

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 30 July 2020.

PRESENT: Councillors A Hellaoui, T Higgins, J McTigue, M Nugent, J A Walker, C Wright, B Cooper (by invitation) and J Thompson (by invitation)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: B Butt, Deputy Member of Youth Parliament for Middlesbrough, C Snowball, Foster Carer and V Davison- Boyd, Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley.

OFFICIALS: S Blood, B Bradshaw, C Breheny, S Butcher, K Dague, S Davison, T Dunn, R Farnham, C Lunn, R Scott, S Williams and J Watson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor L Garvey, Councillor A High, Councillor J Platt, Councillor Z Uddin
V Banks, R Brown, G Earl, A Ferguson, R Haymer, B Morley, P Rudd and T Parkinson,

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None declared

20/11 WELCOME

The Chair welcomed members and officers of the Board to the meeting.

20/12 MINUTES FROM THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JUNE 2020

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2020 were submitted and agreed as a true record.

Agreed- that the minutes be approved.

20/13 ACTION PLAN

The Democratic Services Officer presented the action taken from the meeting on 18 June 2020 and further outstanding issues from previous meetings.

The Board noted two significant actions:

1. The South Tees Youth Offending report scheduled for 30 July 2020 would now be presented to the September meeting. The Chair advised that deferring the item would allow adequate time for officers to present the report and answer questions from the Board.
2. Member training on 'Your role as a Corporate Parent' had been scheduled to take place on 8 September 2020. The training would be delivered by Ann Baxter from the LGA and Director of Children's Services, Sue Butcher.

AGREED- That the action plan be noted.

20/14 UPDATE FROM MYP AND DMYP- VERBAL UPDATE

The Deputy Member of Youth Parliament for Middlesbrough (DMYP) was in attendance and provided the Board with an update on activities undertaken by her and the Member of Youth Parliament since the last Corporate Parenting Board meeting in June.

The DMYP advised that since June they had been involved in three main pieces of work:

1. The MYP and DMYP had met with Luke Rogers, Leader of the Care Leaders Project

- to discuss their plans for the future and to speak about how they can support #middlesbroughchildrenmatter campaign.
2. A proposal had been written, which would be sent to all secondary schools in Middlesbrough and Colleges regarding the introduction of Middlesbrough Youth Council in later October/ early November 2020.
 3. The DMYP and other MYP's across the Country had met independently to establish an E-covention with regard to Protect our future- looking at ways to make our society more eco-friendly. The group would like to invite shareholders, businesses and charities to E-conference and anticipate the E-conference to take place in August 2020.

The Chair thanked the DMYP for her update to the Board.
 AGREED- That the update be noted.

20/15 **MULTI AGENCY LOOKED AFTER PARTNERSHIP (MALAP) SUB GROUPS- UPDATE**

The Democratic Services Officer presented a slide to outline the current member involvements in the Multi agency looked after children partnership (MALAP) sub groups.

The member involvement was as follows:

Health and Wellbeing
 Member Champion: Councillor Hellaoui

Placement and Sufficiency
 Member Champion- Vacancy

Participation
 Member Champion- Councillor Wright

Leaving Care- Stuart Williams
 Member Champion- Councillor Higgins

Education represented by the Virtual Schools- Trevor Dunn
 Councillor Cooper

The Democratic Services Officer advised that if any member would like to champion the placement and sufficiency group to contact her directly.

The Democratic Services Officer also advised that Panel that during the Covid period, only the Participation and Virtual schools sub groups had met, reports had been attached to the agenda for members information. Updates from MALAP sub groups would be submitted to every meeting of the Board for information.

The Chair invited the Voice of the Child Manager to provide a brief overview of the work that been been undertaken through the participation work stream.

The Board were made aware that a review of the role and purpose of the group had taken place. It was agreed that in order to meaningfully integrate participation and engagement into all key areas, that it would be best for the Voice of the Child manager to be invited to all key work streams. The progress and impact of participation and engagement in each area will be reviewed at each meeting in a report provided by the Voice of the Child manager.

AGREED- That the updates be noted and the proposal for the Voice of the Child Manager to attend every sub group to be supported.

20/16 **FUTURES FOR FAMILIES- VERBAL UPDATE**

The Interim Director of Children's Services provided the Board with an update in relation to Future for Families, the Edge of Care service.

At the last meeting of the Board, members will be aware that the Commissioner recommended that the Future for Families project continue, which the Board and officers were delighted with. Sue Butcher was now the sponsor for the project (previously Ian Wright).

The Interim Director advised that the No Wrong door project (originally name of the initiative and name for initiative in North Yorkshire) had been paused nationally during the Covid period, however staff have now been recruited and there was 'go live' date of 24 August 2020 for the building to be opened. The opening would be virtual and members of the Board would be invited to attend.

Future for families was an edge of care service with a multi agency team. North Yorkshire who are host of No Worng door have been fully supportive of Middlesbrough and have been providing additional support within the Fostering service. The Director also advised that Middlesbrough's approach to future for families has been identified as good practice through Covid.

The Chair congratulated the team on their excellent work during Covid and also took the opportunity to congratulate the Interim Director on her recent appointment as Director of Children's Services.

AGREED-

1. A future update be brought back to the Board
2. Details relating to the Open day to be circulated to all Board members

20/17 **FOSTERING SERVICE REPORT**

AGREED- Item deferred

20/18 **ADOPTION TEES VALLEY- ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20**

The Chair welcomed the Service Manager of Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) to the meeting. The Manager had circulated the ATV annual report with the agenda and therefore advised that she would not go through the report in great detail, however focus on how the year began and ended.

The Manager outlined that this 2019/20 was ATV's second full year of operation, the first seeing significant change processes moving 5 local authority adoption departments into 1 Regional adoption agency.

Year 1 allowed ATV to embed the processes, to work in a streamlined way and scope out new ways of working with the 5 local authorities. Whilst there were challenges, the local authorities worked collaboratively to achieve the transition.

In terms of striking features for ATV in 2019/20, the Manager advised the panel of the following:

- In 2019/20 adoption numbers were lower than 2018/19. The reason for this was that in year 1, ATF was being established and there was a vast number of children being referred. The Manager advised that there is always a 12 month lag, and quite often it can take months for children to be referred. The process once referred also takes time in times of looking for suitable families, matching, placing the children and eventually moving those children into their hopefully forever home, prior to applying for an adoption order.
- In 2019/20 ATV have seen considerable large numbers of placement activity. In the Tees Valley, 91 children were placed under adoption regulations and of those 16 children were placed in early permanence and were placed with families under fostering to adoption regulations with the intention to adopt.

In Middlesbrough, 23 children were placed for adoption. The Manager outlined that ATV would have liked that number to have been higher, however ATV are working with the Local authority on referrals and information sharing. The Board were pleased to hear that at the beginning of this year (2020/21), ATV had already matched and placed 14 children from Middlesbrough, which is reassuring.

- ATV have developed the Adoption Support Offer- this was an important priority under the Regionalisation offer. Through the National system and sharing information, ATV are looking at developing a strong regional adoption support offer. The Manager outlined that it was fundamental to keep adopters' connected with ATV in terms of families and children. The offer has been funded out of ATV resources and the Manager outlined how proud she was of this offer.

The Manager went on to highlight some of the key issues from the annual report:

1. Employed of an Education support worker - The position had been co-funded by all 5 virtual schools. This post is vital and the support worker has been able to work with schools, children and their families to advise them what is on offer but not become attached to cases and withdrawn and move on to new cases when appropriate.
2. Establishment of Children's Group- the Manager outlined that ATV felt this was an important group to establish in order for children to share their experience of being adopted. The age cohort for the group is 7-11 years as it is understood that children who are adopted sometimes begin to struggle with their identity during this age. The children were selected and , which was felt to be the best model for this group and is facilitated by adoption workers and social workers. The group was suspended during Covid -19 and has returned virtually, although attendance levels are not as high.
3. You go parent support contract- this was put out to tender. This offer would provide birth parents support as soon as the adoption process begins. The Manager advised that ATV wish to embed this and consultation with birth parents has commenced.

Life stories are a challenge for ATV and one element which is being looked into is how birth parents can contribute to life stories and to future information for the child.

4. Regular adoption offer- The Manager also outlined that ATV would like to improve the regular adoption offer. Currently the offer supports families for 1 year however ATV wish to look at how this can be extended especially in terms of training. The Manager advised that parent training has been provided as they look to ensuring all adoptive parents go through training and at least 1 therapeutic training session.
5. Adoption Partnership Forum- The Chair of Corporate Parenting is a member of this forum. It was agreed that the forum should meet more regularly and now meets monthly. This has improved the partnership and information strategy. The forum discussed a number of issues but most recently ATV have been gaining their views on recruitment of adoptive black and ethnic minority families. This issue will be looked at in depth this year and the forum will be working alongside an agency who actively encourages and supports black and ethnic minority families to consider adoption.

In terms of challenges, the Manager advised of the following:

1. Life story work- There has been a large volume of work and this work is vital to ATV. As a consequence, ATV have appointed a temporary worker to assist with this work.
2. While in the main there has been improvement to working closely together with all 5 Local Authorities, there remain some challenges to achieve timely referrals, and provision of information for family finding.
3. Timescales for placement remained a challenge for some children and we need to have a shared and deeper understanding about the cause of this.

The Manager outlined that there will always be challenges but ATV will address these and

work with the 5 local authorities and especially Middlesbrough.

A number of questions had been submitted prior to the meeting in respect to the item and these were addressed:

1. When the lockdown decision was made due to Covid-19, it happened overnight. What challenges did this pose to the Adoption protocols and how might that have affected the Looked after child and indeed others in the process?

In response, the Manager outlined that Covid-19 for everyone was unexpected and no-one has anticipated lock down to go on for this length of time.

ATV made the decision to continue with adoption panels' and where a match was made and moved the children through. This was extremely difficult, however with the support of the DFE, comprehensive risk assessments were developed for each case. There were understandably some worries from foster careers', who had vulnerable people in their household but we worked on a case by case basis.

In terms of the adoption process, ATV moved to technology to assist with this, for example , facetime was used so that families could read stories to the children, and there were garden visits and In some cases adoptive parents moved in with foster careers for a few days to ease transition and our social workers worked hard to continue with the process.

There was now a protocol in place with the 5 local authorities that 1 visit must be made to adoptive parents but assessments can be done via videolink. ATV have also moved adoptive parents to stage 2 without a medical or DBS check, however this has been done under strict regulations and would not be done if there were any concerns.

2. The report recognises the challenge ATV have with life story books. What is the investment in these books so that it isn't just a quantity completed issue but there is recognition of the quality too. These books after all are a child's link to their past and they need to be more than a lever arch with some plastic wallets.

In terms of life story work, it is extremely important that the child has a story and an identity. ATV are pleased that the Board approved the additional post and training is being delivered to workers where appropriate. The life stories are a partnership between the children, social workers, foster careers and birth parents and ATV want these life stories to be the very best for the children.

The Manager advised the Board that ATV had been approached by a PHD researcher from Newcastle University who is looking at Life stories. The researcher will work with birth parents and adoptive parents to shape the project.

A Board member further asked in terms of assessments, that were aware we were 20 days off the statutory timeframe to complete assessments and 9 days off for fast track assessments and what was being done to address this.

In response, the Manager outlined that they had recently started using a database called Charms, and were receiving additional support for the database. The database would bring information and data together and manage targets and assessments.

The Manager also advised that the Recruitment Manager was being held to account and there seemed to be a trend in hold up's at stage 1 (checks and references) and it has now been allocated to a support worker to assist with the workload. Medical checks and DBS checks have now got relaxed regulations so cases can move to stage 2 more quickly and it is hoped that in time for assessments to be completed will reduce.

The Board member also outlined that they were aware that life-story work was part of Year 1 performance under the current Ofsted report for Middlesbrough and what were the local authority doing to address this. In response, the Interim Director advised that the focus on life story work began in June 2020 and is being led by the Council's Principle Social Worker and the Board would be updated on that work towards the end of the year.

The Chair thanked the Managed of Adoption Tees Valley for her presentation and looked forward to receiving further reports in due course.

AGREED- That the annual report be noted.

20/19 **SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 5 - ORDER OF BUSINESS**

AGREED - in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 5, the Board agreed to vary the order of business as follows: 12 and 11

20/20 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair read out the following statement to the Board and proposed that a vote be taken on the matter:

"I understand that there may be exempt information released as part of the next item, therefore under Paragraph 1 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, I feel it would be prudent to exclude any press and public from the meeting."

AGREED unanimously that the item be considered as confidential.

20/21 **EXPLOITATION, MISSING AND OTHER VULNERABILITIES**

The Chair welcomed the Risk and Reduction Manager to the Board who advised he would provided the Board with information on Exploitation, Missing and other vulnerabilities.

AGREED- That the information be noted.