Fostering Service included.
- Some of the language used needed re-wording to make it more user-friendly.
- The Complaints Section could be reduced as there was a separate information booklet available about complaints.

The CICC liked the idea that children and young people would receive this information.

The CICC suggested that it would be useful if the agenda and reports for the Corporate Parenting Board could be circulated two weeks in advance of the meeting to allow representatives to decide which items they could provide feedback on. It was highlighted that this was not possible due to the Council's statutory timescales for the distribution of Committee agendas.

It was agreed that the CICC would work closely with the Fostering Service to review both documents and incorporate the suggestions made.

A summary of the main areas of activity of the Fostering Service during 2010/2011 was detailed in the submitted report. It had been a very busy year for the Team with 150 initial enquiries received. There had been 48 requests for initial visits and 5 applications. Thirteen foster carers

had been approved and 15 had been de-registered. The total number of approved foster carers on 31 March 2011 was 79. A number of foster carers had retired during the year and the majority of current foster carers were over 55 years of age.

The Fostering Team had had a period of relative stability, although two staff members had retired and others moved to new posts. Four new staff had been recruited via the redeployment process including two Social Workers, one Support Worker, a Training and Development Officer and a Team Manager. Staff recruited to the new posts would cover both the Fostering and Adoption teams in order to respond to the needs and pressures on any one part of the service.

Foster carers had had opportunities to attend in-house training programmes, those run by the Local Safeguarding Children Board, and some run by external organisations. The Fostering Service continued to implement the standards issued by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC), relating to the training and support of foster carers.

Recruitment and retention of foster carers remained a challenge, despite a recent positive trend. Middlesbrough had collaborated with Redcar and Cleveland to facilitate preparation training for foster carers. This had utilised scarce staffing resources and also reduced the time prospective carers had to wait for a preparation group.

The Service had been proactive in looking at ways to advertise freely or cheaply. Schools had been particularly helpful, targeting parents via newsletters and providing free coverage on display screens in school. Most foster carers came to the Local Authority by word of mouth, although some had been recruited from targeted campaigns. The Service was also currently working with the Press Officer to raise the profile of foster carers through publishing some human interest stories from in-house carers.

It was highlighted that Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) were experiencing the same difficulties recruiting carers as Local Authorities. Several foster carers had recently returned to the Local Authority having found the support they had received from IFAs was not as good as they had anticipated.

With regard to allowances, Middlesbrough operated a banding scheme. Foster carers worked their way through the bands according to their experience and the training they had undertaken. In addition, on a case-by-case basis, an additional allowance might be paid to a carer, for example, to keep a large sibling group of children together in a single placement.

Work on developing a new payments database, which was compatible with SWIFT and ICS, had continued and was planned to be implemented as soon as possible.

The Statement of Purpose for 2011/2012 for Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report. All information required by the Regulations was included in the report.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:

1. note that the CICC would work with the Fostering Service to review both Fostering Booklets and present final versions to a future meeting of the Board for approval.
2. note the information provided relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Fostering Service.
3. formally approve the Statement of Purpose for 2011/2012.
4. agree that the next annual review of the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide should take place in April 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2011

A report was presented to provide the Board with information about the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service during the year 2010/11 and plans for 2011/2012, the Statement of Purpose and the draft Children's Guide for 2011/2012.

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 2010/2011 was 22 and a summary of the profiles of those children was provided in the submitted report.

Although the Adoption Team had been settled throughout most of 2010/2011, one member of the Team had now retired and another two would be moving to new posts in other local authorities. One full time and one part time post had now been recruited to and the new staff members would take up their new roles from the end of 2011. A final year student would also take up post in November 2011 until April 2012.

There was an increasing upward trend of the numbers of children who had adoption plans. Eighteen plans had been approved by the Family Placement Panel since April 2011. Middlesbrough currently had 31 children for whom the plan was adoption and who were waiting, but had not yet been matched with adopters. Middlesbrough would need to purchase approved adopters from other agencies in order to place these children. The cost this would incur varied considerably, depending on the provider. The age and developmental difficulties of some of the children waiting also impacted on costs and the ability to seek and match the best adopters within recommended timescales.

Initial visits to prospective adopters had decreased since April 2011. A preparation group for four couples had taken place during in October 2011 and places were also taken by neighbouring authorities to enable the group to run. Due to the decrease in adopters approved by Middlesbrough, adopters approved by other agencies had to be considered. The number of approved adopters was decreasing nationally and all local authorities were competing for a smaller pool of potential matches.

The Service had been proactively researching areas of advertising including magazines, television, radio and involving approved adopters in the recruitment strategy. Arrangements had been made for advertising in bus shelters and a campaign during Adoption Week in October 2012.

Middlesbrough had been placed forty-sixth in the national league tables in respect of adoption. The league tables indicated the percentage of looked after children who were adopted over a given period and the percentage of those, within the same period, that were adopted within 12 months of the plan for adoption being agreed.

Middlesbrough was working with Barnardo's, in partnership with Coram, an Adoption Agency, on the 'Better Paths Project'. This project was funded by the Department for Education (DfE) and was aimed at reducing delay within adoption processes. It was hoped that the project would highlight where Middlesbrough could improve, with the ultimate aim of finding placements for children in a more timely way. The outcome of the work would be available by Spring 2012 and would be reported to the Corporate Parenting Board via the next Annual Report of the Adoption Service.

Breakdowns in adoptive placements were extremely rare and if this occurred a Disruption Meeting would be held to help inform the way the child would be matched in future. It was suggested that it would be useful to include statistical information regarding breakdowns in future Annual Reports.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:

1. note the information provided relating to the activity of Middlesbrough Council Adoption Service.
2. formally approve the Statement of Purpose for 2011/2012.
3. agree that the next annual review of the Statement of Purpose and Children's Guide should take place in April 2012 or as soon as possible thereafter.

PROTOCOL FOR INVOLVING MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL'S FOSTER CARERS IN THE WORK OF THE CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A report was presented, the purpose of which was to approve the process for the involvement of Foster Carers in the Corporate Parenting Board. A draft protocol was attached at Appendix 1 to the submitted report.

The current representative was standing down and an alternative representative needed to be identified. Foster Carers had been invited to express their interest in the role.

The Corporate Parenting Board was established in 2000 and it was agreed that a Foster Carer would be invited to attend meetings. Since then, individual volunteers had undertaken this role. The establishment of a local Foster Care Forum now enabled this valued contribution to be put on a more formal footing, with transparent procedures to govern the process.

It was suggested that, the local Foster Care Forum would be invited, on a bi-annual basis, to identify a Foster Carer to attend Corporate Parenting Board meetings. The Foster Carer would serve as a non-voting member of the Corporate Parenting Board for a two-year term of office, renewable for a further two-year period.

The Foster Carer would not be expected to represent all Foster Carers who looked after Middlesbrough's children, but would be invited to share their valuable knowledge and expertise in relation to caring for children within Middlesbrough. The Foster Carer would be expected to observe a high level of confidentiality and would be invited to sign up to Middlesbrough Council's Members' Code of Conduct.

RECOMMENDED that the Corporate Parenting Board advise the Executive to:

1. note the information provided relating to the Protocol.
2. formally approve the process outlined within the protocol, for the involvement of Foster Carers in Middlesbrough Council's Corporate Parenting Board.

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS

Thanks

The Chair and Members of the Panel extended thanks to Brian Simpson for his attendance at Board meetings and contributions during the last ten years.

Training for Members

The Chair reminded Members that a training session on the Children and Care Council and Communication had been arranged for 1.00 pm on Wednesday 23 November 2011 in the Mandela Room and all were invited to attend.