

COPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on 12 September 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor Carr (Chair), Councillor Brunton Dobson (Vice Chair); Councillors Hellaoui, McGloin, Sharrocks and J Walker.

OFFICERS: A Brown, B Bradshaw, T Dunn, S Kitching, G McClaren and J Wilson.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: A Allen – Director of Culture, Communities and Communications; J Bromily – Director of Finance, Governance and Support; L Cook – Public Health; A Ferguson – NHS; E Scollay – Director of Adult Social Care and Integrated Health; T Parkinson – Chief Executive.

PRESENT AS AN OBSERVER: J Cain – BBC local democracy reporter.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors C Rooney and Uddin.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 7 August 2018 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

**** SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 5 – ORDER OF BUSINESS**

ORDERED that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 5, the Committee agreed to vary the order of business to consider the agenda items in the following order: 6, 4, 7, 8, 5, 9, 10.

SIGNS OF SAFETY

S Kitching, Head of Quality Standards and Initial Response, made a presentation to the Corporate Parenting Board in relation to a new approach to working – Signs of Safety.

By way of background, it was explained that 'Signs of Safety' was an internationally recognised model that set out clear ways of working with families and young people, even in complex circumstances. The model was originally developed in Australia by Andrew Turnell and Steve Edwards by exploring what worked well in difficult cases. Since then the model had evolved with input from practitioners and had increased in use across the UK over the last 6-10 years. It was highlighted that Middlesbrough's regional partners used this approach.

Signs of Safety was a learning model that used an evidence and strength based approach. The model had three clear principles:-

- Working relationships – good relationships with families and young people were paramount to enable honest and respectful discussions of concerns and worries.
- Critical Thinking - to minimise error, a culture of shared reflective practice and a willingness to admit you may be wrong was needed.
- Landing grand aspirations in everyday practice - Command and control social work versus what on the ground good practice with complex and challenging cases looked and lived like.

Using such strength-based practice in Middlesbrough would complement restorative practices and support the development of Family Group Conferencing (FGC). The effective implementation of Signs of Safety would require a shift in practice and involved everyone as corporate parents.

In practice, Signs of Safety aimed to strengthen relationships with parents, children & young people where there were safeguarding concerns. At the heart of the model was a risk assessment and

case planning framework, or map, that balanced past harms and future danger/worries alongside indicators of strength and safety.

It was explained that the Signs of Safety map and analysis categories were:

- “What are we worried about?” (This should include evidence of something that has actually happened to cause the concern).
- “What is working well?” (What are the family’s strengths? What is the child doing well?)
- “What needs to happen?” (Next steps – structured thinking around setting goals for safety, wellbeing and success).

Scaling questions from 0-10 were used to complete the assessments which would identify the level of danger, existing safety issues and safety goals. Use of this method had already begun within Children’s Services initially for referrals and supervision.

The Signs of Safety model would be used across the whole of Children’s Services and the type of assessment would be adapted accordingly. For example, in relation to child protection, the assessment would focus on Signs of Safety, in relation to early help, the assessment would focus on Signs of Wellbeing and for looked after children the assessment would focus on Signs of Success. The three column assessment could be applied to any situation.

It was hoped that use of the Signs of Safety model would:-

- Achieve the best outcomes possible for Middlesbrough’s children, young people and families.
- Aim to keep children with their own families/family networks if it was safe and possible to do so.
- Put children’s voices/stories at the heart of everything.
- Change thinking and practice to help achieve these things.
- Build a learning culture, driving continuous improvement and excellent practice.

The Board was informed that there was a two-year implementation plan which included training staff to use Signs of Safety, including two day training for social workers; advanced training for all managers including senior leaders; and a two-year development programme for Practice Leaders. This would also include introducing ways to learn from, and reflect on, practice such as appreciative enquiries and individual and group supervision aligned to Signs of Safety. Partner briefings had commenced in August and focus groups would be established to evaluate progress.

There would be a full organisational commitment to Signs of Safety, with senior leaders being actively engaged with practice; modelling the approach in management and leadership; creating conditions for social work to thrive; and building shared leadership at all levels of the organisation.

It was essential that practitioners were effectively supported to achieve the best possible outcomes for children through the right policies, procedures, structures, support and tools to support best quality Signs of Safety practice and ensuring practitioners developed services so that the tools and support in place reflected what worked for them.

The audit and quality assurance process would be aligned with the Signs of Safety approach to ensure that meaningful measures reflected what really mattered to children, young people and families. An auditing practice model would be adopted where audits were completed with practitioners, recognising their strengths, and supporting them to reflect on the quality of their work and identify areas they could learn from in order to improve on in future work.

In essence, the Signs of Safety model would:-

- Assist improved, more focused relationships with families.
- Make families feel more empowered, and more able to understand and address the concerns of professionals.
- Ensure practitioners were clearer on what the risks were and what was expected of all parties, resulting in better decision making for families.
- Improve working between practitioners.

- Reduce the number of children taken into care.
- Reduce the length of time cases were open.
- Increase job satisfaction of the social work workforce.

During the course of discussion the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query from a Member of the Board it was confirmed that the Signs of Safety assessment would be completed with the families and children and that any professionals working with the family would be able to see and add to the assessment.
- The Signs of Safety framework would provide clarity for all involved on what the concerns were and what needed to happen to address those concerns. Scaling would be reviewed so that families could see when they had made sufficient change or needed to make further change in order to achieve the goals.
- A Board Member asked how confident the service area was in ensuring that partner agencies would adopt the same approach. The Board was informed that this was a regional practice approach and that key partners and 'front door' services had been trained. In addition, all neighbouring local authorities and the Courts used this approach.
- Initial discussions with the Police indicated that they would like to see consistency across local authority boundaries.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the informative presentation.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

VIRTUAL SCHOOL MIDDLESBROUGH (VSM) ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17

T Dunn, Virtual School Head, was in attendance to provide Members with an overview of the effectiveness of the Virtual School for the period September 2016 to September 2017 in carrying out its statutory role of supporting looked after children in education.

A copy of the Annual Report (2016/17) had been circulated to Members of the Corporate Parenting Board prior to the meeting. The report identified emerging themes/trends and described areas of work to be prioritised during the year.

The key areas of interest to the Corporate Parenting Board within the report were highlighted as follows:-

- Review and evaluation of the 2016-17 VSM Action Plan – A detailed Action Plan was created in September 2016 to target resources towards addressing the identified areas requiring improvement in the previous cycle. Of the 13 identified planned actions, three had been achieved; seven had been achieved in part and three had not yet been achieved.
- The Looked After children population in Middlesbrough, (January 2018) stood at 440 – a 16% increase from the previous year.
- Looked After Children by school year group as at January 2018 was evenly distributed across the year groups with a slight expansion in the size of the population in years 9, 10 and 11. This group required the most significant support from the Virtual School.
- Designated Teachers' Training – Designated teachers were responsible for Looked After Children in schools and appropriate training to ensure the role was undertaken properly was delivered by schools. It was highlighted that there had been some issues around training delivery which were now being addressed and three training events were scheduled to take place.

- Progress and development of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) – All looked after children in Middlesbrough had a PEP, however the quality of the documents varied. Evidence of the most recent audit showed that the quality of PEPs was improving. The Virtual School encouraged young people to attend the PEP meetings and had invested in an 'ePEP' platform for the 2017/18 academic year which would be rolled out to schools and social workers with an accompanying training programme.
- Pupil Premium – It was highlighted that the Pupil Premium Plus paid by the DfE had risen from £1,900 per annum to £2,300 (as of April 2018). The report outlined the distribution of the funding which was sent directly to schools to facilitate the support they provided for Looked After children.
- Pages 16 and 17 of the report detailed the GCSE outcomes for Middlesbrough Looked After children for 2015, 2016 and 2017. There had been a significant improvement from 2016 to 2017 with the progress 8 score improving from -1.93 to -1.24. (Progress 8 was the newest measure of student performance and compared how each individual performed in their best eight subjects).
- In 2017 there was a cohort of 30 students distributed between 24 secondary schools. Three students out of 30 achieved five GCSE passes, including English and Maths. GCSE outcomes in terms of progress and attainment were too low for Middlesbrough's looked after children, however, progress had improved since 2016 which suggested that the approach being taken by the Virtual School was having a significant impact on outcomes.
- Performance at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in Middlesbrough was broadly in line with expectation and similar to performance nationally.
- Absence from school figures for looked after children showed that Middlesbrough matched the overall absence average for the north east region but that rates in Middlesbrough had fallen over the last four years as a result of real time monitoring attendance by the Virtual School. Persistent absence was marginally above the national average and marginally higher in 2017 than in 2016. This issue would be addressed by the Virtual School in the 2017/18 cycle.
- Both Fixed Term and Permanent Exclusion rates had fallen dramatically between 2016 and 2017 as a result of closer working between the Virtual School and partner schools. The Virtual School intervened whenever a school was considering an exclusion and sought to support the school in considering alternative approaches around correcting the looked after child's behaviour.
- Appendix 2 to the report was a 2018/19 Improvement Plan setting out the Virtual School improvement priorities as informed by the self-evaluation completed in February 2018.

During the course of discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query regarding progress on the improvement of PEPs, it was highlighted that, to address a key recommendation of the 2015 Ofsted report, as of July 2017 all PEPs were audited by the Virtual School Head and graded green, amber or red. The categories were as follows: green – the PEP met all statutory requirements, encompassing best practice and clear evidence of high aspirations for the young person; amber – met statutory requirements; red – did not meet statutory requirements. Where a red grade was awarded, the Designated Teacher and Social Worker were contacted and required to rectify any incomplete sections of the PEP within a specified timeframe. Currently, approximately 70% of PEPs in Middlesbrough were graded as good or better and the Virtual School had invested in an 'e-PEP' platform for the 2017/18 academic year which was anticipated to improve this figure. A training programme would be rolled out to schools and social workers in due course.
- With regard to a question relating to pupil premiums, the Board was advised that, since the start of the year, each time a PEP meeting was held, the Virtual School requested a spending profile to be completed. Every action within the PEP required an attributable cost. In cases where the

cost against an action did not appear to be correct, further information would be requested by the Virtual School.

- A Member of the Board expressed some concerns in relation to the differing levels of training and performance of Designated Teachers in different schools and asked whether those schools with poorer outcomes for looked after children could be identified and targeted for specific training. The Virtual Head acknowledged that Designated Teachers played a crucial role in achieving improved outcomes for individual children. Training provided by the Virtual School would provide quality and consistency and Head Teachers would be asked to strongly encourage all Designated Teachers to attend the training.
- It was queried whether the role of the Designated Teacher extended to former looked after children. The Board was advised that children who were no longer looked after because they had been adopted or were subject of a special guardianship order, were eligible for additional support with a Designated Teacher. The Government had awarded all local authorities with £35,000 additional funding over the next three years to help support former looked after children.

The Chair thanked the Officer for the information provided.

AGREED that the content of the submitted report and the information provided at the meeting be noted.

VOICE OF THE CHILD – WORK WITH CORAM VOICE

B Bradshaw, Voice of the Child Participation Co-ordinator, circulated a report to inform the Board of the Bright Spots Programme, developed by Coram Voice with the University of Bristol, aimed at improving the wellbeing of children and young people in care.

The 'Your Life, Your Care' survey had been developed with children and young people recognising that they were experts on their own experiences and was a tool for measuring the quality of looked after children's care experiences and their sense of wellbeing. Your Life, Your Care was based on two international literature reviews, discussion with professionals across the children's services sector and focus groups and interviews with 140 children and young people.

The new Bright Spots survey, "Your Life Beyond Care", focussed on the thoughts, feelings and experiences of care leavers and was developed using the same methodology as Your Life, Your Care.

The surveys would provide an overview of the views of children and young people in Middlesbrough about their experiences of being in care and help to shape service delivery. The Council would have access to a wide network of other local authorities across England using this approach to further develop best practice and enable development of the dataset.

The Your Life, Your Care survey for children aged 4 – 18 would take place between 1 and 21 October 2018. The Life Beyond Care survey (for care leavers) would take place between 24 and 31 October 2018.

The findings of the surveys would be shared with the Children in Care Council who would develop a report and action plan to be presented at the Voice of the Child Participation Conference on 28 January 2019. Feedback following the conference would be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted.
2. That feedback on the findings of the surveys be presented to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board, following the Participation Conference on 28 January 2019.

INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN INTERVIEWS

J Wilson, Head of Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting, provided a verbal update in relation to involving young people in interviews at all levels of recruitment across the Council.

Work was being undertaken in conjunction with Human Resources to ensure that any young person taking part in an interview panel had received the relevant training and was equipped with the necessary knowledge to feel confident in participating. The process of young people being involved in interviews would be reflected within the Council's recruitment policy in due course.

It was highlighted that young people had already participated in some interviews undertaken within Children's Services and that their feedback had been positive.

AGREED that the information provided be noted and that an update on progress be presented to a future meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

CARE CRISIS REVIEW UPDATE

H Watson, Executive Director of Children's Services, was unable to attend the Corporate Parenting Board due to a prior engagement and, therefore, provided a video to update the Board in relation to the Care Crisis Review.

In 2016 the President of the Family Division of the High Court, Sir James Mumby, called for action stating "We are facing a crisis and, truth be told, we have no very clear strategy for meeting this crisis. What is to be done?" In response a seven-month inclusive review undertaken by a 'coalition of the willing' from across the child welfare and family justice sectors in England and Wales was undertaken. On 13 June 2018, the report Care Crisis Review: options for change was published.

The report considered how to address the care crisis, and explored contributory factors leading to the number of children in care reaching the highest level since the Children Act 1989 was enacted and care order applications reaching record levels in 2017.

The review was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and facilitated by Family Rights Group and comprised an inclusive listening exercise with more than 2,000 people across England and Wales, complemented by a rapid academic review of evidence and the contributory factors.

Amongst other factors, the review found that services were stretched with increased levels of demand year on year. The report stated "There was a palpable sense of unease about how lack of resources, poverty and deprivation are making it harder for families and the system to cope" and "A culture of blame, shame and fear has permeated the system, affecting those working in it as well as the children and families reliant upon it. It was suggested that this had led to an environment that is increasingly mistrusting and risk averse and prompts individuals to seek refuge in procedural responses".

A document entitled Care Crisis Review – Summary of the Options for Change, was circulated to the Corporate Parenting Board. Members were asked to consider the options for change in the context of what was happening in Middlesbrough.

The document set out 20 options for change and the following key issues were highlighted:-

- Option 1 – good systems and practice. "That social care leaders and partner agencies regularly review their organisation's systems and practice against the messages from research about a) effective interventions and relationship-based practice and b) agency vision". Middlesbrough was already doing this and was in the process of rolling out the new Signs of Safety framework which had been positively evaluated internationally. This was a new approach to working with families to assess and manage risk. A significant training programme for staff and partner agencies was underway.
- Option 4 – inspections. "Ofsted take account of the messages from this report so that their work, including inspections and planned research, takes account of the duties on local

authorities to support families and to promote children's upbringing within their family, including organisational practice ethos and approaches likely to achieve this".

- In relation to other recommendations, Middlesbrough was working with the local Courts through the Local Family Justice Board. The Executive Director sat as a representative of the ADCS on the National Family Justice Board. The Board was clear that the Performance Management Targets for the Family Justice system be reviewed and that the approach to measuring timescales be revised. This would mean that the 26 week performance target was balanced against what was important in the life of a child which might mean that, on occasion, going beyond the 26 week target.
- Other key findings – option 17 around seeing families as a resource in service design and development. A recommendation that local authorities adopt a charter for parents 'mutual expectations'. This was being explored in Middlesbrough.
- Relationship-based practice was already used in Middlesbrough with Family Group Conferencing now being introduced in greater depth.
- Shortfall in resources – significant research undertaken by Newton Europe, ADCS and the LGA anticipated a £2 billion shortfall by 2020 in Children's Social Care. The document called for the LGA and Welsh Government to come together to highlight the pressures that the system was under with national Government.

The Board held a discussion and the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to the interaction between Social Care and the Courts and it was queried whether the Courts had been part of the discussion in relation to Signs of Safety. It was acknowledged that there were significant challenges around the relationship between the Courts and Social Care, for example, Care Orders being made by the Courts when Social Care had requested a lesser order. The reason for this was often about the Courts not having confidence in the proposed support packages. Kinship carers had a very important role to play and supporting them was key. A Kinship Care Policy, based on the national DfE model, had now been adopted by Middlesbrough Council. The Care Crisis Review recognised some of the performance pressures put on the justice system including the 26 week performance measure which was not always in the best interests of the child. The Board was informed that work needed to be undertaken regarding the Council's position locally with the Court. Efforts were being made within Social Care to minimise the work being put before the Court but this needed to be done in a safe and appropriate way.
- Reference was made to the difficulties (which included a significant number of variable factors) associated with demand forecasting and establishing a demand model to help in determining an acceptable level of looked after children numbers and planning for increases in demand for children's social care in Middlesbrough. It was also highlighted that the findings of the recent Ofsted focussed visit agreed that those children who had been taken into care had been appropriate.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

DRAFT LOCAL OFFER FOR CARE LEAVERS (E-BROCHURE)

The Chair proposed that, due to time constraints, this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

AGREED that this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 7 November 2018.

OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT AUGUST 2018

The Chair proposed that, due to time constraints, this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.

AGREED that this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 7 November 2018.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 7 November 2018 at 3.00pm.