

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO DECISION SCHEDULE



Tuesday 8 May 2012

at 10.00 a.m.

in Committee Room C,
Civic Centre, Hartlepool.

The Cabinet Member responsible for Children's Services will consider the following items.

1. **KEY DECISIONS**

No items.

2. **OTHER ITEMS REQUIRING DECISION**

- 2.1 Appointment of Local Authority Representatives to Serve on School Governing Bodies – *Director of Child and Adult Services*
- 2.2 Adoption Annual Report 2011/2012 and Statement of Purpose 2012/2013 – *Director of Child and Adult Services*
- 2.3 Fostering Services Annual Report 2011/12 and Statement of Purpose 2012/13 - *Director of Child and Adult Services*

3. **ITEMS FOR INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Improving the Safety and Wellbeing of Local Adolescents - *Director of Child and Adult Services*

4. **REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW OF SCRUTINY FORUMS**

No items.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO
Report to Portfolio Holder
8 May 2012



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY
REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE ON SCHOOL
GOVERNING BODIES

SUMMARY

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To request the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services consideration and approval of the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee in respect of the appointment of Local Authority representative Governors to serve on school governing bodies.

2 SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The report summarises the process for inviting applications for representative governors and the criteria for their selection.

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

It is the responsibility of the Portfolio Holder to decide the appointment of Local Authority representative school governors following advice from the General Purposes Sub Committee.

4 TYPE OF DECISION

Non-key decision.

5 DECISION MAKING ROUTE

Portfolio Holder's meeting on 8 May 2012.

6 DECISION(S) REQUIRED

Approval by the Portfolio Holder of the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee, in respect of the appointment of representative Governors to serve on school governing bodies, where, interest has been expressed in the vacancies.

Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: APPOINTMENT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY
REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE ON SCHOOL
GOVERNING BODIES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

To request the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services consideration and approval of the recommendations of the General Purposes Committee in respect of the appointment of Local Authority representative governors to serve on school governing bodies where, interest has been expressed in the vacancies.

2. BACKGROUND

Applications are invited from members of the general public, elected members and those governors whose term of office is about to expire or has expired who are interested in serving or wish to continue serving as a Local Authority representative governor on school governing bodies.

The following criteria were agreed by the Borough Council for the recruitment of Local Education Authority representative governors in 2000. Local Authority governors should be able to show:

- demonstrable interest in and commitment to education;
- a desire to support the school concerned;
- a commitment to attend regular meetings of the governing body (and committees as appropriate) and school functions generally;
- good communication/interpersonal skills;
- ability to work as part of a team;
- a clearly expressed willingness to participate in the governor training programme.

A schedule setting out details of vacancies together with applications received in respect of the vacancies was considered by members of the General Purposes Sub Committee at their meeting held on 16th April 2012. (**Appendix 1**).

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services approve recommendations of the General Purposes Committee in respect of the appointment of Local Authority representative governors to serve on school Governing Bodies. A schedule outlining recommendations of the General Purposes Sub Committee is attached at **Appendix 1**.

4. CONTACT OFFICER

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Child and Adult Services Department

VACANCIES SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES

APRIL 2012

**Contact Officer: Ann Turner
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**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE-
VACANCIES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY REPRESENTATIVES ON
GOVERNING BODIES**

SCHOOL INCLUDING LA GOVERNORS	VACANCIES	POSSIBLE INTEREST	RECOMMENDED FOR APPOINTMENTS
Clavering Primary School Councillor R. Cook Mrs. I. Green Councillor J. Robinson	Mrs. I. Green Term of office expired 24 th April 2012	Mrs. I. Green	Mrs I Green
Fens Primary School Councillor A. Preece	2 Vacancies	Mr. P. Heward Councillor A Marshall form awaited	Mr P Heward Councillor A.Marshall Subject to receipt of application form
Rossmere Primary School Councillor T. Lawton Mrs. M. Smith	1 Vacancy	Councillor Paul Thompson	Councillor Paul Thompson
Seaton Carew Nursery School Councillor H. Thompson	1 Vacancy	Councillor Paul Thompson Councillor Geoff Lilley	Report to be submitted to the GP Committee
St Bega's R.C. Primary School	1 Vacancy	Mr. Stuart A. Langston	Mr Stuart Langston
West View Primary School Councillor C. Simmons Mr. D. Wise	Councillor S. Griffin Term of office expired 29 th January 2012	Councillor S. Griffin	Councillor S Griffin

Kingsley Primary School Mrs J Brough Mr J Vale	1 Vacancy	Mrs J Hanson	Mrs J Hanson
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CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Report to Portfolio Holder

8 May 2012



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT 2011/2012 AND
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2012/2013

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Portfolio Holder the Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2011/12 and the Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2012/13.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

- 2.1 The Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 (Standard 18) requires Local authorities to produce a clear Statement Purpose which is available to, and understood by adopters staff, volunteers and children. The Statement of Purpose should be child focussed and show how the services will meet outcomes for children. In addition, a Children's Guide should be available to children whose plan is for adoption. Minimum standards 25.6 requires the adoption agency to ensure the executive side of the local authority:

- Receive a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 6 months;
- Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children and / or services users;
- Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

- 2.2 The Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2011/12 is attached at **Appendix 1**. The Adoption Services Statement of Purpose 2012/13 is attached at **Appendix 2**.

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

- 3.1 The Portfolio Holder has responsibility for Children's Services and requires information about how services are delivered and their effectiveness.

4. TYPE OF DECISION

- 4.1 Non key.

5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE

- 5.1 Children's Services Portfolio Holder meeting on 8 May 2012.

6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED

- 6.1 To receive the Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2011/12 and the Adoption Service Statement of Purpose for 2012/13.

Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: ADOPTION ANNUAL REPORT AND
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Portfolio Holder the Annual Report of Adoption Service 2011/12 and The Adoption Service Statement of Purpose 2012/13.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The work of the Adoption Services is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of adoption services. The National Minimum Standards together with regulations for adoption and the placement of children looked after form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies.
- 2.2 It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards that the service produces a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide for adoption services and reviews these at least annually. It is also a requirement that the executive side of the local authority receive six monthly reports detailing the management, outcomes and functioning of the Adoption services. This information is provided within the Annual Report, attached as **Appendix 1** and a six month progress report will be provided to the Portfolio Holder in October 2012. The Statement of Purpose for 2012/13 is attached in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.3 The Annual Report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff, and adopters, the constitution of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective adopters, the achievements of the service during the year and the priorities for further service development in 2012/13.
- 2.4 The Statement of Purpose and Annual Report for the Adoption Services will be presented to the Corporate Parent Forum in June 2012.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To receive the Annual Report of the Adoption Service 2011/12 and the Adoption Service Statement of Purpose for 2012/13.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Annual Report of the Adoption Service provides the Portfolio Holder with information on the effectiveness of services for children.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 5.1 Adoption National Minimum Standards

6. CONTACT OFFICER

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HARTLEPOOL CHILD AND ADULT SERVICES



HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILD & ADULT SERVICES

**ANNUAL REPORT OF LOCAL AUTHORITY
ADOPTION AGENCY**

APRIL 2011 – March 2012

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The annual Adoption Agency report provides information about the activity and outcomes achieved by the service during 2011/12 and outlines plans and strategic priorities for 2012-13.
- 1.2 The 2011 Statutory Adoption Guidance and Adoption National Minimum Standards places a requirement upon Local Authority adoption services to ensure that the Executive side of the Council receive 6 monthly reports on the management and outcomes of the agency. The Annual Report provides a full review of the service and an interim progress report is made to the Portfolio Holder at the end of the second quarter of the financial year.

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The aim of the Adoption Service is to recruit, train and support adopters to provide high quality adoptive placements for the children of Hartlepool. This is achieved through the following objectives:
- To ensure that where children cannot remain in the care of their birth parent/s, they are placed with appropriate adoptive parent/s at the earliest opportunity;
 - To provide robust assessment of and support to adoptive carers and children to meet identified needs;
 - To provide advice and support to birth families;
 - To manage and facilitate Post Box contact arrangements that support the exchange of information which meets the needs of the children, adoptive parent/s and birth parent/s;
 - To fulfil statutory requirements in relation to the Adoption & Children Act 2004 for the adoption of a child by a step parent;
 - To provide advice, support and guidance in relation to permanency planning and facilitate family finding for children;
 - To ensure the Adoption Panel is facilitated and supported to provide robust consideration and recommendation relating to approval of adopters, plans for adoption of children and matching of children and adoptive families.

3.0 STATUTORY FUNCTIONS OF THE ADOPTION SERVICE

3.1 Hartlepool Adoption Service is managed in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2004. The Adoption National Minimum Standards and the Regulations 2011 form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of adoption agencies and adoption support agencies.

4.0 ADOPTION TEAM STRUCTURE

4.1 The team continues to have the equivalent of 3.5 posts, plus the Family Placement team manager, and a part time team clerk. In the last 12 months a very experienced worker retired from 0.5 position.

4.2 In recognition of the increasing demand on the adoption service, the vacant 0.5 post has been increased to a full time position which has been recruited to within the fostering team, freeing up additional capacity from experienced social workers in the fostering team to work across both service areas.

5.0 TRAINING FOR ADOPTERS

5.1 The adoption social workers continue to support adopters post approval and post placement to access training provided in-house and through After Adoption. The Adopters Support Group in February 2012 covered 'Managing Introductions' and in March 2012 there was a session on 'Talking to your child about adoption'. The team also publicised that After Adoption were offering birth parents the opportunity to attend sessions on the following:

- Letterbox and Contact
- Life Story Work
- Media Feedback

6.0 BUDGET

6.1 There has been a significant increase in the numbers of children requiring adoptive placement however the budget for 2011/12 was sufficient to absorb the increase. The service is currently successfully recruiting adopters but with the increase in demand it is anticipated there may be a need to purchase external placements from adoption agencies and other local authorities which could impact on the 2012/13 budget, however this will be managed carefully.

7.0 ADOPTION PANEL ACTIVITIES

- 7.1 The service has convened 17 Panels from April 11 to March 2012.
- 7.2 The following chart provides information relating to the Adoption Service activity for 2011/2012.

Number of approved adopters as of 1.4.11	11 couples, one of whom were inter-country adopters who were deregistered in December 2011
Number of approved adopters as of 1.4.12	12 - 9 couples and 3 singles
Number of children's plans for adoption as at 1.4.11	14
Number of children's plans approved for adoption from April 1.4.11	18
Numbers of children whose plans were ratified in 2011/2012 and are still waiting for a placement to be secured	3
Number of Matches	17 children with 14 sets of adopters
Number of children's plans converted to long term fostering 1.4.11-1.4.12	12
Number of adopters currently being assessed	10
Number of adoption orders granted 1.4.11 - 1.4.12	9
Number of children in adoptive placements	6, we have two couples each with one child placed from another agency.
Number of adoption breakdowns	1

Recruitment Information	
Number of adoption packs sent out	28
Number of initial Visits	25
Preparation Group 1 delivered in June 2011	There were four couples invited to the June group. Three did not proceed to assessment stage two because of relationship breakdown and the other couple did not give a reason. The fourth couple are now approved.
Preparation Group 2 delivered in November 2011	Eight were invited to the November group and of these, 6 have proceeded to assessment. 1 couple are going to July 2012 group, the delay is because of a planned operation. A second couple have asked to be put on hold as they are experiencing difficulty with their birth child's behaviour.
Preparation Group 3 delivered in March 2012	Eight couples were invited to March 2012 group. Two were unable to attend but will be coming to the July group and one couple felt it was too soon for them to attend following expression of interest. From this group, 3 are proceeding to assessment and we are awaiting a response from a fourth couple. Two did not attend but no reason was given. Approved foster carers seeking to adopt also attended this group.

- 7.3 With the increasing use of the Integrated Children's System adoption module by the adoption service, it is anticipated that more accurate and current information will become available regarding the timeliness of our assessments of adopters and the matching of children with adopters. This is particularly relevant in terms of the Government's Action Plan for Adoption which places an emphasis on decreasing timescales and reducing delay for children.

8.0 SUFFICIENCY

- 8.1 Over the past year the number of children coming to Adoption Panel for approval of plans for adoption has remained high. Nationally this has corresponded with a reduction in the number of enquiries to the service from potential adopters but the service has benefited greatly from taking the unprecedented step of advertising for adopters and from the publicity generated by the publication of the adoption statistics in November 2011 when Hartlepool was ranked within the top three performing authorities for the placement of children within timescales. The Adoption Service has placed advertisements in the Primary Times and regional publications and the Primary Times, in particular, has prompted enquiries to the service. The media interest in response to Hartlepool's placing in the performance ratings led to press and television exposure which reaped positive benefits for our recruitment success. Three adoption preparation courses were undertaken in the past year one in June 2011, one on October/November 2011 and one has just taken place in March 2012.
- 8.2 It has been recognised that a crucial way to engage the public and to attract new carers and adopters is through the internet. Work had taken place in respect of fostering and adoption web pages and attention paid to the website information that is available in respect of both fostering and adoption on the Hartlepool Borough Council website. The development of the micro site provides yet another channel for disseminating information regarding the fostering and adoption services and also provides a means of directly registering an interest in becoming either a foster carer or adopter. The contact information is also available on the Family Information Services in Hartlepool (FISH) website.
- 8.3 This move into the electronic arena does appear to be critical as some of the enquiries received have been prompted by searches on the internet and approaches are now being made by email in terms of both fostering and adoption.

9.0 JOINT ADOPTION & FOSTERING PANEL

- 9.1 In January 2011, the current tenure of the Adoption Panel Chair came to an end; Joyce Whitfield had chaired Hartlepool's Adoption Panel for 9 years and provided excellent support, scrutiny and decision making. A review of the Panels work was undertaken, at this time and the decision was taken to amalgamate the Fostering and Adoption Panels. Yvonne Hamilton independent chair of the Fostering Panel took over responsibility for the joint Panel from January 2012.
- 9.2 It is anticipated that the amalgamation of the Panels will give a greater degree of flexibility to the Panel process enabling children's plans and

the approval of prospective adopters to be considered without any delay and to ensure that quoracy would not be an issue.

9.3 A joint Panel training day was held on 19 January 2012 having been postponed in December due to the commitments of Panel members and this new date was well attended by Panel members from both the Adoption and the Fostering Panels as well as team members from the Family Placement Service. Presentations were given regarding:

- The Legal framework for adoption delivered by Neil Wilson Local Authority Solicitor;
- The new National Minimum Standards for Fostering and Adoption;
- The planning for permanence process;
- Connected Persons assessments;

9.4 The Adoption and Fostering Panel as a combined Panel commenced in March 2012 and will continue to meet every second and fourth Thursday in the month.

10.1 PANEL RECRUITMENT

10.1 During the course of the year the Adoption Panel experienced the resignations of two independent panel members in December 2011 and February 2012 respectively.

10.2 Also in January 2012 Yvonne Hamilton who was the Fostering Panel chair commenced in the role of Adoption Panel chair.

10.3 A new independent member was recruited in January 2012 to the Adoption and Fostering Panel, his relevant experience is as a foster carer for an independent fostering agency.

11.0 SUPPORT TO ADOPTERS

11.1 All adopters have an allocated adoption social workers, however given the relatively small size of the team most potential and approved adopters are known to all members of the team, this ensures they receive a timely response to any queries and have pre existing relationships with the social workers in the team should they require immediate support or guidance.

11.2 The team facilitate quarterly adopter support groups and bi-annual events for the whole adoptive family at Christmas and a Summer Party.

11.3 A regular newsletter is produced and sent to all adopters.

11.4 Hartlepool commissions a service from After Adoption to provide direct independent support to adopters, children and birth families. This

takes the form of direct interventions with families or individuals, group work, training events and family events.

12.0 ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2011/12

- 12.1 One of the major achievements within the adoption service over the past year has been the success of the hard work to increase the numbers of adopters and achieve a greater number of matches for children with a plan for adoption.
- 12.2 The Family Placement Team remained in the Station Lane office premises throughout the majority of 2011/12, however the team has recently moved to the new premises on 12 March 2012. This move has enabled the team to be co-located with the Through Care team, the Children with Disabilities team, the Placement Support Team and the Looked After Nurse Specialist. It is anticipated that this will be a positive advantage in terms of working more closely with Social Workers and having access to a range of support services that may be required by children and their adopters. The premises will also offer space for participation work to be undertaken with children; it will also provide a resource which can be used for activities and group work with children and space for adopter training and support groups.
- 12.3 Progress has been made in terms of formalising family finding processes and permanency planning to ensure that they are robustly carried out in a timely manner and that recording of activity is consistent and accurate. The department has recently launched a revised Planning for Permanence Policy which supports social workers in making the right decisions for children.
- 12.4 The service has commissioned the review and revision of the department's Adoption policies and procedures in order that they properly reflect the new National Minimum Standards and can provide accurate guidance to workers and this work is near completion.
- 12.5 Progress has been made in exploring options in respect of the post adoption arrangements and the implementation of an electronic system to address and support the arrangement of contact. The service is currently looking at a system to support this work in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in this area which will benefit children, adopters and birth families.
- 12.6 As detailed in the interim report produced in 2011, the Family Placement Service underwent an inspection of adoption services in May 2011. The initial feedback given indicated that the service was judged to be satisfactory with some areas for improvement. Unfortunately the formal report was not received until mid October 2011 which made it difficult to fully implement an improvement action plan. However as the service was aware of many of the issues

highlighted within the verbal feedback, the service started to address and implement improvements to the service in a timely way.

- 12.7 Once the formal report was received, it was felt that some of the positive aspects of the service that had been mentioned in the verbal feedback had not been noted within the written report and a letter was sent to the Inspector concerned to this effect. The Inspector accepted some of the concerns and adjusted the report accordingly.
- 12.8 An action plan has now been drawn up to ensure that all the recommendations made are fully and comprehensively addressed. In particular the mechanisms for seeking feedback are being overhauled and the quality of post adoption support assessments and plans were to be robustly addressed and we are seeking to better evidence their effectiveness.
- 12.9 In 'Adoption Performance Table' published in October in 2011, Hartlepool was placed third highest performing authority in the country. This related to the percentage of children who were adopted within a year of their plan for adoption being approved. This statistic highlights the efficiency and effectiveness of the service in terms of keeping to timescales appropriately with regards the needs of the children, minimising delay and also the priority placed on securing permanence for children. The 2012 figures indicate that Hartlepool has managed to sustain a high level of performance and is placed fifth in the country with reference to the average length of time between a child becoming looked after and moving into an adoptive placement.

13.0 PLANS FOR 2012/13

- 13.1 Despite the disappointing Adoption Inspection outcome, the Adoption team members remain optimistic about what they have achieved for the children of Hartlepool as reflected in the adoption league tables, and remain totally committed to improving the service further and building on the progress made. The government's focus on adoption can be seen as a positive driver and provides the opportunity to consider improved ways of working that will further enhance the service.
- 13.2 The following priorities for service development have been identified for action in 2012/13:
- Develop a robust system of gathering and recording adopters and children views and ensure those views inform all the work of the service and drive current practice and service development;
 - Implement a performance and quality assurance framework which provides rigorous and robust challenge to the service and the department as a whole.

- Develop an Adopter Charter in partnership with prospective and approved adopters.
- Review the recruitment strategy for adopters to ensure the service maintains and improve upon the current positive position.
- To strengthen preparation and assessment arrangements to ensure adopters are well prepared for the role of adoptive parents and have excellent support to fulfil this parenting task.
- To improve the quality of post adoption assessments and support plans to ensure children are fully prepared for adoption, have their needs accurately assessed, are matched with appropriate adoptive families and a comprehensive plan of support is in place to meet the needs of the child and his/her adoptors.

Jacky Yeaman- Vass
Team Manager Family Placement

Jane Young
Head of Business Unit Resources
and Specialist Services



Hartlepool Borough Council

Child and Adult Services

Adoption Service

Statement of Purpose

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

ADOPTION SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council approved this Statement of Purpose on 29 September 2003.

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Service's signed this document on behalf of the Elected Members.

This Statement of Purpose is reviewed and updated on an annual basis and is submitted for approval to Elected members.

This document was reviewed and updated in March 2012 and is to be submitted for approval by Elected members in April 2012.

This Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and revised as appropriate by the Team Manager of the Adoption Services no later than April 2013.

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Values, Aims and Objective

Value Statements

The value statements listed below underpin the provision of Adoption services in Hartlepool.

- Children are entitled to grow up as part of a loving family which can meet their needs during childhood and beyond.
- It is best for children where possible to be brought up by their own birth family.
- The child's welfare, safety and needs will be at the centre of the adoption process.
- The child's wishes and feelings will be actively sought and fully taken into account at all stages.
- Delays in adoption can have a severe impact on the health and development of children and should be avoided wherever possible.
- Children's ethnic origin, cultural background, religion and language will be fully recognised and positively promoted when decisions are made.
- The particular needs of disabled children will be fully recognised and taken into account when decisions are made.
- The role of adoptive parents in offering a permanent family to a child who cannot live with their birth family will be valued and respected.
- Adoption has lifelong implications for all involved and requires lifelong commitment from many different organisations, professions and individuals who have to work together to meet the need for services of those affected by adoption.
- Government will work in partnership with local government, other statutory agencies and voluntary adoption agencies to ensure that these standards are delivered.

Aims and objectives of the Adoption Service

Adoption means an Adoption Order under the 1976 Act or preceding legislation and vests parental responsibility in the adopters. The Order extinguishes the rights and duties of birth parents including any parental responsibility any person had before the Order (updated in 2002 Act).

Adoption affects the following groups of children;

- Babies whose parents cannot or do not wish to care for them.
- Children who are in the care of the Local Authority.
- Children cared for by relatives.
- Children in a step-parenting family.
- Children privately fostered.
- Children brought into the country from abroad.

Hartlepool Borough Council Adoption Service aims to provide a range of adoptive placements for those children requiring permanent substitute families.

The Adoption Service aims to ensure that prospective adopters are provided with the skills, knowledge and support to enable them to meet the assessed needs of children placed and to provide a safe and secure home environment.

The following guiding principles underpin the services provided by the Adoption Service:

- Adoption is a process with life long implications for adopted people, adoptive parents and birth parents.
- There is a commitment to providing adoption services to all sectors of Hartlepool's population and to seek to provide sensitive needs led services to children, parents and adopters.
- There is a duty to establish and maintain services designed to meet the needs of adopted children, adopters and birth parents.
- There is a recognition of the importance of incorporating research and user feedback into the formulation of policies, procedures and practice. Constructive feedback from service users is welcomed and should be directed to the Adoption Service Team Manager.
- The provision of after adoption services to adopted adults, birth relatives, adopted children and their families, intermediary services to birth relatives and support and advice to birth parents where the plan for adoption has been made and the parents are contesting the plan.

Objectives

- To conduct recruitment activities and employ strategies in order to attract the range of adopters identified for children and young people.
- To undertake effective assessments of prospective adopters within timescales specified in National Guidance.
- To establish and support a Permanence Panel to consider assessments and make recommendations for approval to the agency decision maker.
- To provide pre-approval training for prospective adopters equipping them to meet the needs of children referred for adoption and developing their awareness of adoption issues.
- To protect children from abuse and neglect.
- To create stability for children and young people who require permanent substitute families.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members where appropriate.
- To create lifelong attachments with adoptive parents in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- To work in partnership with children and young people, prospective adopters, birth parents and social workers.
- To provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his/her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.
- To provide or contract to provide after adoption services to provide support to people who have been adopted, their birth families and adoptive parents.

Services provided by the adoption agency

The Adoption Service provides the following services and facilities:

- Recruitment, assessment and preparation of prospective adopters.
- Family finding for children awaiting adoptive placements.
- Support to adoptive placements.
- Adoption and Fostering panel training
- Consultation and advice to social workers considering adoption as an option for a child/children.
- Post adoption support service.
- Post Box Service.

More detail on each of these areas of service provision can be found in the departmental Adoption Procedures.

In April 2003, Hartlepool Borough Council entered into a formal contract with “*After Adoption*” an agency specialising in post adoption support to provide services to the following groups in the form of individual work or group support:

- Adopted adults
- Birth Parents and Relatives with children under 18 who have been adopted or where the plan is adoption
- Adopted Children and their families
- Special Guardians
- Birth relatives where the children that were adopted are now adults

Staffing information

Name and Job Title	Date of Appointment	Qualifications	Experience
Jane Young Head of Business unit Resources and Specialist Services	October 2010	CSS PQ1 PQ CCA CMS	Qualified in 1989. Experienced in Children & Families Social Work and Fostering & Adoption including managing a leaving Care Team and Family Placement Team
Jacky Yeaman-Vass – Placement Team Manager	February 2009	MSW Social Work CQSW DMS CSM	Qualified in 1992. Experienced in Children and Families work including managing a Family Support Team for 9 years
Kathryn Ling Principal Practitioner	February 2009	CQSW CCA	Qualified in 1993 Experience in Children and Families, Mental Health, Disability team and Family Placement work
Clare Frankland – Social Worker	April 1989	CQSW PQCCA DiPSW	Qualified in 1981 Generic social work before specialising in Family Placement since 1988. Vast experience of adoption work
Alison Garbutt – Social Worker	September 2010	CSS BSc Child Care	Qualified in 1990. Worked in Children and Families team as Social worker and then Principal Practitioner before moving to current post
Christine Croft & Jacqui Dixon Fostering Social Workers with some	March 2012	Christine CQSW Jacqui Dixon CQSW	Christine Croft Experience in Children and Families Social Work and in establishing and

Name and Job Title	Date of Appointment	Qualifications	Experience
responsibility for Adoption work equivalent to a half time post			running a fostering service Fostering Social Worker since February 2009 Jacqui Dixon Experience in Children and Families Social work and as Family Resource Team Manager Fostering Social worker since September 2009.
Patricia Adams Administrative staff – shared with Fostering Service	11.1.07		C&AS Admin Children and Families

Adoption agency - organisation and control of operations

The Placement Team Manager who is ultimately responsible to the Assistant Director within the Child and Adult Services Department manages the Adoption Service. The Agency Decision Maker is currently the Assistant Director of Child and Adult Services.

The Placement Team Manager supervises the Principal Practitioner who in turn takes responsibility for supervising the two full time adoption social workers and the work of the two workers undertaking the adoption work as part of their responsibilities and allocates their workload. The Placement Team Manager is also the Agency Panel Adviser.

As with any Adoption Agency, the Adoption and Fostering Panel is critical to the monitoring and quality assurance of the work of the agency and enables the agency to meet its statutory obligations.

Statutory Requirements

1. Specific requirements govern the composition and terms of reference of Adoption Panels. These are set out in the Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and the Adoption Agencies and Independent Review of Determinations (Amendments) Regulations 2011
2. The Adoption Panel established by Hartlepool Borough Council performs an important role in assisting the agency to reach the best possible decision in respect of:

- Whether a child should be placed for adoption.
- Whether an application for a Placement order should be made.
- The suitability of prospective adopters.
- Whether a child should be placed with a specific prospective adopter.

The Panel can give advice to the agency (but is not required to do so) on:

- Contact arrangements
- The number of children the prospective adopter may be suitable to adopt, their age range, sex, likely needs and background.
- Whether a child qualifies for an adoption allowance

The panel is also required to feedback to the agency every six months on the quality of reports presented to panel as part of its quality assurance role.

The Regulations seek to ensure that the Adoption Panel has a separate identity from the agency with an important independent element. The National Minimum Standards (England) 2011, and the Adoption and Children Act 2002 further endorse this level of independence.

Panel Composition

In accordance with amended regulations in force from April, 2011, Hartlepool Borough Council are establishing a “central list” of persons considered to have the appropriate qualifications and/or experience to consider the cases submitted to the Panel for consideration.

The requirement is that the panel is a multi agency body with a considerable element of independence from the adoption and fostering service. This independence means that they do not make the decisions on behalf of the adoption and fostering service but make recommendations in relation to their statutory functions.

There is no limit to the number of people on the central list and the same people do not have to be appointed to every panel meeting. For the purpose of considering adoption matters the members of the central list will include:

- An Adoption Social Worker
- the Medical adviser to the agency
- other persons considered suitable including independent persons. These people could include specialists in education and Child and Adolescent Mental Health and those with personal experience of adoption
- and may include other Social workers

The Panel chair is required to be independent of the agency and to have the following significant qualities:

- The authority and competence to chair a panel
- The ability to analyse and explain complex situations
- The ability to identify key issues , problems and solutions

- Excellent interpersonal, oral and written communication skills

Panel business can only be conducted if there are at least five members which for the purposes of considering adoption matters must include

- The Independent Chair or Vice Chair – the guidance now indicates that more than one Vice Chair can be appointed
- Adoption Social worker
- At least one other “independent person”- who is not a member or employee of the Adoption Agency.

In addition to the members of the Panel, the Adoption Panel should also include:

Panel Adviser: This is the Placement Team Manager who attends the Panel in an advisory capacity. They advise the Chairperson and panel members on matters of agency policy, practice and procedure. The Adviser takes back any issues raised by Panel members to the Adoption Social Workers or the agency as a whole.

The professional adviser is not a panel member and does not take part in reaching a recommendation.

Legal Adviser: *This person advises the Panel on any relevant legal issues. The Legal Adviser is not a Panel Member and does not take part in reaching a recommendation.* If they are unable to attend Panel in person legal advice is given in writing.

Membership of Hartlepool Adoption and Fostering Panel Central List includes

- Chairperson – Independent Person
- Vice Chairperson Team Manager, Principle Resources Manager
- Vice Chairperson – agency worker
- Agency Social Worker – Social Worker, Through Care Team/Adopter
- Agency Social Worker – Social Worker, Disability Team
- Elected Member
- Adoption Social Worker /Adopter
- Independent member/Adopter
- Independent member/Adopted Person
- Independent member/Foster carer/Adopter
- Independent member – Education
- Independent member – Health
- Independent members – Foster carers x 3
- Medical Adviser

Advisers to Panel

- Panel Adviser
- Legal Adviser
- Medical Adviser

Formal voting is not a requirement of the Adoption & Fostering Panel and the Chairperson must try to encourage a consensus view amongst Panel Members. The Panel Chairperson can ask for further information to be made available for Panel

Members where a clear consensus is not possible. Any serious reservations expressed by Panel Members must be minuted for consideration by the Agency Decision Maker. The Agency Decision Maker in Hartlepool is Sally Robinson the Assistant Director of Child and Adult Services.

All Panel members are required to have a current Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check and new members are also asked to provide two references which are verified by telephone, an employment history and verification of their identity. New members of the Panel attend a Panel as an observer prior to attending as a full member. They will also receive an induction programme relevant to their needs as part of this process.

Panel members are required to participate in annual reviews. Reviews of the panel members are conducted by the Panel Chair and the Panel Adviser. The annual review of the Panel Chair is conducted by the Agency Decision maker.

The agency is required to arrange panel training at least one day a year but the intention is to extend this to provide additional half day sessions to update on developments throughout the year.

The Adoption & Fostering Panel meets twice monthly and is instrumental in monitoring and evaluating the provision of services to ensure that the quality and effectiveness of the adoption service are of an appropriate standard.

On occasion additional panels may need to be arranged to meet the needs of the service for instance when complying with court timetables in terms of approving plans for adoption.

Complaints Procedure

Complaints can be made about any aspect of service provided by the Children's Services Department. Complaints will be acknowledged within 3 working days. There are up to three stages to the complaints system but the aim is to resolve complaints quickly and informally at Stage One wherever possible.

The complaints system can be used by; users of services, carers of those using services, potential service users, foster carers or adopters. The system can also be used to appeal about a decision made about a service provided by the department.

Complaints are dealt with in three stages:

- Stage One: The informal resolution stage. A complaint will be acknowledged and a Social Work Team manager will look in to the complaint and try to resolve it. The complainant will be notified of the outcome within 10 working days or 20 working days if the complaint is complex.
- Stage Two: The complaint will be considered by an Independent Person who will check that the investigation is fair and complete
- Stage Three: The Review Panel Stage. If a complainant remains dissatisfied with any part of the written response at Stage 2 it is possible for the complainant to go to a review panel.

As well as the corporate complaints system detailed above, prospective adopters who have not been approved by Panel have two main options:

Prospective adopters who have not been approved by Panel are entitled to make further representations to Hartlepool Borough Council, as the Adoption Agency;

OR

From 30 April 2004, prospective adopters have the right to refer their case to an Independent Review panel for a review of the agency's determination. The independent panel do not have the power to overturn the original decision but will make a recommendation to the agency on the suitability of the applicants to be adoptive parents.

These options cannot be run simultaneously; prospective adopters who have not been approved by panel must decide whether to make further representations to the agency or seek an independent review of the decision.

Useful Contact Numbers and Addresses

Family Placement Team
8-9 Church Street
Hartlepool
TS24 7DJ

Tel: 01429 405588
E-mail – fosterandadopt@hartlepool.gov.uk

After Adoption
Unit 112
The Design Works
William Street
Felling
Gateshead
NE10 OJP

Tel: 0191 4788396
Action Line: 0800 056 8578
Website: www.afteradoption.org.uk
E-mail – helpline@talkadoption.org.uk

British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)
Head Office
Saffron House
6-10 Kirby Street
London
EC1N 8TS

Tel: 0207 7421 2601

BAAF Northern England Tel: 0113 289 1101

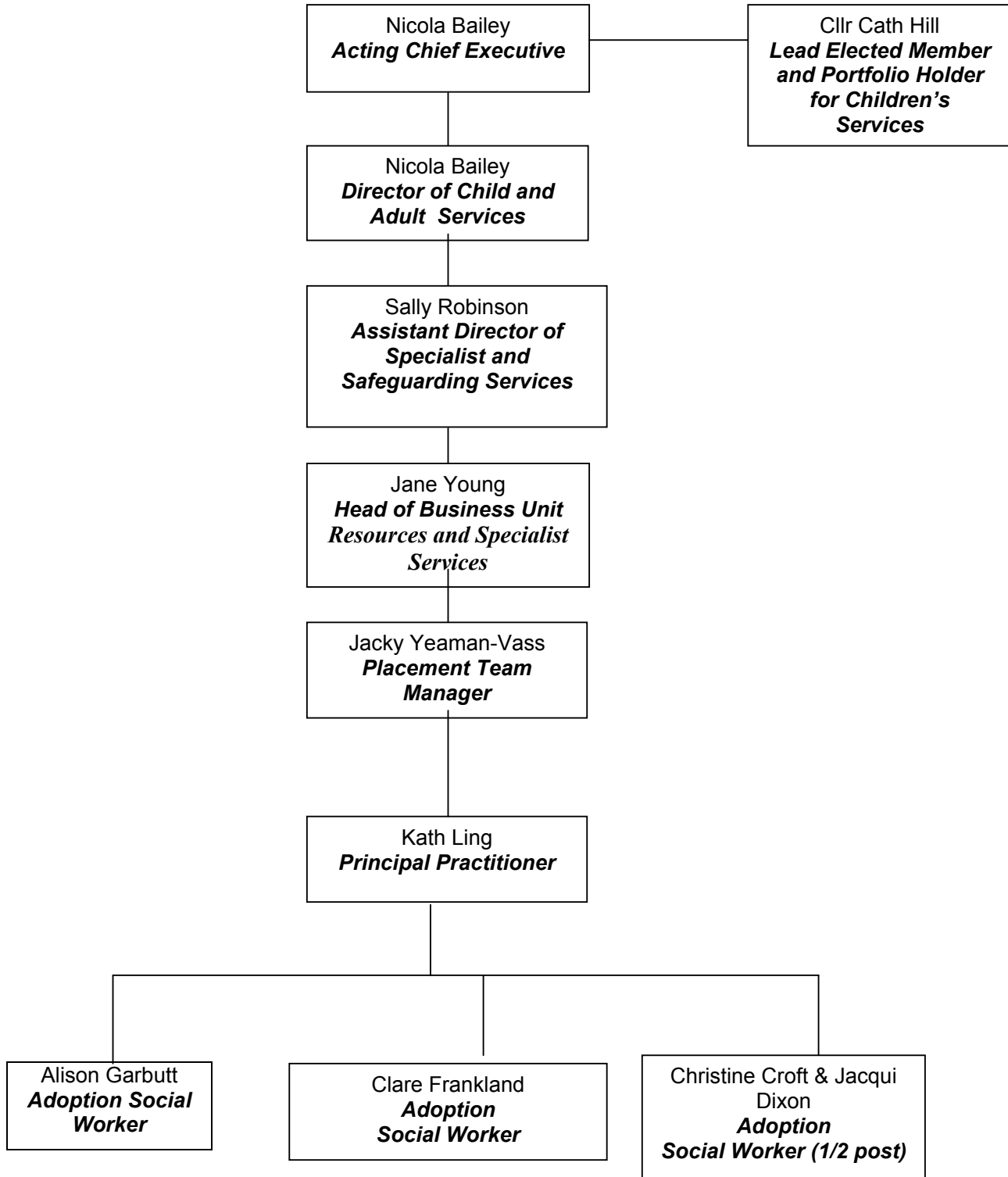
Website: www.baaf.org.uk
E-mail: mail@baaf.org.uk

Dr Roger Morgan
Children's Rights Director
Ofsted
Aviation house
125, Kingsway
LONDON WC23 6SE

Tel: 0800 528 0731
Website : www.rights4me.org

APPENDIX 1

HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL – ADOPTION SERVICE



CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Report to Portfolio Holder

8 May 2012



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: FOSTERING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT
2011/12 AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
2012/13

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to the Portfolio Holder the Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2011/12 and the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose for 2012/13.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

- 2.1 The Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011 (Standard 16) requires Local Authorities to produce a clear Statement of Purpose which is available to, and understood by foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It should be available to any parent or person with responsibility. The Statement of Purpose should be child focussed and show how the services will meet outcomes for children. In addition, a Children's Guide should be available to children who receive a foster care service. The Fostering Services Minimum Standard 25.7 requires fostering services to ensure the executive side of the local authority:

- Receives a written report on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency once every 3 months;
- Monitor the management and outcomes of the service in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and achieving good outcomes for children;
- Satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of the registration.

- 2.2 The Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2011/12 is attached at **Appendix 1**. The Fostering Services Statement of Purpose 2012/13 is attached at **Appendix 2**.

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

- 3.1 The Portfolio Holder has responsibility for Children's Services and requires information about how services are delivered and their effectiveness.

4. TYPE OF DECISION

- 4.1 Non key.

5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE

- 5.1 Children's Services Portfolio Holder meeting on 8th May 2012.

6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED

- 6.1 To receive the Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2011/12 and the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose for 2012/13.

Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: FOSTERING SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT
2011/12 AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE
2012/13

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to Portfolio Holder the Annual Report of Fostering Service 2011/12 and The Fostering Services Statement of Purpose 2012/13.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The work of the Fostering Services is subject to National Minimum Standards applicable to the provision of foster care for children looked after. The National Minimum Standards together with regulations for fostering and the placement of children looked after form the basis of the regulatory framework under the Care Standards Act 2000 for the conduct of fostering agencies.
- 2.2 It is a requirement of the National Minimum Standards that the service produces a Statement of Purpose and a Children's Guide for fostering services and reviews these at least annually. It is also a requirement that the executive side of the local authority receive three monthly reports detailing the management, outcomes and functioning of the Fostering Services. This information is provided within the annual report attached at **Appendix 1** and three monthly progress reports will be provided to the portfolio holder in August and November 2012 and January 2013. The Statement of Purpose for 2012/13 is attached at **Appendix 2**.
- 2.3 The Annual Report provides details of the staffing arrangements in the service, training received by both staff and foster carers, the constitution of the Fostering and Adoption Panel, activity in relation to the recruitment, preparation and assessment of prospective foster carers, the achievements of the service during the year and the priorities for further service development in 2012/13.
- 2.4 The Statement of Purpose and Annual Report for the Fostering Service will be presented to the Corporate Parent Forum in June 2012.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To receive the Annual Report of the Fostering Service 2011/12 and the Fostering Service Statement of Purpose for 2012/13.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Annual Report of the Fostering Service provides the Portfolio Holder with information on the effectiveness of services for children.

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Fostering Services National Minimum Standards

6. CONTACT OFFICER

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Child and Adult Services
Hartlepool Borough Council

01429 523732

sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk

HARTLEPOOL CHILD AND ADULT SERVICES



HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILD & ADULT SERVICES

FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 2011 – March 2012

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The annual report of the Fostering Service for Hartlepool Borough Council (HBC) provides information about the activity of and outcomes achieved by the service during 2011/12. The report will reflect on the work of the team and service provided, identify changes that have taken place within the service and detail the statistical information in respect of the Fostering Service from 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012. Finally the report will set out priorities for service development during 2012/13.
- 1.2 The Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011 places a requirement upon Local Authority fostering services to ensure that the Executive side of the Council receive 3 monthly reports on the management and outcomes of the service. The Annual Report provides a full review of the service and interim progress reports will be made to the Portfolio Holder on a quarterly basis throughout the financial year.

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The Fostering team aims to provide safe and secure family placements for children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council, where each child is supported and encouraged to achieve his/her full potential.
- 2.2 The Fostering team actively works in partnership with children, young people, their families and other stakeholders involved in promoting positive outcomes for children and young people looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council in order to deliver a high quality foster care service
- 2.3 The Fostering team actively seeks to involve foster carers, children and young people looked after and children of foster carers in the development and continuous improvement of the service.
- 2.4 The Fostering team recruit, assess, train and support a suitable and diverse range of foster carers to provide quality care and placement choice for children and young people.
- 2.5 The Fostering team promotes stable placements and continuity of care for children to ensure carers, children and young people receive appropriate support and minimum disruption leading to good outcomes.

3.0 STATUTORY FUNCTION OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

- 3.1 Hartlepool Fostering Services is managed in accordance with the National Minimum Standards which are underpinned by Fostering Service Regulations 2011 and the National Care Standards Act 2000. Statutory guidance for Fostering Services are contained within the Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations, Fostering Services, Care Planning.

4.0 FOSTERING TEAM STRUCTURE

4.1 The Fostering Team is part of the Specialist Services Business Unit

The team comprises of a:

Team Manager Fostering and Adoption Team
Principal Practitioner
5.5 Social Workers
1 full time team clerk

4.2 Since the last annual report a social worker joined the team in October 2011 filling a vacancy and an additional 0.5 post has been created to provide additional capacity to the team, and this post was appointed to in April 2012.

4.3 The Specialist Services Business Unit is based at 8/9 Church Street; the Fostering team is co-located with the Adoption team, Through Care team, Children's Disability team and the Placement Support team. This co location of services provides a positive advantage in terms of working more closely with Social Workers and having access to a range of support services that may be required by children and their foster carers. The premises offer space for participation work to be undertaken with children; as well as providing a resource which can be used for activities and group work with children and space for foster carer training and support groups.

4.4 The Placement Support team provides direct support to looked after children and foster carers and facilitates the Sons and Daughters of Foster Carers group. The team supports the Children in Care Council and facilitates group work for children looked after for example the Cook for Fun group. There are two therapists within the team providing direct therapeutic services to children and young people and support and guidance for foster carers. The team also has access to the Looked After Nurse Specialist who is co located with the service and a dedicated commissioned service from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services which provides direct work with children and young people and support, guidance and training to foster carers.

5.0 PLACEMENTS

5.1 The team provides a range of placements including time limited foster care, permanent fostering placements, family and friend carers, respite care, short break care for children with disability, remand foster placements and specialist placements for children/young people with more challenging or complex needs.

5.2 The service currently has 92 approved foster carers. This number includes two Short Break Carers and one Remand Carer.

5.3 Between 1 April 2011 and 31 March 2012 the service approved 7 new mainstream foster carers. The service commenced Connected Persons assessments in a further two cases but these were not taken to Panel due to a change of legal status in one instance and the ending of the placement in the other. During the year, the department has reviewed and amended its Connected Person's, Residence Order and Special Guardianship Order policies and procedures to ensure that children and young people are cared for in arrangements suitable to meet their needs. The department has also recently launched a revised Planning for Permanence Policy which supports social workers in making the right decisions for children.

5.4 During the year, the fostering service accepted the resignation of 4 mainstream carers, and 2 Connected Person's carers. The table below summarises activity in the Fostering Service during 2011/12.

Number of foster carers	92
Number of placements available	162
How many children in placement?	146
How many vacancies?	12 – All offering placements for children under 11 years
How many not able to use/on hold?	6 placements – 5 carers 1 carer is on hold due to house move; 1 on hold due to need to re-assess; 1 carer has sold house and will be resigning; 1 carer on hold due to illness; 1 carer on hold due to re-assessment from Kinship to Mainstream carer.
Initial enquiries - where did people hear about the service?	56 Enquiries: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 shop • 43 telephone • 1 email Prompt for enquiry from a range of sources including; TFM radio, Hartlepool Mail,, HBC website, TV adverts, FC recommendation, Foster care leaflets
Information pack sent out between 1.4.11 – 31.3.12	46

Initial visits - How many proceeded - Reasons for not proceeding	20 visits with 8 proceeding to preparation training 5 withdrew 5 medical grounds 1 accommodation difficulties 1 work commitments
Preparation Group Nov 2011	5 – Currently undertaking assessment; 1 – Approved at April's Panel; 2 – Withdrew
How many waiting for a group?	8
How many carers approved by Panel 1/4/11 – 31/3/12?	7
Complaints received	0
Allegations against foster carers	2
Placement Disruption	9
How many referred for Connected Care Assessment	2
Number of referrals for placement: Placements made: (by age range) - IFA - Residential Care	44 72 placed 14 aged <1 19 aged 1-5 16 aged 6-10 23 aged 11-17 4 2
How many carers de-registered	4 Main 2 Kinship

6.0 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

6.1 The number of looked after children/young people is as follows:

Total on 31 March 2011 – 168

Total on 31 March 2012 – 181

- 6.2 The numbers of looked after children for Hartlepool are very much in line with the national trend of a steady increase in numbers of looked after children. Recent government figures released show that nationally there has been a 10% increase over the year in the number of looked after children. While the end of year figure for Hartlepool is 10%, it is worth noting is that during the year the figures have been, at times, much higher, for instance in October 2011 the number of looked after children was up to 196.
- 6.3 The following table provides a statistical comparison with our Tees Valley neighbours where all authorities have seen an increase in the number of looked after children.

CLA at:	CLA at 31/03/11	CLA at 31/03/12	% increase
Darlington	185	201	9%
Middlesbrough	330	354	7%
Redcar & Cleveland	150	174	16%
Hartlepool	165	182	10%
Stockton	295	342	16%

7.0 **TRAINING**

- 7.1 All members of the Family Placement Team have the opportunity to attend a variety of mandatory and optional in-house training as well as conferences and courses offered by outside providers.
- 7.2 The staff team have again participated in the Blended Learning modules which forms the basis of the division's annual training plan, these modules cover seven topics from Making Assessments Count for Children and Motivating People to Change through to Supervision and Performance Management and Quality Assurance. The learning is being achieved through attendance at seminars, workshops and coaching sessions.
- 7.3 The learning that staff gained from attending conferences such as the Attachment Seminar presented by David Howe and the conference regarding the Fostering National Minimum Standards has been disseminated throughout the team and the wider workforce and is used in both preparation and Panel training. The team was also involved in workshops delivered for social workers around planning for permanence.
- 7.4 With regard to regional and national events, members of the Fostering Service have attended conferences on:
- 'Staying Put' the concept of young people remaining with carers post 18,
 - ICS - addressing and highlighting ICS issues;
 - The Connected person's process.

- 7.5 The Foster Carers Training Programme 2010 – 2012 outlines the training that is available to develop and enhance the skills of foster carers and foster carers also have access to the Seminars delivered through the Blended Learning Programme. The Training Programme is in the process of being updated in liaison with the workforce development team and it is intended that it will more fully reflect the range of skills and expertise that carers require.
- 7.6 From May 2011 foster carers have been expected to complete a training and development portfolio. This provides a record of the training that they have undertaken and can be used to highlight areas for development which will translate into their 'Personal Development Plan'. They continue to have access to the various department and Local Safeguarding Children Board training plans with the opportunity to nominate themselves for many of the courses listed, subject to availability. The joint training of foster carers and practitioners enhances the learning opportunities for both and the department is committed to continuing this model. Foster Carers are expected to attend mandatory training in such areas as Child Protection, Manual Handling, Food Hygiene and First Aid and have also had the opportunity to attend courses such as Dealing with Challenging Behaviour and Internet Safety.
- 7.7 A limited number of Foster Carers have had the opportunity to attend externally provided courses including the Assessing Sexual Abuse and Successful Interventions Conference and these have been accessed on the understanding that learning will be disseminated to other carers by the attendees.
- 7.8 With regard to the Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care, the Supervising Social Workers have successfully supported all Foster Carers to complete their CWDC Workbook within the necessary timescales. Some new carers managed to complete the workbook themselves whilst others were supported individually either by Supervising Social Workers or a Foster Carer Mentor. This is a considerable achievement for the Fostering Service as a whole and reflects the team's commitment to ensuring carers are encouraged to continuously develop and that the local authority has a well trained and skilled foster care workforce to meet the needs of Looked After Children in Hartlepool.
- 7.9 The Fostering Service also continues to provide a programme of informative and support sessions through its evening support groups. Over the past year the service has arranged for a variety of professionals to attend and deliver talks. The programme has included presentations on Running, Missing from Home and Care procedures, benefits issues, the use of Max cards and a presentation by the Manager of the Through Care team on the views and experiences of Hartlepool looked after children with, most recently, a session by the Manager and workers from the over 11's team on the experiences and needs of older children in care.

8.0 BUDGET

- 8.1 As in all areas of the Council, budget is an area of close scrutiny and it is imperative to ensure the service delivers value for money and identifies any potential areas to achieve savings.
- 8.2 As such the drive to be able to meet the needs of looked after children through in house provision as opposed to within the independent sector is on-going. Fortunately due to having a net increase in foster carers year on year for the past few years, the service continues to extend its capacity to provide high quality matched placements for children and young people and in the main, meet the increase in demand. The motivation for this goes beyond the financial benefits that can be achieved and encompasses meeting the needs of Hartlepool children in their town of origin which promotes continuity of education, health and social networks as well as the capacity of the fostering service to understand the strengths of its own foster carers and thus ensure better matching and placement stability. Where a child is placed with in house carers, the service is further improved by the supervising social workers having knowledge of the type of support, training or development individual foster carers will require and access to services that can deliver that support.
- 8.3 Hartlepool Borough Council continues to utilise the Tees Valley authorities' Collaborative Arrangement of using preferred providers which has some financial advantage for the authorities when they are seeking placements within the independent sector. However as the demand for placements regionally has increased and placements are being sought for less complex children then the capacity of the Independent Fostering Agencies to provide placements for some of the more challenging and complex children has diminished. In the coming year, the Collaborative Arrangement will be reviewed to strengthen the provision of services to meet the requirements of Tees Valley local authorities.
- 8.4 The Recruitment Strategy 2011/12 again highlighted the particular shortage of foster carers for older children and the ageing profile of the foster carers currently approved. The publicity material utilised throughout the year targeted carers for teenagers and for sibling groups but unfortunately while the service continued to attract some interest in fostering per se, the interest was not sufficiently weighted towards either of these groups to increase placement capacity for these specific groups of children. For 2012/13, the publicity materials have been updated and are being more systematically disseminated through a variety of more tried and trusted mediums and it is hoped that this will engender the interest that we need.
- 8.5 During 2011/12, the Children's Services Scrutiny Forum undertook an investigation into the Council's service for looked after children. This investigation was far reaching and took evidence from a wide number of sources. The recommendations of the investigation detail innovative

actions to be undertaken including options to be explored to increase the Council's foster care stock with particular reference to harder to place children and young people. The action plan from the Scrutiny investigation will be implemented during 2012/13.

- 8.6 The Commissioned Placements Panel chaired by the Assistant Director which considers requests for placements in the independent sector has continued to operate. As previously stated this Panel ensures that our own resources are thoroughly explored and confirmation given that in-house capacity cannot meet the needs of a specific child before agreement is given to seeking placements within the independent sector. Thereafter the Panel ensures that placements for children are properly identified and commissioned and the commissioning process achieves value for money.
- 8.7 In terms of service development the local authority is looking at innovative ways to reduce the numbers of children and young people entering the care system. One approach has been the development of the 'Edge of Care' team which aims to provide intensive support to families of young people at risk of becoming looked after due to family breakdown.
- 8.8 The scheme will provide intensive interventions to families to address difficulties and this provision may include the opportunity for a young person to be given some time out with a foster carer ranging from one night to three nights a week. The intention is that the same foster carer will provide support to the family as a whole and be part of the interventions to effect change.
- 8.9 In order to provide these specialist placements, the fostering service will recruit foster carers specifically for the scheme and the publicity materials now includes reference to it. The team will also canvass interest amongst existing foster carers who may view this method of intervention as a challenging development in their fostering careers.
- 8.10 The responsibility of the team will be the recruitment and assessment of support carers while their on-going management supervision and development will lie within the preventative services.

9.0 SUFFICIENCY

- 9.1 With the increasing numbers of looked after children it is essential that the service increase the number of foster carers approved in the coming year, particularly carers providing placements for adolescents, sibling groups and permanent foster care. The service has been relatively successful in recruiting carers for most placements; however there is a short fall in the provision for adolescents and sibling groups and it is the aspiration of the service to recruit sufficient carers to facilitate choice when matching children with carers. Children and young people were consulted as part of the recent Scrutiny Forum investigation into services for looked after children. Children and

young people told the investigation they wanted to be placed with their siblings and would like some choice and input into the decision about where they are placed. This has been incorporated in the Fostering service action plan for 2012/13.

- 9.2 The Fostering service has, over recent years, been successful in achieving regular recruitment of foster carers. It does seem however that the rate of enquiries has slowed down. During the past year, the service has focussed its recruitment efforts on attracting interest from prospective carers who can provide placements for teenagers and sibling groups; this was, however there has been only limited success. As a consequence there will be a full review of the recruitment strategy to consider whether there are any other avenues to be explored to attract new carers to the service, particularly for these specific groups of children and young people.
- 9.3 As well as placing adverts in the press and online the service has participated in a regional radio campaign advertising for foster carers, but this unfortunately has not achieved the increased response that had been hoped for. The campaign is due to repeat next month and it is hoped that this will have more success, coinciding with Fostering Fortnight.
- 9.4 The Fostering service in recognition of the increasing demand for foster placements has worked hard to improve and extend its publicity materials. Building on the positive brand image created for the Looked after Children's Pledge, the Fostering leaflets and the Foster Carers Charter leaflets have a similar presentation with the 'brand' colours and layout. There has also been some investment in materials such as banners and pens.
- 9.5 The new materials were utilised when the Fostering Service took advantage of the opportunity to have a presence in a shop in the Middleton Grange shopping centre over a week in February 2012. This attracted some interest and interested parties will be invited to attend preparation training which is to be run in May 2012.
- 9.6 It is recognised that a crucial way to engage the public and to attract new carers is through the internet. Work has taken place in respect of development of a Fostering and Adoption micro site and attention paid to the website information that is available in respect of both fostering and adoption on the Hartlepool Borough Council website. The micro site provides yet another channel for disseminating information regarding the fostering and adoption services and also provides a means of directly registering an interest in either of these. The contact information is also available on the Family Information Services in Hartlepool (FISH) website.

9.7 This move into the electronic arena does appear to be critical as some of the enquiries have been prompted by searches on the internet and approaches are now being made by email in terms of both fostering and adoption.

10. FOSTERING PANEL ACTIVITY

10.1 The Fostering Panel met 12 times in the last year.

10.2 With regards to plans for children considered by the Fostering Panel, the plan for long term fostering was recommended for approval for 11 children and there were 10 matches considered by the Panel involving 13 children achieving permanence in their foster placements. Three of the matches involved foster carers from Independent Fostering Agencies.

10.3 The Fostering Panel also considered and endorsed the recommendations of 31 Foster Carer Reviews.

10.4 Annual appraisals for all Panel members were undertaken by the Team Manager and Panel Chair in the last year.

10.5 During April 2011 to March 2012, membership of the Panel remained fairly consistent. During the year there have been two vacancies arisen on the Panel and these have been filled in a timely way. The Panel membership meets the requirement of the National Minimum Standards and it provides robust, effective consideration and where necessary challenge to the organisation.

10.6 In January 2011 the Fostering and Adoption Panels amalgamated and now hold a joint Panel. The aim of this was to provide greater capacity and flexibility to support timely business of the Panel and ensure quoracy of the Panel at all times.

10.7 Prior to the Panels joining a Panel training day was held for all members to ensure members had the appropriate knowledge, information and support to enable all them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and confidently. A joint Panel training day was held on 19 January 2012 having been postponed in December due to the commitments of panel members and this new date was well attended by panel members from both the Adoption and the Fostering panel as well as team members from both sides of the service. Presentations were given regarding:

- The Legal framework for adoption delivered by Neil Wilson Local Authority Solicitor;
- The new National Minimum Standards for Fostering and Adoption;
- The planning for permanence process;
- Connected Persons assessments.

10.8 The Adoption and Fostering Panel as a combined panel commenced in March 2012 and will continue to meet every second and fourth Thursday in the month.

11.0 SUPPORT TO FOSTER CARERS

11.1 All foster carers have an allocated supervising social worker and receive a minimum monthly supervision and support visit. Supervising social workers also make occasional unannounced visits to foster carers.

11.2 A monthly support group meeting is facilitated by social workers from the Fostering Team. This meeting is positively attended by carers and has a dual role in providing training, advice and information and facilitating an opportunity for carers to meet regularly to provide peer support.

11.3 Funding is provided directly to the Hartlepool Foster Carer Association who provide regular communication with carers, a newsletter and activities for all the family to be part of. A supervising social worker from the Fostering team acts as a contact point and supports these activities. The Head of Business Unit has met with the Association twice within the last year to discuss issues relating to the Association and fostering services as a whole.

11.4 The Placement Support team provides individual support to carers, children and young people. This support can range from practical, emotional, advice and guidance and will be identified as part of an assessment of need in partnership with the children's social worker and fostering supervising social worker.

11.5 The Department commissions services for looked after children and foster carers from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, carers have access to support in relation to individual young people who they are caring for and psychologists have attended support groups to discuss general issues, and challenges relating to caring for children looked after.

11.6 The Placement Support Team facilitates the Foster Carer Sons and Daughters group, meeting on a monthly basis, providing activities and advice for children and young people.

11.7 The Fostering team has a duty worker throughout the working week who is available to respond to any calls from carers. In addition to this, foster carers have access to the Emergency Duty Team, the commissioned out of hours service and an out of hours telephone support service provided by Jane Young Head of Business Unit (Specialist Services), Wendy Rudd, Head of Business Unit (Safeguarding, Assessment & Support and Maureen McEnaney, (Safeguarding and Review Manager) on a rota basis. Foster carers can use the phone the line at any time.

12.0 PARTICIPATION

- 12.1 A representative group of foster carers and social workers lead in the development of the Foster Carer Pledge.
- 12.2 Foster carers are represented on the Council's Corporate Parenting Forum and participate fully in these meetings.
- 12.3 Foster carers are represented on the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership which takes the lead in the implementation and delivery of the Children Looked After Strategy.
- 12.4 Foster carers were invited and took part in a recent scrutiny investigation relating to services for looked after children.
- 12.5 A newsletter which is delivered through the Foster Carer Association but supplied by a Social Worker within the fostering team is distributed to all carers.
- 12.6 All foster carers have access to the Departments web based Practice Manual which contains the Foster Carer handbook, Departmental Policies and Procedures and research information. The manual also provides a vehicle of communication and participation.
- 12.7 The Fostering service held a Celebration Evening in February 2012 to celebrate the efforts of the longest serving foster carers namely those that have been approved for ten years or more and also to demonstrate our gratitude to all our carers for the care that they provide to the looked after children of Hartlepool. The intention is to make this a yearly celebration.

13.0 ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2011/12

- 13.1 The Fostering Service has in extremely challenging times continued to retain and recruit carers and has been successful in providing high quality in house placements for the vast majority of children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council. In recognition of the need to maintain this work, the Department has increased the capacity of the service by an additional 0.5 social work post.
- 13.2 The development of the dedicated placement support team has provided considerable additional support direct to carers.
- 13.3 The team has recently moved accommodation and is co located with the Through Care team, Children with Disability team, Placement Support team and the Children's Looked After Nurse, although this is a very recent move it has facilitated an increased understanding, and communication between the services has been positive. The accommodation will also provide a venue for small groups of foster carers to meet either for informal support or training and offers better access to social workers, nurse etc.

- 13.4 The fostering service has committed time to the updating of its procedures in-house and the updated procedures have been uploaded onto the web based practice manual. Further to this, work has almost been completed on the updating of the Foster Carer's Handbook which provides guidance and advice to carers regarding their task of caring for looked after children, and the majority of this is also now available on the electronic practice manual. During the year, arrangements were made to provide foster carers with access to the department's electronic Practice Manual as a swifter and more effective way for them to access the information that they need. Progress is also being made on implementing a system of secure emails for foster carers and a pilot scheme has started to identify and iron out any difficulties.
- 13.5 The Fostering service has produced, with the participation of foster carers, a Foster Carer's Charter which sets out the local authority's role and pledge to both foster carers and to children and young people placed. It details what the department will provide for its carers including the provision of support and information. It also sets out the Foster Carers' role, detailing their commitment to such matters as working in partnership and their learning and development.

14.0 PLANS FOR 2012/13

- 14.1 During 2012/13, the service plans to build on its strong foundations of a high quality foster care service. The new office base is currently being refurbished to provide space for children and young people and/or foster carers to use both for individual work, group work and training. The Child Looked After Nurse has a dedicated space and will provide a drop in service for advice and support to carers.
- 14.2 During the coming year, the service has identified the following priorities to deliver continuous improvement in its services to looked after children with specific reference to the fostering service:
- To embed the delivery of services from the Placement Support team, ensuring all carers have access to a named support worker; and the team and carers have direct access to a primary mental health worker who is to be seconded into the placement Support Team from CAMHS;
 - To facilitate and strengthen foster carer participation in service planning and service development.
 - Embed into daily practice the promises in the Foster Carers Pledge and Children looked After Pledge with all areas reflected in the care provided to children and young people looked after.
 - Implement a Fostering Service Development Plan.
 - Continue to develop, facilitate and support Carer Support Group and Sons & Daughters Group.

- Review and deliver the foster carer training programme.
- Develop a Foster Carer Buddy Scheme.
- Continue to provide high quality support and supervision to carers.
- Review the effectiveness of the 2011/12 Recruitment Strategy and refresh the Strategy with the aiming of increasing recruitment to ensure effective matching of children with carers.
- Undertake targeted recruitment for carers able to care for older young people, those on remand and larger sibling groups.

Jacky Yeaman
Team Manager Family Placement team

Jane Young
Head of Business Unit Resources and Specialist Services



HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILD AND ADULT SERVICES

FOSTERING SERVICE

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

April 2012

**HARTLEPOOL BOROUGH COUNCIL
FOSTERING SERVICE**

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This Statement of Purpose was initially approved by the Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council on 29th September 2003.

It was signed on behalf of the Elected Members by the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services.

This Statement of Purpose was reviewed and up dated in April 2012 and is to be approved by the Elected Members of Hartlepool Borough Council.

The Statement of Purpose will be reviewed and revised as appropriate by the Team Manager of the Fostering Service no later than April 2013.

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Introduction

It is a requirement of the Fostering Services England Regulations 2011 and National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, that each fostering agency produces a statement of purpose, including its aims and objectives, a description of the service it provides and the facilities that are provided. This Statement of Purpose gives an outline of those requirements and also how the services is managed and its fitness to provide fostering services. It shows the policy and performance framework that underpins our work and shows how the welfare of children will be met and good outcomes achieved for all children in its care. It also demonstrates the systems which we have set in place to recruit, train, supervise and support foster carers.

This statement is available to all members of staff, foster carers, children and birth parents and is available on our Practice Guidance site fostering microsite. A copy of this statement is also to be lodged with Ofsted. The information contained is regularly updated, and will be amended annually.

A separate Children's Guide to the Fostering Service is given to all young people who are to be placed with foster carers. This is also available on the micro site.

Children's Guide

Subject to the child's age and understanding, the fostering service ensures the child received the Children's guide at the point of placement and that the foster carer explains the contents of the Children's Guide in a way that is accessible. The Children's Guide includes a summary of what the fostering service sets out to do for children, how they can find out their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern. The fostering service will update this guide as required on an annual basis to ensure that information is current and reflects developments in the service. The service would seek to ensure that the guide was available in a format appropriate to the communication needs of the child concerned and would access council resources such as language translation to achieve this.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES, PRINCIPLES AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR STANDARDS OF CARE

AIMS

The main aim of Hartlepool Fostering Service is to provide safe, high quality foster care placements for children and young people that value, support and encourage them to grow and develop as individuals. As well as promoting their health and general well-being the service is committed to ensuring that foster carers and family friends or Connected Persons carers are encouraged to help children and young people to reach their maximum educational ability.

Foster carers will provide good parenting for all children who are looked after and children will be consulted and encouraged to actively participate in their care and family life.

The Fostering Service will ensure that foster carers are provided with the skills, knowledge and support to enable them to meet the assessed needs of children placed.

Our service is committed to multi-agency working and develops partnerships and protocols with organisations which can progress the needs of our looked after children. We work at all levels in partnership with Education and Health to promote the well being of children in public care in Hartlepool.

To ensure foster carers make children and young people aware of their rights and the comments, complaints and advocacy process by passing on the relevant information.

Ensure that all practice promotes equal opportunities for all and value diversity of both foster children and carers regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, age, religious beliefs, disability or marital status.

To ensure that any decisions are transparent and fair and that any concerns are addressed and information about the complaints procedure is made available to all.

The service will consult regularly and learn from those that are in receipt of services through comments, compliments or complaints and have regular meetings with foster carers, senior managers and elected members.

The service will consult regularly with children who are fostered, using a variety of methods to ensure their voice is heard.

The service will also undertake the assessment and support to family and friends or Connected Persons carers to ensure they are equipped to provide the high quality of care aspired to for all children who are looked after. The process including timescales and responsibilities for undertaking a Connected

Person assessment are detailed within the Hartlepool Borough Council Connected Persons Policy and Procedure document.

OBJECTIVES

- To plan and implement effective recruitment campaigns and strategies in order to attract the number and range of carers identified to meet the complex and diverse needs of the looked after population of Hartlepool and to ensure a choice of high quality foster placements.
- To ensure that wherever possible and appropriate siblings will be accommodated together.
- The individual child's needs/wishes and feelings are paramount and taken into consideration in relation to placements.
- To undertake effective assessments of prospective carers including Connected Persons carers within specified timescales to ensure that children are afforded safe and effective placements.
- To maintain and support an Adoption and Fostering Panel to consider Foster Carer and Connected Persons assessments and make recommendations for approval of prospective Foster Carers, children's plans for long term foster care, plans for Special Guardianship and approval of the match of Named children with Foster Carers. The panel also considers the first reviews of Foster carers and subsequent reviews where category changes are being agreed or there have been issues regarding placements
- To provide pre and post approval training for applicants and carers, equipping them to meet the diverse needs of this group of children and young people.
- To provide regular recorded supervision and support contacts with carers by suitably qualified and experienced staff.
- To ensure that additional and flexible support is available to carers to underpin placement stability and improve outcomes for children in placement.
- To protect children and young people from abuse and neglect through safer recruitment practices and adherence to safeguarding policy and procedures in all areas of the service including for staff, carers and panel members.
- To create stability for children and young people in foster care through robust matching processes and a good standard of consistent and effective support.

- To achieve better life chances for looked after children particularly in relation to health, education and employment and leisure activities through promoting the development of skills and expertise within the fostering community and engendering and supporting a culture of aspiration for our looked after children.
- To maintain and promote contact with family members where appropriate.
- To prepare young people adequately for when they eventually leave their foster placement.
- To create lifelong attachments with carers in order that children and young people continue to be supported into adulthood.
- To work in partnership with children and young people, their parents and carers and social workers.
- Provide an environment where each child and young person is helped to make the best of his or her abilities emotionally, physically, educationally and socially.

PRINCIPLES

The work of Hartlepool Fostering Service is based on the following principles:

1. **Child focussed** – the child’s welfare and needs are at the centre of the fostering process and their wishes and feelings are sought and taken into account in all aspects of their care.
2. **Partnership** – the Fostering Service will work in partnership with children and their parents, foster carers and their families, and social work staff and other professionals when delivering the service.
3. **Anti-discriminatory practice** – the Fostering Service will respect human rights and will ensure that there is fair and equal access to all its services. The services it provides will be free from discrimination, prejudice and racism. The service will value diversity and promote equality.

THE STANDARDS OF CARE

The Fostering Service will in its delivery support Hartlepool Child and Adult Services in meeting the child focussed standards which set out what children in foster care need as detailed in the Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards 2011:

Standard 1: The child’s wishes and feelings and the views of those significant to them

- Children know that their views, wishes and feelings are taken into account in all aspects of their care; are helped to understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes in all cases; and know how to obtain support and make a complaint.
- The views of others with an important relationship to the child are gathered and taken into account.

Standard 2: Promoting a positive identity, potential and valuing diversity through individualised care

- Children have a positive self view, emotional resilience and knowledge and understanding of their background.

Standard 3: Promoting positive behaviour and relationships

- Children enjoy sound relationships with their foster family, interact positively with others and behave appropriately.

Standard 4: Safeguarding Children

- Children feel safe and are safe. Children understand how to protect themselves and are protected from significant harm, including neglect, abuse and accident.

Standard 5: Children Missing from Care

- Children rarely go missing and if they do, they return quickly
- Children who do go missing are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return

Standard 6: Promoting good health and wellbeing

- Children live in a healthy environment where their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted and where they are able to access the services to meet their health needs.

Standard 7: Education, employment and leisure activities

- Children are able to enjoy their interests, develop confidence in their skills and are supported and encouraged to engage in leisure activities
- Children are able to make a positive contributing to the foster home and their wider community

Standard 8: Promoting educational achievement

- The education and achievement of children is actively promoted as valuable in itself and as part of their preparation for adulthood. Children are supported to achieve their educational potential.

Standard 9: Promoting and supporting contact

- Children have, where appropriate, constructive contact with their parents, grandparents, siblings, half-siblings, wider family, friends and people who play a significant role in their lives.

Standard 10: Providing a suitable physical environment for the foster child

- Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.

Standard 11: Preparation for a placement

- Children are welcomed into the foster home and leave the foster home in a planned and sensitive manner which makes them feel loved and valued.
- Children feel part of the family. They are not treated differently to the foster carer's own children living in the household. The child's needs are met and they benefit from a stable placement.

Standard 12: Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care

- Children are prepared for, and supported into, adulthood so that they can reach their full potential and achieve economic well-being.

Children Looked After Strategy

In addition to the national standards, Hartlepool Fostering Service has adopted the visions or aspirations for Looked after children detailed in the Children Looked After Strategy which underpin its approach to service delivery. These include:

- The vision is to ensure that every looked after child in Hartlepool experiences high quality care and stable relationships, is nurtured and grows up with a sense of identity and belonging.
- When a child becomes looked after, there must be sufficient range of accommodation options available to be able to match the child to a placement that will meet his/her needs.

THE SERVICES PROVIDED

The services provided specifically by the Fostering service fall into two main areas:

- 1) those provided to registered foster carers and potential foster carers including Connected persons carers
 - initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming foster carers
 - preparation training for applicants
 - competency based assessments of applicants
 - support systems for approved foster carers and Connected Persons carers including allocated Supervising Social Worker and regular supervisions
 - post-approval training and development for foster carers and Connected Persons carers
 - consultation with carers over the development of the service

- 2) those provided to children requiring a foster placement
 - a duty social worker available during office hours Monday to Friday
 - provision of a range of foster care placements for children looked after by Hartlepool Borough Council
 - the provision of carers for use by the Emergency Duty Team for placements at evenings, weekends and bank holidays.
 - Consultation with looked after children on all aspects of the service.

The Fostering service also works in conjunction with a number of other agencies and professionals to ensure a cohesive and effective package of support is available to children who become looked after. The Multi-Agency Looked After Partnership provides a valuable forum for the review of progress and service effectiveness and to plan the implementation of work projects. The agencies and partners involved with looked after children and young people including carers and young people are represented on this forum and are fully involved in its activities. The Child in Care Council plays a critical role in service development and has a valuable contribution to make in terms of feedback. The authority is committed to learning from the experiences of its children in care and to seek improvements.

Provision of Therapeutic Services

The Fostering Service has a discreet service the Therapeutic Social Work team (ACORN) and commission a discreet service from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), who provide therapeutic input to children and young people in foster placement, consultation to carers and other professionals. CAMHS comprises of clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, child and adolescent mental health practitioners and social workers with expertise in children's mental health.

In addition the members of the Therapeutic Social Work Team (ACORN) work closely with carers and often work directly with them in conjunction with the child in placement. The key objectives of the work is to provide a regular, easy to use guidance and support service to all foster carers and to improve placement stability for children in care. They also provide training to foster carers, Connected Persons carers, social workers and other professionals.

Provision of Health Promotion Support Services

There is a Designated Nurse for Looked after Children and Young People who oversees Children's Annual Health Assessments and has a proactive input into the health promotion of Young People. She will provide support to foster carers in addressing the range of health issues which may present with looked after children. She also provides advice and support to young people on an individual basis on issues such as contraception.

A dedicated consultant paediatrician advises the Adoption and Fostering panel on medical issues for applications to foster and children with a plan for long term fostering.

Provision of Educational Support Services

The Fostering service has strong links to the educational support services for Looked after children and in particular works closely with the Inclusion Co-ordinator (Looked After children/young offenders), the Head of Social and Education Inclusion - Child and Adult services who have a strong commitment to the looked after population.

Provision of Leisure, Sport, Cultural and Religious Activity

Foster carer training and supervision promotes the importance of leisure provision for looked after children and young people, and the expectation that carers will seek out and support new experiences and activities to enhance children's self-worth, social development and independence.

Looked After Children and their carers in Hartlepool are able to access the MAX card which gives free access or reduced cost access to a range of leisure activities throughout the local area. Information on community play schemes, clubs and holiday activities are provided to our carers on a regular basis through newsletters.

We aim to support all young people in their religious and cultural beliefs and customs. We ensure that information is available to provide understanding of different cultures and religions. We provide resources that may be needed to ensure young people are able to practice their beliefs and customs.

We are committed to directly challenging racism and ensure that all young people who access our services are aware of our policies in relation to anti-oppressive practice and anti-racism. We will ensure that all people are treated equally, regardless of age, sex, sexuality, ethnicity, disability or

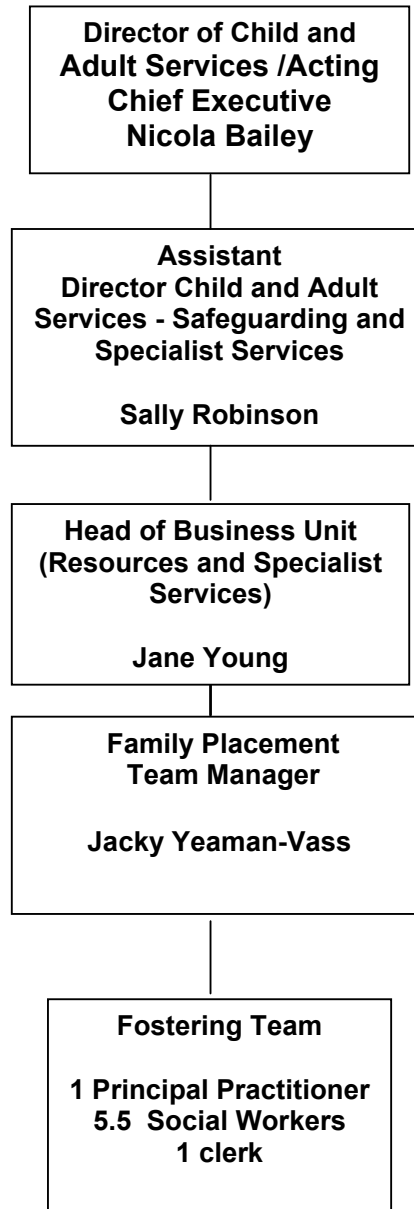
religion. We have supervising fostering social workers to help carers with issues with trans racial placements.

Preparation for Adulthood/Pathway Planning

The Through Care Team and the Fostering Service work closely with other professionals to provide a holistic approach to meeting young peoples needs. Hartlepool is committed to supporting care leavers and ensuring that they are able to build the skills and ability to eventually live independently. The service is committed to the ethos of 'Staying Put'. We acknowledge that young people mature at different rates and we will support where possible young people to remain in their foster placement beyond 18 years of age in order to experience normal family life if this supports them more effectively.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The Fostering Service of Hartlepool Borough Council is provided by designated workers from the Family Placement Team who are based within the Safeguarding and Specialist section of the Child and Adult Services Department.



SPECIFIC SERVICE INFORMATION

NUMBERS OF FOSTER CARERS

The number of Foster Carer approvals achieved 1 April 2011 – 31 March 2012 comprised 7 approvals of mainstream carers and 0 approvals of Connected Person carers. In the period 2010 - 2011 the fostering service accepted the resignation of 4 mainstream carers, and 2 Connected Persons carers.

The total number of Foster Carers approved by Hartlepool Borough Council on 31st March 2012 was 92. This number includes 2 approved as Short Break Carers, 1 as a Remand Carer.

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN PLACED

The total number of Looked After children at 31 March 2012 was 181 (prev. 168). The number of children placed in foster care placements provided by Hartlepool Borough Council Fostering Service on 31st March 2011 was 141 (prev. 134).

DESIGNATION OF CARERS

The majority of carers are mainstream offering either short or longer term care to children and young people up to the age of 18 years.

A banded payment scheme is in place ranging from band 1 to band 4. Progression is based on experience, competencies and training. This scheme also includes the potential to make the payment of a Specialist fee which is the equivalent to the previous Band 5 payment for placements for children with more complex needs.

Of the 92 carers approved, the Fostering Service had, as of 31 March 2012, 13 foster carers who were designated Specialist Carers due to the complex needs of the children placed.

2 Carers approved are designated as a 'Short Break Carer' (previously Sharing the Caring). They provide short break care for children and young people with disabilities to provide them and their carers with some respite. However one carer is currently on hold while she gives consideration to her personal circumstances.

Hartlepool also has 1 Remand Carer who was recruited specifically to look after young people who have been remanded in care by the Courts. However this carer is on long term sick. It is proposed that the remit of Specialist carers will include remand provision although the demand for such a provision has not been evident over the past 12 months. Additional training is to be provided to ensure that this service is available.

Hartlepool currently has one carer whose remit is to specifically provide 'parent and child' placements but also have carers who have the capacity to provide such placements in very specific circumstances. This is an area which still requires attention so that our resources are able to meet the demand for these placements in the most effective manner.

SAFEGUARDING, COMPLAINTS & ALLEGATIONS

Protecting Children from Harm

Hartlepool Fostering Services operates a safe recruitment process for all staff employed by the agency and panel members. In addition, there is a rigorous vetting and assessment process undertaken with all potential carers. Enhanced CRB checks are repeated every 3 years for all carers, staff and panel members.

Hartlepool Fostering Service has policy and guidance underpinning our service on safe caring, health and safety, bullying, management of behaviour and foster carer agreements.

Our processes and procedures will ensure that any concern is addressed and monitored by the management team and will inform service developments, for example:

Poor quality of care/breach of foster care agreement, child protection procedures which deal with allegations of abuse against foster carers and through the complaints procedures.

Children will know about these procedures through their social worker and the Children's Guide. They also have had access to a children's rights and advocacy service independent of the service currently provided by Barnados.

Complaints Procedure

Hartlepool Borough Council Child and Adult Services operates a complaints service which is independent of the Fostering Service.

Foster Carers are given a Complaints and Compliments Leaflet at the outset of the assessment, detailing the process if they wish to make a complaint, and also when they sign the Foster Carer Agreement, which is kept with the carer's handbook.

NUMBERS OF COMPLAINTS AND THEIR OUTCOMES

In the year 1 April 2011 to 31ST March 2012 there were no complaints made against a foster Carer in respect of the standard of care provided.

Allegations

All allegations in relation to foster carers are investigated and actioned through Hartlepool Child Protection Service reporting to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) on behalf of the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children's Board under the procedures for Managing allegations against people who work with children or who are in a position of trust. Foster carers are offered independent support during this process which can be accessed via their fostering Social worker.

NUMBERS OF ALLEGATIONS AND THEIR OUTCOMES

There were 2 child protection referrals made in respect of allegations by looked after children against their carers. These resulted in section 47 enquiries being conducted. Both concluded that there was no further action to be taken but the children moved to alternative placements. Both fostering households were offered independent support at the time of the allegations being made but chose not to access this.

THE PROCEDURES AND PROCESSES FOR RECRUITING, APPROVING, TRAINING, SUPPORTING AND REVIEWING CARERS.

1. RECRUITMENT:

Publicity

- 1.1 Hartlepool's recruitment strategy is reviewed annually. All enquirers are asked where they obtained the contact details of the service and this information is analysed in order to target specific campaigns. From information regarding the previous years' enquiries there again appears to be greatest response to adverts in the local press and from people known to current carers.
- 1.2 Methods currently used include leaflets being displayed in council and public buildings in the town, local advertising in the Hartlepool Mail including the Mail website and related guides such as the Parenting Guide and wall planner and calendar. Advertisements are also regularly placed in 'Hartbeat' and we have recently advertised within the Primary Times. The publicity materials for attracting new foster carers have recently been updated and we have in effect developed a brand which we hope will assist in our efforts to attract new carers.
- 1.3 There are also regional efforts orchestrated through the Regional Marketing Forum to attract new foster carers and the most recent activity was a regional radio advertising campaign. Advertisements for carers for specific children can be placed in the local media.
- 1.4 We also have access to the Hartlepool Borough Council Press Office who are able to help us promote the service to the press through editorials and we have a page on Hartlepool Borough Council website where potential carers can register interest in becoming a foster carer. Features on radio, newspaper articles, community meetings and briefings are all undertaken regularly. At present one of the Fostering social workers is preparing to undertake a sponsored trek in Nepal for Fostering Network (May 2012) and this is providing a valuable opportunity for publicity on behalf of the local authority.

Response to Enquiries

- 1.5 Enquiries regarding fostering are responded to quickly. An Information pack is normally sent out within one day of the enquiry being received. Once the return slip is received from the enquirer a joint home visit is normally made within five working days. Information about the assessment process is given and information about the family is gathered, including their motivation to foster. They are asked to consider and indicate if they wish to proceed by returning the form provided. If no response is received within 8 weeks then a further

contact is made to ascertain their wishes and reason for delaying or withdrawing. If the potential applicants do not respond in a further 4 weeks then the file will be closed.

2. ASSESSMENT:

- 2.1 The process for assessment leading to presentation to the Adoption and Fostering Panel for approval is clearly explained and keeping applicants informed of the progress of statutory checks etc, is considered important.
- 2.2 All applicants are normally required to attend a 4 day preparation course. The preparation training undertaken uses the Fostering Networks Skills to foster programme including, Skills to Foster, Child Development, Separation and Loss, Working Together, Safer Care, Moving On. There is an evaluation at the end of the course and applicants are requested to feedback.
- 2.3 Medical examinations are carried out by the applicant's doctor using the BAAF medical form and returned to the Hartlepool Medical Adviser for comments and a recommendation regarding suitability to foster. The applicants are required to undergo a number of statutory checks including an Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check, local authority checks, current employer and NSPCC checks. The purpose of these checks is to safeguard the children to be placed.
- 2.4 The allocated workers undertaking the home study make an agreement with the applicants for the completion of the assessment including agreeing dates and times of visits and the target for completion of the home study. The applicants are required to view the assessment report and give written feedback prior to the Panel consideration of their application.

3 APPROVAL:

- 3.1 The applicants will be invited to attend the Adoption and Fostering Panel that is held every second and fourth Thursday in the month. They will be given the opportunity to answer questions put by the Panel members and to make any additional comments they may wish to make. Applicants are to be informed verbally of the Agency Decision Maker's decision within two working days and are to receive confirmation in writing five working days of the Agency Decision Maker's confirming or otherwise the Panel recommendation. The Applicant will be asked for their comments regarding the process and evaluation forms are to be used to achieve this.

3.2 Applicants who are not deemed suitable to foster may access the review procedure or seek an independent review through the Independent Review Mechanism.

4. SUPPORT:

4.1 Once a foster carer has been approved by Panel they complete a foster carer agreement and are provided either with the paper copy of or information to access the Foster Carer Handbook electronically. All foster carers are allocated a supervising social worker from the Fostering Service. This person will visit the foster carers, provide formal supervision on a monthly basis or at an agreed level dependent upon current placement and carer capability. They will also provide directly, or facilitate access to, any practical, emotional or professional support required.

4.2 Foster carers are provided with equipment to enable them to care for a child in placement.

4.3 Foster carers will be invited to attend a monthly support group that is facilitated by two members of staff from the team. The group is an opportunity to build networks of support amongst other carers, exchange ideas about fostering and to have the opportunity to hear guest speakers on a variety of relevant subjects. This provides a valuable forum for carers to be updated regarding service developments and to network with other professionals.

4.4 The Fostering Service operates a duty system within office hours which is staffed by a fostering service worker. Foster carers can access support and advice from this worker if their allocated worker is not available. An out of hours telephone support service is also provided additional to the Emergency Duty Team arrangements which are in place.

4.5 All foster carers receive full membership of Fostering Network and access to an independent advice and mediation service should an allegation be made against them.

4.6 The agency also provides financial support to the Hartlepool Foster Carers Association which arranges a number of social events throughout the year. Members of the team also meet with representatives of the Foster carers Association to be kept informed of any issues they wish to raise

4.7 This year the Fostering Service arranged a Celebration evening event in February 2012 to commemorate the efforts of the longest serving foster carers namely those that have been approved for ten years or more and also to demonstrate our gratitude to all our carers for the

care that they provide to the looked after children of Hartlepool. The intention is to make this a yearly celebration.

- 4.8 The fostering service has worked alongside some of our foster carers to produce a Foster carer Charter and this sets out the local authority's role detailing what the department will provide for its carers including in terms of support and information. It also sets out the Foster Carers' role detailing their commitment to such concepts as working in partnership and their learning and development.

5. TRAINING:

- 5.1 A training plan details and supports the provision of sufficient and regular training opportunities for foster carers through the approval process and throughout their career in fostering.
- 5.2 All foster carers will attend a preparation training course incorporating the Skills to Foster materials during their preparation and assessment.
- 5.3 An Induction programme involving the completion of the Children's Workforce Development Council workbook has been developed and all new foster carers will be required to undertake this piece of work within the first twelve months. Foster carers will have the opportunity to be supported on an individual basis to complete the workbooks by their Link Workers or will be able to access group sessions which have taken place over a seven week period. The group sessions were to be repeated on a six monthly basis dependent upon the numbers of newly approved carers and their requirements. There has also been the opportunity for carers to be mentored by more experienced carers if they wished and this option has been pursued by some of this year's new carers.
- 5.4 Foster Carers are required to complete a training portfolio and their Supervising Social Workers are to support each carer to ensure they have a Personal Development Plan which is reviewed as part of the Foster Carers annual review.
- 5.5 Foster carers are given support and encouragement to attend all training events that are relevant to their role. Any places available on relevant staff training events are offered to foster carers to increase their sense of working in partnership with the professional team and to ensure the best care is offered to children and young people. Carers are provided with information regarding training provided corporately, through Child and Adult Services and through the Local Safeguarding Children Board. All carers are provided with a training portfolio to record their training and development activity which in turn is used to inform and create their personal development plan.

- 5.6 Where possible Foster Carer representatives are supported to attend specialist training events by external providers such as BAAF and the expectation is that they will then cascade the information to the other carers.

6 REVIEW:

- 6.1 The registration of all foster carers is reviewed on a regular basis. The views of the foster carer are sought, together with the views of children and placing Social workers via end of placement reports and within the review documentation. The supervising social worker is responsible for collating the information and adding their own views based on the placements that have taken place and their observations of the carer during visits and supervision
- 6.2 The first review is held after six months and then annually thereafter. Reviews are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers who are independent of the Fostering Service. The review report is presented to the Fostering Panel by the supervising social worker for consideration after the first review and if there is a proposal to change the approval category or recommend de-registration. Foster carers have the option to attend panel if they wish.
- 6.3 The registration of foster carers may be reviewed by Panel at any time if there are changes of circumstances or events indicate that foster carers are no longer suitable to care for children.

Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

Foster carers are provided with full information about the children placed with them and are expected to observe high standards of confidentiality. As an agency we maintain records on carers and looked after children, who are subject to National Standards and Data Protection legislation. Staff and foster carers are expected to declare any potential conflicts of interest, as are panel members.

7. DE-REGISTRATION:

- 7.1 Most foster carers voluntarily withdraw from the fostering task. The details of their resignation are placed before the Fostering Panel and their de-registration is formally recorded.
- 7.2 There are occasions when the registration of a foster carer is reviewed with a view to considering the options available, i.e. changes to approval or de- registration. Foster carers are offered the opportunity to submit a response attend the Fostering Panel in these circumstances. Also if unhappy with the decision reached they are also able to request

a review of the decision or to have their case addressed by the Independent Review Mechanism.

8. THE ADOPTION AND FOSTERING PANEL:

- 8.1 The fostering agency is required by the Fostering Services Regulations to establish a Fostering Panel. The membership, role and functions of the panel are prescribed within the Regulations. Hartlepool have moved away from separate panels for Adoption and Fostering matters and have now amalgamated the panel and hold a joint 'Adoption and Fostering panel. This is in order to ensure quoracy and to allow for flexibility regarding the presentation of cases. Panel membership is now drawn from a central list of members and quoracy dictates that at least five members are present. These members must comprise the chair or vice chair, a social worker representative and an independent member. Panels must have access to medical and legal advice as required.
- 8.2 Hartlepool's Adoption and Fostering Panel currently meets every second and fourth Thursday in the month and considers assessments of prospective foster carers, annual reviews of carers, de-registrations and issues in relation to foster carers. Although not a requirement within the regulations the Adoption and Fostering Panel also considers the plan for a child for long term fostering and Special Guardianship. The business of the Panel is formally recorded.
- 8.3 The Adoption and Fostering Panel makes recommendations that are presented to the Agency Decision Maker for consideration. These decisions are recorded and notified in writing to the prospective/existing foster carers.
- 8.4 Foster carers who disagree with the Panel decision regarding their approval, de-registration or changes to category of approval will have the opportunity to request a review of the decision made by the Fostering Panel either through the agency or through the Independent Review Mechanism which is provided by BAAF.
- 8.5 The Hartlepool Borough Council Adoption and Fostering Panel policy and procedures document provides additional information regarding the constitution and running of the panel.

APPENDIX 1 Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Standards:

The work of Hartlepool Fostering Service is delivered within the following legal framework and in accordance with the following standards:

- Fostering Service Regulations 2011
- The National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services 2011 from section 23 of the Care Standards Act 2000
- Children Act Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)
- Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance for local authorities 2010.

This Statement of Purpose is produced in accordance with the following standards and regulations

NMS 2011 Standard 16

- 16.1** The fostering service has a clear statement of purpose which is available to and understood by foster carers, staff and children and is reflected in any policies, procedures and guidance. It is available to the responsible authority and any parent or person with parental responsibility.
- 16.2 The aims and objectives of the statement of purpose are child focused and show how the service will meet outcomes for children.

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)

- 4.1 The Fostering service provider must compile a Statement of Purpose , which sets out the aims and objectives of the service as a whole, and the services and facilities which are provided (including the provision of any 'parent and child arrangements'). The statement must be reviewed and updated as necessary , but at least annually and published on the provider's website(if they have one), with a copy provided to Ofsted. Copies must also be available upon request to anyone working for the purposes of the fostering service , any foster carer or potential foster carer of the service, and to any child placed with one of the service's foster carers and their parents.
- 4.2 The Statement of purpose is a key document which sets a framework for all of the business of the fostering service . it must be consistent with relevant legislation, Regulations, NMS and statutory guidance, be child focused and show how the fostering service will help children achieve positive outcomes. The manager of the fostering service must ensure that the service is at all times conducted in a manner consistent with the Statement of Purpose.

APPENDIX 2

**NUMBERS, RELEVANT QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE OF STAFF
as at 1st April 2012**

The staff of Hartlepool Borough Council's Fostering Service consists of:

NAME & STATUS	DATE OF APPOINTMENT			QUALIFICATIONS	RELEVANT EXPERIENCE
Jane Young Head of Business Unit Resources and Specialist Services	01	10	10	CSS 1989 PQ 1 PQ Child Care Award 2004 CMS 2006 GSCC registered	Children & Families LAC Team Manager Fostering & Adoption Team Manager. Fostering & Adoption Panel member
Jacky Yeaman- Vass Team Manager	02	02	09	MSW Social work 1992 CQSW 1992 CSM DMS GSCC registered	Children & Families Fostering & Adoption Panel member Family Support Team Manager IRO
Glynis Howe Principal Practitioner	04	11	02	CQSW 1984 PQ1 CCA GSCC Registered	Children & Families Family Placement Training
Christine Croft Social Worker	02	02	09	Dip SW 1997 PQ1 CCA GSCC Registered	Children & Families Independent Fostering Agency
Julie Levitt Social Worker	02	02	07	BSc Childhood Studies Dip SW 1997 GSCC Registered	Children & Families Leaving Care Family Placement
Janet McGreevy Social Worker	10	01	05	Dip SW 1992 BA (Hons) Social Work Studies PQ1 GSCC Registered	Residential Social Work Family Support Child Protection Nominated Worker
Jacqui Dixon Social Worker	01	10	09	Dip Sw 2003 PQ1 GSCC Registered	Children & Families Resource Team manager Nominated Worker

Emma Howarth Social Worker	01	10	11	BA Early Childhood Studies BA Social Work 2010 Certificate in Counselling Children GSCC Registered	Children & Families Family Resource Worker
Keith Munro Social Worker	01	04	12	BA Hons Social Studies Dip SW work 1992 GSCC registered	Children & Families Connexions Children's Society Research and Policy
Patricia Adams Administrative Staff – shared with Adoption Services	01	11	07		Child & Adult Services Admin Children & Families

CHILDREN'S SERVICES PORTFOLIO

Report to Portfolio Holder

8 May 2012



Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: IMPROVING THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF LOCAL ADOLESCENTS

SUMMARY

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of the report is to update the Portfolio Holder on the work of the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB) which has developed a series of recommendations to support the further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

The report provides a summary of the work of the Adolescent Task and Finish Group established by Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board and sets out the recommendations to support the further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool. The report provides the Portfolio Holder with an opportunity to comment on the issues highlighted in the report and influence the work of the Board in its development of services relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool. (A copy of the full report submitted to the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children's Board is attached as **Appendix 1**).

3. RELEVANCE TO PORTFOLIO MEMBER

Children's Services Portfolio includes responsibility for safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

4. TYPE OF DECISION

For information only.

5. DECISION MAKING ROUTE

For information only.

6. DECISION(S) REQUIRED

That the Portfolio Holder notes the recommendations and further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

Report of: Director of Child and Adult Services

Subject: IMPROVING THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF LOCAL ADOLESCENTS.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to update the Portfolio Holder on the work of the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children's Board (HSCB) which has developed a series of recommendations to support the further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board established a Task and Finish group to promote a better understanding of the risks experienced by local adolescents with the aim of improving how services jointly safeguard adolescents, support them to make safer choices and promote their wellbeing.

2.2 The Task and Finish group agreed to work to the chronological definition of adolescence as typically being 11-19.

2.3 The work of the group included a review of recent national research and literature relating to the key factors that impact upon the safety and wellbeing of adolescents.

2.4 This was supplemented by an analysis of local need that explored a number of interrelated indicators that often, when taken in combination, can lead to young people experiencing difficulties during the adolescence phase and often later in life.

2.5 This work was then cross-referenced with the views of local adolescents and their perception of growing up in Hartlepool which were established through the use of a local on-line survey and focused group work with young people to provide both quantitative and qualitative data.

2.6 Overall 423 adolescents took part in the consultation (full details regarding the reach of the survey are included in the report at **Appendix 1**).

- 2.7 The work of the group concluded with the development of a series of recommendations which were agreed by Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board which will support the further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

3. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 3.1 Local adolescents appear to have a good understanding of the key threats to their safety and wellbeing and the risks associated with their own behaviours as well as the environment in which they live and socialise.
- 3.2 Most adolescents in Hartlepool feel safe within the family home. Their primary concern around their safety is the threat posed by other groups of adolescents and the fear of being bullied and physically assaulted. Adolescents tend to socialise in large groups outside of the home to counteract this threat.
- 3.3 A minority of adolescents are carrying weapons for self-defence purposes.
- 3.4 A significant number of adolescents feel pressured by their peers to get involved in things which ultimately may pose a risk to their safety and would appear to have limited coping mechanisms to deal with such pressures.
- 3.5 Families were seen as a support for the majority of adolescents, but this was not always related to parents. Even in this small sample it was clear that there were a number of adolescents who did not live with parents, but were with grandparents and extended family members.
- 3.6 Notably a minority of adolescents feel pressure from within their families to do things they did not wish to do by immediate or extended family members.
- 3.7 In general, adolescents awareness of wider support agencies across the town appeared limited.
- 3.8 A minority of adolescents will not or can not talk to anyone about their problems (and openly say this) and have no outlet for their frustration, anger or feelings.
- 3.9 There are a number of 'named' areas across the town which adolescents deem to be unsafe.
- 3.10 For some adolescents within the town many of the above concerns are coupled with other pressures due to their situation. Young carers struggle to cope with the demands of being a carer to an adult whilst

also dealing with general concerns that affect the majority of young people. For Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual or Transgender young people areas in which most young people hang out and meet friends, can be a very intimidating and sometimes dangerous places that provide little comfort or reassurance, due to homophobic opinions. It appears that young people with Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities are even more isolated due to the concerns of parents / carers who are ultimately trying to protect them from risk of harm.

- 3.11 Local adolescents appear to have a good understanding of both the opportunities and dangers associated with the internet and e-networks.
- 3.12 National research highlights that the practice and expertise in universal services is critical to the safety of adolescents. The most vulnerable adolescents are those on the margins of the child protection system about whom there are some concerns, but either universal services are not identifying concerns appropriately, sometimes due to a perception that adolescents are more resilient to the effects of abuse or potentially harmful behaviours and/or have not understood their responsibilities for referring these concerns to the relevant service for assessment.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS TO SUPPORT THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS REALTING TO THE SAFETY AND WELLBEING OF ADOLESCENTS IN HARTLEPOOL

- 4.1 It is clear that despite the difficulties that typically occur as part of normal development most adolescents locally lead positive lives and make a successful transition to adulthood. Key to this is the support and guidance young people get from their families and other adults that they trust, and their experience at school. But a small minority clearly require early and effective additional help. There are risk factors which can help identify these young people, although their presence is not always known, understood or acted upon by those working with them in universal settings. Those who are not identified or helped effectively can face significant harm and a small number will cause major harm to themselves and others unless there is decisive early intervention.
- 4.2 The following recommendations were the culmination of the work of the task and finish group and have been accepted by Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board. During 2012/13 an action plan will be delivered to ensure the implementation of these recommendations.

Recommendation 1

The marketing of the local 'Youth Offer' needs to be improved; particularly in relation to safe places to go and things to do for local adolescents and how they can access further help and support if they (or their families) are experiencing difficulties. These improvements need to take full account of the growing preference amongst

adolescents for the use of e-facilities and e-networking as means of acquiring information and knowledge.

Recommendation 2

Ensure that staff in universal settings are equipped with the skills, knowledge and responsibility to identify adolescents who are vulnerable through use of the Common Assessment Framework and to respond promptly to prevent further exposure and/or participation in risky and harmful behaviours. Those providing services will need to work closely with the whole family to identify the underlying causes behind presenting behaviours addressing these as well as meeting the presenting needs. This will ensure long term improvement for the circumstances of adolescents who are experiencing difficulties.

Recommendation 3

Ensure that local strategies to prevent and reduce adolescents participation in risky and harmful behaviours acknowledge the influence of the peer group on adolescents decision making and provide strategies to resist the pressure of their friends and peers.

Recommendation 4

Ensure that local strategies to prevent and reduce adolescents participation in risky and harmful behaviours make full use of local norms data to redress young peoples perception that the majority of their peers are participating in sex and drinking large quantities of alcohol and misusing substances.

Recommendation 5

Ensure that enforcement agencies are aware of the emphasis adolescents place on belonging to large groups when using public spaces as a key safety measure.

Recommendation 6

Ensure that staff in all settings have access to training relating to the dangers of knife crime and that knife crime awareness and prevention is a key feature of both formal and non formal curriculums to ensure that adolescents can understand the dangers of carrying knives both within school and in settings outside of school.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 That the Portfolio Holder notes the findings and recommendations of the task and finish group and endorses the recommendations to

support the further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

- 6.2 That the Portfolio Holder endorses the work of Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board in developing an action plan to implement the recommendations.

7. CONTACT OFFICER

Sally Robinson, Assistant Director (Safeguarding and Specialist Services), Child and Adult Services, Hartlepool Borough Council, Level 4, Civic Centre, TS24 8AY. Tel 01429 523405. E-mail sally.robinson@hartlepool.gov.uk

Mark Smith, Head of Integrated Youth Support Services, Child and Adult Services, Hartlepool Borough Council, level 4, Civic Centre, TS24 8AY. Tel 01429 523405. E-mail mark.smith@hartlepool.gov.uk

HARTLEPOOL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

Adolescence Report

10th January 2012

1) INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board established a Task and Finish group to promote a better understanding of the risks experienced by local adolescents with the aim of improving how services jointly safeguard adolescents, support them to make safer choices and promote their wellbeing.
- 1.2 The purpose of the report is to highlight the findings of the Task and Finish Group and provide the Hartlepool Safeguarding Children's Board with a series of recommendations to support the further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

2) TASK AND FINISH GROUP MEMBERSHIP

Mark Smith	HBC Head of Integrated Youth Support Services – Chair
Jim Murdoch	Hartlepool Safeguarding Children Board Business Manager
John Robinson	HBC Parent Commissioner
Heather Duckers	Senior Clinical Matron, Health
Judith Hodgson	HBC Resources Team Manager
Keith Munro	HBC Research and Development Officer
Zoe Westley	HBC School Improvement Adviser
Deborah Gibbin	Teenage Pregnancy Officer
Dave Wise	Chairman of the West View Project
Stuart Simpson	Cleveland Fire Brigade Diversionsary Activities Manager
Pip Harkness	Hartlepool CAHMS Clinical Nurse Specialist

Roni Checksfield	HBC Youth Inclusion & Custody Co-ordinator (Hartlepool Youth Offending Service)
Beth Storey	HBC Youth Work Manager
Caroline Wilkinson	HBC Nurse Advisor (Hartlepool Youth Offending Service)

- 2.1 Partners on the board each agreed to allocate staff to the working group. The group met on four occasions with work being allocated to members to be completed between meetings. Although the group was never attended by all partners each meeting was able to move the agenda forward effectively.

3) SCOPE OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 This report seeks to promote a better understanding of the risks experienced by local adolescents with the aim of improving how services jointly safeguard adolescents, support them to make safer choices and promote their wellbeing.
- 3.2 The Task and Finish group agreed to work to the chronological definition of adolescence as typically being 11-19
- 3.3 The report includes a review of recent national research and literature relating to the key factors that impact upon the safety and wellbeing of adolescents .
- 3.4 This is followed by an analysis of local need that explores a number of interrelated indicators, that often when taken in combination can lead to young people experiencing difficulties during the adolescence phase and often later in life.
- 3.4 This is cross-referenced with the views of local adolescents and their perception of growing up in Hartlepool, which were established through the use of a local on-line survey and through focused group work with young people to provide both quantitative and qualitative data.
- 3.5 The report concludes with a series of recommendations to support the further development of local arrangements relating to the safety and well-being of adolescents in Hartlepool.

4) LITERATURE REVIEW

- 4.1 The following table summarises the latest research on the safety and wellbeing of adolescents in the UK. This was used to give the task and finish group a better understanding of the national context on safeguarding adolescents and improving their wellbeing.

Title	Key Themes
Learning lessons from serious case reviews 2009–2010 (Ofsted October 2010)	<p>Summary of the key factors leading to the death or serious injury of children and adolescents.</p> <p>Background and circumstances of the children and adolescents highlights that many of these deaths could have been preventable.</p>
Learning lessons from serious case reviews 2008 - 2009 (Ofsted October 2009)	<p>Summary of the key factors leading to the death or serious injury of adolescents.</p> <p>Background and circumstances of the children and adolescents highlights that many of these deaths could have been preventable.</p>
Learning lessons, taking action: Ofsted's evaluations of serious case reviews 2007 – 2008 (Ofsted October 2008)	<p>Summary of the key factors leading to the death or serious injury of adolescents.</p> <p>Background and circumstances of the children and adolescents highlights that many of these deaths could have been preventable.</p>
Safeguarding Young People: Responding to young people aged 11-17 who are maltreated.	<p>Professionals perception of adolescents resilience and ability to cope with the effects of abuse and harmful behaviours.</p>
Positive for Youth: A new approach to cross-government policy for young people aged 13 to 19 (DFE 2011).	<p>National overview of the adolescent phase and the coalition governments aspirations adolescents and local services.</p>
Barnes, M et al (2011) Understanding Vulnerable Young People: Analysis from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England.	<p>National overview of the factors that make adolescents vulnerable to harmful behaviours and poor outcomes.</p>

Newbury-Birch ET AL (2009) Impact of Alcohol Consumption on Young People: A systematic review of published research.	A summary of published research that highlights the factors that make adolescents vulnerable to substance misuse.
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Adolescence

- 4.2 Adolescence is generally defined as a key period of biological and psychological development which generally occurs between puberty and the physical maturation into adulthood and which is characterised as typically beginning and ending around the teenage years (Larson, Wilson 2004).
- 4.3 In Britain this key period of development takes place within a broader societal period of transition as children gradually acquire the rights and responsibilities that are accorded to adults.
- 4.3 Culturally, this phase in Britain (similar to the majority of the Western world) has come to be defined as a period of both opportunity and risk as children typically begin to acquire greater levels of personal autonomy and in doing so become exposed to greater levels of risk.
- 4.4 Most adolescents are able to develop and progress into adult life with the support of universal services, such as health and education, community-based organisations, and the care and support of their family, friends and community. However, for a critical minority, adolescence is a time when serious problems emerge or earlier difficulties escalate (DFE 2011).

Risks in the teenage years

- 4.5 The coalition governments recently published Positive for Youth policy (DFE 2011) highlights that adolescents will make mistakes and do things they should not do, or wish they had not done. Most will be able to get back on track quickly with little harm done. Most young people make the transition successfully to adulthood through a combination of supportive families; good schools, colleges and training providers and access to opportunities for personal and social development outside the classroom along with the vision and belief that they can succeed.
- 4.6 Some young people, however, are disadvantaged because of their backgrounds or vulnerable because of their personal circumstances or behaviours, and find the changes in the teenage years much more difficult. A minority engage in behaviour that harms themselves or others and which may have far-reaching consequences. Individual young people may move in and out of being at risk of poor outcomes as they develop and as their circumstances change.

- 4.7 Some adolescents may face problems with poverty, drugs, violence, problems at school or with housing. Adolescents in general are more likely to be victims of crime than older people – for example, 14% of young people aged 16-24 were victims of personal violence or theft in the last year, compared to just under 6% of everyone aged over 16 (Home Office 2010/2011). Some adolescents face discrimination, bullying or even violence, which may be linked to their age, appearance, disability, ethnicity, religion, gender identity or sexual orientation. Small proportions of adolescents are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, or at risk of becoming detached from their communities and of drifting into the alternative sense of belonging offered by gang culture.
- 4.8 One of the most significant changes in the way adolescents live their lives today is the explosion in internet and social media. This has huge benefits in widening access to knowledge and experience and making the world more immediate. However Professor Tanya Byron's review of internet safety and Reg Bailey's review of commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood highlight that the internet can create significant risks for adolescents such as access to potentially inappropriate material, which range from content (e.g. violence and pornography) through to contact and conduct of children in the digital world (e.g. suicide pacts, sexual exploitation and cyber bullying).
- 4.9 Research has highlighted that many of the most pressing problems facing adolescents have a shared set of risk factors (DFE 2011). These include things like early family relationship problems, violence, poverty, disengagement from school, learning difficulties, a history of problem behaviour within the family or friendship groups, poor mental health, or exposure to criminal activity. Such risk factors do not automatically predict that problems will occur later, but they do make it more likely. For example, one piece of research found that young people displaying four or more risk factors at age 16 or 17 were eight times more likely to not be in education, employment or training at age 18 or 19 compared to those displaying no risk factors at this age (42% compared to 5%) (Barnes et al 2011).
- 4.10 The links between different forms of risky behaviour are also well established. Truancy, substance misuse, crime, early and risky sexual activity, and anti-social behaviour tend to cluster together. For example, evidence shows that alcohol use by adolescents is associated with cannabis use, lower educational attainment, teenage pregnancy and truancy, and can make them more likely to be a victim of crime (Newbury-Birch et al 2009).
- 4.11 Family problems including domestic abuse, parental substance misuse, and parental mental health problems have an enormous impact on the lives of some adolescents. Their health and wellbeing can be adversely affected and they can be forced to look after themselves and their parents far earlier than their peers, as well as take on caring responsibilities for other members of their family. For some adolescents, family problems can be so severe that they are unable to live with their families and go into care. Some run away and face significant risks to their safety and welfare (DFE 2011).

Safeguarding Adolescents

- 4.12 Official statistics for England suggest that a quarter of all children who become subject to a child protection plan are between the age of 11-17 years (Children's Society, NSPCC & Social Policy Research Unit University of York 2010). However, the study found that whilst much is known about the background to child maltreatment, far less is known specifically about these issues for adolescents.
- 4.13 A review of recent serious case reviews, which are enquiries into the death or serious injury of a child where abuse or neglect is known or suspected to be a factor, highlights that the most common reason for a serious case review in the adolescent group over the 2007 – 2010 period was suicide.
- 4.14 The next most prevalent factor relates to murder often by another young person through stabbings or shootings or a conviction of murder relating to another young person.
- 4.15 Further factors beyond suicide and murder were:
- Sexually assault;
 - Sexual exploitation;
 - Drowning;
 - Overdose of drugs and alcohol;
 - Death in house fires;
 - Neglect;
 - Road traffic accidents linked to neglect;
 - Physical abuse;
 - and anorexia.
- 4.16 Other features illustrated in the reviews included long standing family problems and/or behaviour problems concerning the adolescents. Allegations of, or evidence of, sexual abuse were a feature in 30% of the cases.
- 4.17 A notable feature of this group is that almost all of them had a history of family and personal problems which were known to agencies, often dating back to their early childhood. However, an important feature is that only a small minority of the adolescents were on the child protection register at the time of the incident, although many of them, were known or had been know to social care services and all were known to universal youth support services.
- 4.18 Common characteristics of the families were domestic violence, mental ill-health, and drug and alcohol misuse. Frequently, more than one of these characteristics were present. Other family risk factors reported in the reviews included previous or current offending behaviour by the parents, family homelessness, suicide or attempted suicide by a parent, self-harming

behaviour either of the parents or of the adolescents, death of the mother by natural causes, and disability of a parent.

- 4.19 The factors related to drug and alcohol misuse, domestic violence, mental illness and learning difficulties were often not properly taken into account in assessing risk and considering the impact on the adolescent. Agencies were found to be particularly poor at addressing the impact of chronic neglect on adolescents and intervening at an early stage to prevent problems from escalating. By the time the children reached adolescence the problems in the family had been evident for some years.
- 4.20 A key message of these surveys is that the practice and expertise in universal service is critical to the safety of children. The most vulnerable adolescents are those on the margins of the child protection system about whom there are some concerns, but either universal services have not identified concerns appropriately and/or have not understood their responsibilities for referring these concerns to the relevant service for assessment.

Key messages from serious case reviews:

Poor understanding of basic child protection signs, symptoms and risk factors by staff in mainstream services.

Agencies responded reactively to each situation rather than seeing it in the context of the case history.

No single agency had a complete picture of the family and a full record of all the concerns.

Staff accepted standards of care that would not be acceptable in other families.

Little direct contact was made with the children to find out what they thought about their situation.

Professionals were uncertain about the significance of issues in complex and chaotic families and too much reliance was placed on what parents said.

Families were often hostile to contact from professionals and developed skilful strategies for keeping them at arms length.

Little evidence of assessments to evaluate the quality of the attachments between parents and children.

Families were subject to multiple assessments and plans without any clear expectation of what needed to change for the children, and what the consequences would be if these changes were not forthcoming.

- 4.21 A further study undertaken by the Children's Society, NSPCC & Social Policy Research Unit University of York in 2010 highlighted that young People are often perceived by professionals as more resilient, more able to cope with the effects of abuse, more able to remove themselves from abusive situations and more likely to disclose abuse than younger children.

4.22 The report suggests that whilst age did not effect professional's decisions to make referrals of young people aged 11- 17 when they believe them to be at risk of harm, it does seem likely to affect professionals perceptions of risk in relation to adolescents.

5) THE LOCAL CONTEXT

5.1 Despite significant regeneration over the past twenty years, both the national Index of Multiple Deprivation (2010) and recent local analysis of need (Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2010 and Hartlepool Child Poverty Strategy 2011) indicate that significant numbers of families in Hartlepool continue to experience high levels of deprivation. Deprivation covers a broad range of potentially life limiting issues and refers to unmet needs caused by the interplay of a number of local factors that impact upon families living conditions such as:

- low Income;
- exclusion from the labour market;
- impairment of quality of life by poor physical and mental health and disability;
- educational underachievement, barriers to progression and a shortage of skills and qualifications amongst adults;
- barriers to accessing key local services and affordable housing;
- low quality of individuals' immediate surroundings both within and outside the home; and
- a prevalence of violent crime, burglary, theft and criminal damage in an area.

5.2 Deprivation can present in many forms and often manifests in children and adolescents through:

- Challenging behaviour;
- Poor sleep patterns;
- Attachment problems;
- Anxiety in children and young people;
- Child undertaking adult caring responsibilities;
- Poor attendance at school;
- Persistence lateness at school;
- Lack of concentration at school leading to poor attainment;
- Poor peer relationships;
- Eating disorders;
- Self harming;
- Social isolation;
- Exclusion from school;
- Anti social behaviour;
- Low self esteem;
- Children undernourished, unkempt
- Taking part in risky behaviours

Household circumstances

- 5.3 Unemployment rates in Hartlepool are consistently higher than both the North East and national rates. Since 2008 unemployment rates have been rising, standing at 7.4% in April 2010, the highest level in a decade.
- 5.4 Hartlepool has the highest level of Incapacity Benefit claimants in the Tees area, and is above both regional and national averages.
- 5.5 Child poverty statistics in 2009 show that there was an estimated 6,200 children living in poverty in Hartlepool, many of whom live in workless households. This represents 29.5% of the total child population in Hartlepool which is significantly higher than the national average. Statistics published over the last month indicate that the rate has risen to 31% of the child population with the highest levels of child poverty recorded in Stranton (60.08%), followed by Dyke House (50.83%) and Owton (45.13%).
- 5.6 The evidence suggests there are families who are more resilient to deprivation however local analysis of need and outcomes highlights that the interplay of the above factors clearly places families who are contending with deprivation at a disadvantage. This can significantly limit the opportunities and outcomes for their children which, in time, will tend to perpetuate a cycle of deprivation and disadvantage due to diminished life chances.

Health and well being

- 5.7 Obesity among children and young people locally is a cause for concern as it has a significant impact on their long term health. The childhood obesity rate for 11-year-olds in Hartlepool is 22.8%, significantly higher than the national average of 18.3%.
- 5.8 Research highlights that children's acquisition of speech, language and communication skills are key to avoiding social and economic problems later in life. Available local data shows that although there has been significant improvement in outcomes over the last few years for children aged 5 there are still approximately half of children at the age of 5 who do not have the expected level of communication. This would suggest that there are significant numbers of adolescents locally who hampered by their communication skills and acquisition of speech, language.

Educational attainment and progression

- 5.9 Whilst educational attainment overall has continued to improve locally, children in Hartlepool continue to do less well than their peers across the North East.
- 5.10 The gap between those children on free school meals and their peers also continues to be stark. Only 29.7% of children on free school meals achieved 5 A* - C GCSE's including English and Maths in comparison to 62.9% of their peers.

- 5.11 There has been a significant improvement in the numbers of local young people who leave school and progress to further learning, training or employment. However, young people in Stranton, Brus, St. Hilda, Dyke House and Owton continue to struggle, in comparison to their peers, to make successful post 16 transitions. This is due to a prevalence of factors such as an inability of parents to financially support their children's attendance at college or training due to low household income, low educational attainment, teenage pregnancy and substance misuse.

Risk Taking Behaviour

- 5.12 Binge drinking levels (estimated at 29.2%) and hospital admission rates are amongst the highest in the country and they are increasing.
- 5.13 Hartlepool has some of the highest levels of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections in the country. There is a clear picture of an increasing trend in sexual risk taking behaviour and sexually transmitted infections in Hartlepool are the highest in Tees but lower than the North East and England rates. This is driven by the relatively high Chlamydia rates in 15 – 25 year olds 2,680 per 100,000 (Health Protection Agency).
- 5.14 Hartlepool's Teenage pregnancy rate (under 18) for 2009 was 57.1 per 1000 women aged 15-17. This is significantly higher than the regional and national average. Although numbers are small, teenage conception rates in Hartlepool continue to fluctuate.
- 5.15 First time entrants into the Youth Justice System have reduced significantly in recent years due to the introduction of a number of pre-court disposals in an attempt to prevent young people from entering the Criminal Justice System. However for those within the criminal justice system reoffending rates have not reduced at the same rate and remain a strategic priority for action.
- 5.16 An annual analysis of factors that contribute to young peoples risk taking behaviour locally highlights that the most prevalent factors are often a combination of the young person's family circumstances, their lifestyle, their misuse of substances and a lack of engagement with education and/or further learning all of which shapes thinking and behaviour.

Safety and Wellbeing

- 5.17 The number of young people who became the subject of a child protection plan during 2009/2011 in Hartlepool broken down by gender, age and category are outlined below.

Gender	Number
2009/2010	
Female	1
Male	14
Total	15
2010/2011	

Female	10
Male	3
Total	13

- 5.18 There was a significant variance in gender between the 2009/10 and 2010/11. There were higher levels of males than females made subject of Child Protection Plans in 2009/10 and higher levels of females than males in 2010/11. But the numbers of adolescents who are made the subject of a plan are very small and it is therefore difficult to pull a reason or interpretation from the figures. Although if there was a consistent year on year pattern of one gender always being substantially greater than the other then further exploration may be required.

Age	Number
2009/2010	
11	5
12	1
13	4
14	3
15	2
Total	15
2010/2011	
11	1
12	3
13	2
14	1
15	3
16	3
Total	13

- 5.19 Given the low numbers of 16 and 17 year olds made the subject of a Child Protection Plan nationally it is reassuring to see that in Hartlepool, when appropriate, older adolescents 16 year olds were being made the subject of a plan.

Child Protection Plan Category	Number
2009/2010	
Neglect	11
Sexual Abuse	2
Physical Abuse	1
Emotional Abuse	1
Total	15

2010/2011	
Neglect	10
Physical Abuse	3
Total	13

- 5.20 An annual analysis of local adolescents who entered the care of the Local Authority identifies that the primary determinant for children coming into care in Hartlepool is that they are in need as a result of, or at risk of, abuse or neglect, including children at risk due to domestic violence. The second most prevalent factor is where children's needs primarily arise from living in a family where the parenting capacity is chronically inadequate, or children are living in a family that is going through a temporary crisis that diminishes the parental ability to adequately meet some of the children's needs.
- 5.21 Local data highlights that cycles of deprivation and neglect clearly overlap. Local adolescents identified as children in need or who are subject to a child protection plan are primarily resident in those areas of highest deprivation.
- 5.22 A more detailed analysis of the broader circumstances/factors of families whose children are experiencing neglect indicates that parenting, parental substance misuse, housing and home conditions, employment issues and domestic violence are the main factors linked to the prevalence of neglect. It is often the complex interplay of each of these factors that makes problems in some households insurmountable and places the children at significant risk.

6) THE VIEWS OF LOCAL ADOLESCENTS

6.1 To enable the task and finish group to establish a firmer understanding of how we can continue to improve the way services jointly safeguard adolescents, support them to make safer choices and promote their wellbeing a consultation process was established using on-line questionnaires alongside focused group work involving local adolescents.

6.2 Overall 423 adolescents took part in the consultation.

Reach of the consultation

6.3 The consultation was undertaken over a period of 3 months and open to young people aged 11 -19 years.

6.4 53% of those surveyed were aged between 16 and 17 years. 17% were aged 18 or over and 30% were aged 15 and under.

6.5 47% of responses were from males with 53% being females.

6.6 Almost 8% of those surveyed indicated that they had a disability.

6.7 91% of those surveyed said that they were in education, 3% in employment, 3% unemployed and 2% in training.

- 6.8 Almost 92% of the survey classed themselves as white, just over 1% mixed race, 2.5% Asian or Asian British, just over 1% black or black British, almost 1% Chinese and the remainder identified themselves as being from another ethnic group.
- 6.9 80% of those surveyed said that they would describe themselves as straight or heterosexual, 4.5% said gay or lesbian, 6.5% said bisexual, 3.6% said not sure and the remainder preferred not to say.
- 6.10 The following organisations supported the consultation through the facilitation of focused group work to ensure that adolescents from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of individual circumstances and experiences could participate in the consultation process:
- Headland Future
 - Wharton Annexe
 - Hartlepool Young Carers
 - Manor West
 - Manor Residents
 - Hart Gables
 - West View Project
 - Youth Offending Service
 - HYPED young peoples substance misuse service
 - Teenage Pregnancy Support Service
 - The Through Care Team
 - All local Secondary Schools including Catcote Special School and the Pupil Referral Unit.

7) KEY FINDINGS

General safety and wellbeing

- 7.1 The majority of adolescents who participated in the consultation reported that they do feel safe for the majority of the time or more in Hartlepool. However, approximately 25% responded that they only feel safe some of the time and almost 7% indicated that they rarely feel safe at all in Hartlepool.
- 7.2 The vast majority of young people almost 87% indicated that they feel safe 'At home/with family'. 63% of young people said that they feel safe at 'school or college' and 63% said that they feel safe when they are with friends. 24% of young people said that they felt safe in their local neighborhood along with 25% indicating that they felt safe on-line.
- 7.2 The primary reason for feeling unsafe was attributed to other young people and in particular young people in large groups. 56% of young people indicated that other young people are the causes for making them feel unsafe in their communities compared with only 16% indicating that older people made them feel unsafe. The focused group work highlighted that most young people were concerned about violence and 'being beaten up' by other young people. Linked to this was the threat of bullying.

- 7.3 Just over 40% of responses claimed that poor street lighting was a cause of feeling unsafe along with almost 40% claiming that a lack of police presence was also a reason for feeling unsafe in Hartlepool.
- 7.4 Lack of facilities such as Youth centres, libraries and leisure centres along with poor housing and derelict buildings all had responses of approximately 35%. Approximately 17% indicated that they did not have safe places to play in their communities.
- 7.8 In terms of participants use of local facilities, 20% of adolescents indicated that they felt safe when using local services, such as Youth Centres, Libraries, and Leisure Centres. Approximately 15% felt safe accessing local sports facilities or Hartlepool Town centre. 11% of responses indicated that they felt safe using public transport. Only 5% of young people responded that they felt safe 'When I am in Hartlepool parks or open Space (such as Ward Jackson Park or Burn Valley Park)'.
- 7.9 Clearly the majority of participants identify the primary threats to their safety and wellbeing as lying outside of the family home. When asked what made a community feel unsafe young people identified a number of things; one group mentioned speeding cars, others felt the environment itself i.e. places being deemed as 'rough areas' with one group going as far to say that they feel safer hanging around outside of the neighbourhood that they actually live in as they feel so unsafe there. Many young people said they avoided certain streets and areas due to 'reputation'.

Specific areas identified by young people in the survey as unsafe:

Burn Valley Park
Greyfields
Claverin Estate
The Steetly site
Mill House
Lancaster Road – linked to the threat posed by adult residents
The Hartlepool Carnival

- 7.11 Many Participants reported that they felt unsafe in poorly lit areas including back alleys and parks where it can be dark. However, many participants reported that local parks continue to be used regularly as key meeting places and provide opportunities for 'hanging around'. A small number of participants identified having more police on the street would make them feel safer along with CCTV. Participants from Catcote School said that their parents do not allow them to go out alone for fear of what might happen to them and as this has been a feature throughout their life. This group highlighted that as a result, they often feel intimidated when walking alone in Hartlepool.

- 7.12 Sadly for some groups of young people, acute worries and concerns are carried on a daily basis. Young Carers spoke about their caring responsibilities and how this affects their life, and how some feel that they really don't know how to cope with what they are regularly dealing with. Here the role of the young carers group cannot be underestimated as a support network.
- 7.13 For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered young people, worries included being subject to physical and verbal homophobic abuse outside of the family home. For example parks, town centres, school and the communities in which they live. This was related to the homophobic abuse experienced whilst in these areas. Almost all of the group recognised their own homes as a safe haven. The older young people in this group identified that there were no gay bars in Hartlepool but that even if there were, they would be unlikely to access as they felt they would be at risk when leaving. There was discussion around previous bars that had existed in which people had experienced physical and verbal abuse (Club Attitude). Other worries this group included was mental well being, homelessness, communities in which they live, walking down the street, being bullied and 'fear of what you might become'.
- 7.14 The issue of 'strangers' arose in all the focus groups. Many participants highlighted the need to avoid talking to strangers and to decline the offer of lifts from people you don't know. The younger groups emphasised staying away from "strangers", whereas the older participants referred to staying away from young people you don't know "If you know the people you're with, then you know what they are like".
- 7.14 More generally, pressure to do well in exams, financial worries and employment for the future was mentioned by many of the groups. There was a general feeling that due to the things young people hear about cuts and global financial issues, there is a general feeling of unease about what the future holds for them.
- 7.15 The Catcote School group shared similar concerns of other groups and more than this, they also mentioned being concerned about what money they are entitled to in relation to the DLA and how it may change when you are under 16 and then over 18 years etc.

8) E-safety

- 8.1 Facebook and online discussion arenas were identified by all young people at various points throughout the consultation. Young people saw the internet and e-networks (Facebook being the most referenced throughout the group work) as both a safe and unsafe place. With reference to peer pressure and risks, young people identified e-networks as a mechanism to start rumours, to bully and intimidate, and for people to find out about your business. At least one participant had experienced cyber bullying through the use of an E-network.

8.2 There was also the concern about speaking to people that you don't know online and making sure that you don't meet up with them as they may not be who they say they are. On the flip side, young people thought e-networks provided a facility to help cope with feelings / problems by sharing their concerns with friends. Some felt that young people used their status update to let their friends know about the way they were feeling and to gain support. In other areas of the consultation some groups mentioned the internet as a way to search for support when you need help.

9) Exposure to risk and harmful behaviours

9.1 Just over 26% of participants reported that they feel pressured into doing things that they do not want to do.

9.2 Of those adolescents who felt pressured 48% reported that they felt pressured into drinking alcohol. 35% said they felt pressured into having sex. 34% felt pressured into smoking. Just over 20% of young people responded that they felt pressured into taking drugs, with the same percentage reporting that they felt pressured into 'taking physical risks, such as stunts'. 20% reported that they felt pressured to 'Stay in a bad relationship'. 19% of participants felt pressured into being violent towards others and 16% felt pressured into stealing.

9.3 64% of participants indicated that they felt pressure from other adolescents with 41% of responses indicating that close friends apply pressure to do things that may cause them harm.

9.4 10% of those who reported feeling pressured into doing things they did not wish to do said that they felt as though parents/carers placed pressure on them to do things that may cause them harm. 9% felt pressure from extended family members such as cousins, aunts and uncles along with 5% indicating that siblings cause pressure.

9.6 5% felt pressurised by adults outside of the family to do something that may cause them harm. Analysis of responses made included reference to "drug dealers" and "alcoholics and old men".

9.10 46% of participants reported that they participated in risk taking and potentially harmful behaviours to fit in with the crowd and because they felt as though everyone else is doing it. 35% said that they wanted to look cool and 28% said because it was new/different. Just over 20% of adolescents who responded to this question said that they felt pressured into doing something that may cause them harm because they were bored.

9.11 One young person reported that they did something that may cause them harm because their mum said that they couldn't do it. Another young person said that they felt pressure from the media to do something that may cause them harm.

- 9.12 Focused group work highlighted that young people from across the groups had experienced pressure to get involved in fights. This was linked with the pressure to do things to fit in with the majority and become popular, including having sex, stealing, vandalism and selling drugs. A number of young people who smoke identified peer pressure as the reason for them starting.
- 9.13 Many of the participants mentioned alcohol consumption as a safety issue. One young woman recounted being spiked whilst having a night out (although nothing happened to her, she felt very poorly the next day). Another group spoke about where and how much you drink as an issue; identifying being drunk as a risk factor and that if you choose to drink you should be with people you trust, in a safe environment (not at the park at night) and don't drink too much. Although young people recognised the risks to their safety and wellbeing through alcohol use, many participants appeared to normalise this behaviour and talked openly about not being concerned that at times they had no memory of the night before. Ironically participants raised concerns regarding the fact that that people who are drunk are unpredictable and this can lead to a threat of verbal and physical violence.
- 9.14 A key point to note is that almost 8% of participant reported that they carry some sort of weapon for self-defence purposes. During the focused group work a minority of participants mentioned carrying weapons as a way of keeping safe and made reference to knives and crowbars. Other participants reported that they were aware of young people who carried weapons for personal protection.

10) Relationships

- 10.1 On the whole participants spoke with confidence about what a positive intimate relationship should look and feel like. This included trust in your partner, love, respect, compassion, loyalty and romance.
- 10.2 Participants identified that harmful relationship would likely include large age differences in a relationship, fighting, abuse (including a parent or carer abusing a child), and violence.
- 10.3 Interestingly the term domestic violence was not actively used, neither were discussions about adults that they knew being in those situations. This maybe due to the fact that discussions occurred within a group situation and young people could be uncomfortable talking about their personal experiences and/or awareness of family/friends domestic violence issues.
- 10.4 Many young people spoke about the pressure to do things within personal relationships. This included drinking alcohol, smoking, having sex; and "wanting to please" your girlfriend/boyfriend.
- 10.5 Worryingly one young person mentioned the pressures of partners making sex videos of you on their phone (no personal experience was disclosed and the comment was made about hearing of such things happening to others).

11) Coping Strategies, Resilience and protection from harm

- 11.1 How adolescents cope with threats to their safety and wellbeing in Hartlepool would appear to be varied.
- 11.2 Almost 70% of participants reported that they would turn to their friends to talk about feeling unsafe. Just over 60% would turn to a member of their family with just over 50% choosing to talk to their parent/carer.
- 11.3 Almost 7% of those who responded said that they had no one to talk to.
- 11.4 Family, particularly parents featured strongly as a protective factor, although in a couple of groups there were young people who disagreed with this openly stating that they did not have a good relationship with their parents and that they would not confide in them. Discussions around family included the ease / difficulty of discussing issues that concern you with parents; some felt that it was easier to talk to parents as they (the young people) got older, whereas for others it became more difficult. Extended family was closely linked to this for a lot of young people, as was neighbours, particularly for those young people who identified strong links with their community and who had lived within that community all their lives.
- 11.5 Where participants identified that they were experiencing problems at home they reported that it was difficult to talk to a parent or guardian when they had a problem with them. One adolescent had specific concerns about following in their parents footsteps and making the same mistakes that her mother had done and therefore 'turning out like her'.
- 11.6 Within all groups there were young people who disclosed that they would speak to no one about their problems or concerns; "I would do nothing", "I would speak to no-one", "I would avoid thinking about it", "hide away alone", "listen to music to block it out".
- 11.7 Participants identified the need to seek help if they found themselves in a violent and/or harmful relationships spoke about seeking help and walking away from such relationships.
- 11.8 Overwhelmingly young people identified being in a large group, when outside of the home as a key safety measure. The contradiction, however, is that many spoke about feeling intimidated by gangs of young people they didn't know. Reasons for feeling safe in a large group included that someone would be unlikely to 'start on you' if you were in a group, and if an incident did occur your friends would 'have your back'. The importance of safety in large groups for young people cannot be underestimated and at the same time poses a conundrum about the concerns frequently raised regarding the presence of young people in public spaces.

- 11.9 83% adolescents reported that they carry a mobile phone to help them stay safe. Whilst, ringing the police was mentioned during the focused group work, the adolescents predominantly reported that they would ring friends or family if they felt in an unsafe situation. Linked to this; five groups said that a good safety measure is letting someone (mainly family) know where you are and when you should be home. Just over 40% of adolescents said that they keep their parents informed of their whereabouts.
- 11.10 16% of young people questioned indicated that they carry condoms for protection from sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies and during the group work some participants spoke knowledgeably about sexual health and how to access contraception locally.

12) Access to help and support

- 12.1 Some participants were very knowledgeable about routes of support and services available, whereas others seemed to have some knowledge but admitted a lack of awareness of the range of services each organisation could provide.
- 12.2 In terms of accessing services for advice, help and support in relation to their safety and wellbeing, almost 27% would choose the police or a teacher to talk to around feeling unsafe. Almost 17% of participants reported that they would seek support from local youth support staff. 15% said that they would turn to another trusted adult, 5% to a Social Worker and almost 3% choosing to turn to a coach/sport and recreation worker.
- 12.3 Almost 7% of those who responded said that they had no one to talk to and 13% of participants indicated that they would not turn to anyone for help.
- 12.4 Adolescents in receipt of specialist services made regular reference to their named worker (such as their Social Worker or Youth Offending Service Officer) as the key individual they would seek to access for advice, help and support.
- 12.5 Notably, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered focus group demonstrated a good understanding of both local and national support services and identified Victim Support, Harbour, the Samaritans and thisisabuse.org as sources of advice and support for adolescents experiencing difficulties.
- 12.10 However, what featured strongly across all groups was the emphasis placed on peer friendships and the role of friends as both a source of advice and support, and as key contributors to adolescents day to day safety.

13) Summary of findings and conclusions

- 13.1 Local adolescents appear to have a good understanding of the key threats to their safety and wellbeing and the risks associated with their own behaviours as well as the environment in which they live and socialise.

- 13.2 Most adolescents in Hartlepool feel safe within the family home. Their primary concern around their safety is the threat posed by other groups of adolescents and the fear of being bullied and physically assaulted. Adolescents tend to socialise in large groups outside of the home to counteract this threat.
- 13.3 A minority of adolescents are carrying weapons for self-defence purposes.
- 13.4 The majority of adolescents feel pressured by their peers to get involved in things which ultimately may pose a risk to their safety and would appear to have limited coping mechanisms to deal with such pressures.
- 13.5 Families were seen as a support for the majority of adolescents, but this was not always related to parents. Even in this small sample it was clear that there were a number of adolescents who did not live with parents, but were with grandparents and extended family members.
- 13.6 Notably a minority of adolescents feel pressure from within their families to do things they did not wish to do by immediate or extended family members.
- 13.7 In general, adolescents awareness of wider support agencies across the town appeared limited.
- 13.8 A minority of adolescents will not or can not talk to anyone about their problems (and openly say this) and have no outlet for their frustration, anger or feelings.
- 13.9 There are a number of 'named' areas across the town which adolescents deem to be unsafe.
- 13.10 For some adolescents within the town many of the above concerns are coupled with other pressures due to their situations. Young carers struggle to cope with the demands of being a carer to an adult whilst also dealing with general concerns that affect the majority of young people. For LGBT young people areas in which most young people hang out and meet friends, can be a very intimidating and sometimes dangerous places that provide little comfort or reassurance, due to homophobic opinions and expressions. It appears LDD young people are even more isolated due to the fear of parents / carers who are ultimately trying to protect them from risk of harm.
- 13.11 Local adolescents appear to have a good understanding of both the opportunities and dangers associated with the internet and e-networks.
- 13.12 National research highlights that the practice and expertise in universal services is critical to the safety of adolescents. The most vulnerable adolescents are those on the margins of the child protection system about whom there are some concerns, but either universal services are not identifying concerns appropriately, sometimes due to a perception that adolescents are more resilient to the effects of abuse or potentially harmful behaviours and/or have not understood their responsibilities for referring these concerns to the relevant service for assessment.

14) RECCOMENDATIONS

14.1 It is important to note that this piece of work has been carried out by a number of officers on the basis of a short piece of work aimed at identifying characteristics of adolescent safety and wellbeing in Hartlepool. The group was selected because of their role or specific interest and did not include specialists in research. The group did have access to a range of officers who were able to bring specific skills and knowledge to the table. It quickly became apparent that adolescence is a complex phase that has been studied widely both nationally and internationally and that many of the issues uncovered in this short piece of work are reflected in areas across the country. The methodology used by the group has been very practically based and has relied on responses from adolescents across the town. In essence our findings are not surprising and lead us to identify a number of issues that could be considered by the board.

14.2 It is clear that despite the difficulties that typically occur as part of normal development most adolescents locally lead positive lives and make a successful transition to adulthood. Key to this is the support and guidance young people get from their families and other adults that they trust, and their experience at school. But a small minority clearly require early and effective additional help. There are risk factors which can help identify these young people, although their presence is not always known, understood or acted upon by those working with them in universal settings. Those who are not identified or helped effectively can face significant harm and a small number will cause major harm to themselves and others unless there is decisive early intervention.

14.3 Recommendation 1

The marketing of the local 'Youth Offer' needs to be improved; particularly in relation to safe places to go and things to do for local adolescents and how they can access further help and support if they (or their families) are experiencing difficulties. These improvements need to take full account of the growing preference amongst adolescents for the use of e-facilities and e-networking as means of acquiring information and knowledge.

14.4 Recommendation 2

Ensure that staff in universal settings are equipped with the skills, knowledge and responsibility to identify adolescents who are vulnerable through use of the Common Assessment Framework and to respond promptly to prevent further exposure and/or participation in risky and harmful behaviours. Those providing services will need to work closely with the whole family to identify the underlying causes behind presenting behaviours addressing these as well as meeting the presenting needs. This will ensure long term improvement for the circumstances of adolescents who are experiencing difficulties.

14.5 Recommendation 3

Ensure that local strategies to prevent and reduce adolescents participation in risky and harmful behaviours acknowledge the influence of the peer group on adolescents decision making and provide strategies to resist the pressure of their friends and peers.

14.6 Recommendation 4

Ensure that local strategies to prevent and reduce adolescents participation in risky and harmful behaviours make full use of local norms data to redress young peoples perception that the majority of their peers are participating in sex and drinking large quantities of alcohol and misusing substances.

14.7 Recommendation 5

Ensure that enforcement agencies are aware of the emphasis adolescents place on belonging to large groups when using public spaces as a key safety measure.

14.8 Recommendation 6

Ensure that staff in all settings have access to training relating to the dangers of knife crime and that knife crime awareness sans prevention is a key feature of both formal and non formal curriculums to ensure that adolescents can understand the dangers of carrying knives both within school and in settings outside of school.

Mark Smith
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On behalf of the Adolescents Task and Finish Group