

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

FINAL REPORT OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL – LISTENING TO THE VOICE OF THE CHILD

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AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

1. The aims of this Scrutiny investigation were:
 - To ensure that children and young people can influence those decisions that affect their lives
 - To assist in developing a new and improved delivery model for the Voice of the Child that will benefit children and young people in Middlesbrough.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

2. The terms of reference for the scrutiny panel's investigation were as follows:
 - a) To identify the types of participation and to illustrate the benefits and challenges associated with listening to the voice of the child.
 - b) To examine the work that the Council, and its partners, is currently undertaking to increase child and youth participation.
 - c) To empower children and young people to identify ways that the Council, and its partners, could enhance participation and further develop a child-focussed approach.
 - d) To identify best practice standards and models of engagement that would benefit the children and young people of Middlesbrough.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Children's Rights

3. Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) ¹ states that children and young people have a basic right to have a say and be taken seriously in all matters which affect them and requires government organisations to actively engage them in decision making. It also states that when adults are making decisions affecting children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.
4. This Convention encourages adults to listen to the opinions of children and involve them in decision-making. The Convention recognises that the level of a child's participation in decisions must be appropriate to the child's level of maturity, as children's ability to form and express their opinions develops with age. The UNCRC clarifies that these rights apply to children of every age, including those experiencing difficulties in making their view heard, for example children with impairments.
5. As holders of rights, even the youngest children are entitled to express their views. They make choices and communicate their feelings, ideas and wishes in numerous ways, long before they are able to communicate through the conventions of spoken or written language. Our youngest children can remain 'silenced' and often excluded from the decisions which shape their lives with the assumption that they are too young to express their views and that caregivers know best and so can speak, and act, on children's behalf.

¹ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx> - Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

6. The UNCRC recognises that children are not mere passive recipients of care but have an active interest in the decisions which affect them.
7. Enabling the Voice of the Child is more than just a basic right. Communication is the means through which we develop relationships, express our thoughts and feelings, make choices and, ultimately, take part in society. To deny any child the opportunity to express their views and develop life skills in decision making can have negative implications for their future independence.
8. Participation should be a meaningful two way process, with views freely expressed and heard. Where this is the case there are clear benefits for children and young people. For example building on existing skills, developing new ones, increased confidence and self-esteem, increased understanding of organisations and how to influence them. This also provides opportunities to change services making them more tailored to children and young people's needs.

Voice of the Child Definition

9. The "Voice of the Child" is a term used to capture work at various levels.

Individual:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent to which children and young people's voice is valued, listened to, heard and acted upon as part of their journey through the system, both to build professionals understanding of their lived experience, and the influence over, and participation in decisions which affect them
Service development:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent to which children and young people participate in or can influence the planning, design, delivery, monitoring and/or evaluation of services as a result of the expertise they have as a result of their experiences. This can range from consultation to co-production
Strategic level:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the extent to which children's participation is embedded into the aims and values of organisations and then reflected in plans, strategies, policy, workforce and performance management systems.

10. Why is the Child's Voice Important?

- Children feel listened to.
- When children are involved, plans are more successful.
- We can see their experience, from their point of view.
- Children can develop their own story about what is happening in their lives.

11. What happens when Children and Young People are not listened to?

- Children are less safe.
- Children are less happy and their wellbeing is lower.
- Children become less visible; adult needs can dominate.
- Assumptions are made about children's lives.

- Knowledge about children is limited to their relationships with adults.

Legislation and Regulation

12. Local authorities have been under a duty to listen to the wishes and feelings of children in decisions which affect them since the Children Act 1989² established the ‘paramountcy principle’, where the child’s welfare is paramount. Subsequent legislation including the Children Acts 1989, 2004³, Health and Social Care Act 2012⁴ and the Children and Families Act 2014⁵ have all reiterated this commitment to children and young people’s voice. The expectation that services will listen to children and young people, both in relation to their own individual case and in terms of influencing the design and delivery of services, is at the heart of Ofsted’s framework for inspecting children’s services. ‘Working Together to Safeguard Children’⁶ states:
13. “A child-centred approach: for services to be effective they should be based on a clear understanding of the needs and views of children⁷”.
14. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 years 2014⁸, places an important emphasis upon involving children and young people in decision-making at individual and strategic levels. “Local authorities must consult the child and the child’s parent or the young person throughout the process of assessment and production of an EHC plan. They should involve the child as far as possible in this process.”
15. *The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews (Ofsted 2011)*⁹ provides an analysis of 67 serious case reviews that Ofsted evaluated between 1st April and 30th September 2010. The focus of the report is on the absolute importance of listening to the voice of the child in safeguarding children and young people.

Term of Reference A:

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents> - Children’s Act 1989

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents> - Children’s Act 2004

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/7/contents/enacted> - Health and Social Care Act 2012

⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/6/contents/enacted> - Children and Families Act 2014

⁶ https://consult.education.gov.uk/child-protection-safeguarding-and-family-law/working-together-to-safeguard-children-revisions-t/supporting_documents/Working%20Together%20to%20Safeguard%20Children.pdf – Working Together to Safeguard Children

⁷

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/592101/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children_20170213.pdf - Working Together to Safeguard Children

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25> - Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0-25 years 2014

⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526981/The_voice_of_the_child.pdf - The voice of the child: learning lessons from serious case reviews (Ofsted 2011)

To identify the types of participation and illustrate the benefits and challenges associated with listening to the voice of the child.

16. Children and young people should have the opportunity to describe things from their point of view. They should be continually involved, and have information fed back to them in a way that they can understand. There should always be evidence that their voice has influenced the decisions that professionals have made.
17. Members were informed that the Council needed to ensure young people could have an influence on those decisions that affect their lives, they should be viewed as partners rather than passive recipients of services.
18. The Director of Children's Care explained to the Panel that listening to the Voice of the Child was a key requirement for Ofsted and other external bodies she also explained it was vital that the Council received feedback on what children and their families wanted from its services.
19. The panel was informed that empowering children and young people to participate in decision making about their own lives and affect the development of services that support them is a key objective for services working with children, young people and their families and is a value to be embedded in Middlesbrough's strategy for children and young people.

Types of participation

20. Local Authority areas with well-developed participation strategies such as Nottingham¹⁰ have defined participation as the "meaningful involvement in the decision making processes which affect young people's lives" and identified the following examples:
21. **Individual participation**- Where a person is involved in the planning and design of his or her own service plan or pathway plan, including for example care pathways, personalised budgets, personal education and health plans.
22. **Social participation** - Community-based youth and play work or school-based citizenship programmes where young people are motivated to be involved in their community and participate in the design and delivery of activities and programmes.
23. **Public participation** - Involvement in forums or councils, participation in surveys and consultations or through activities linked to quality assurance and improvement of services (such as inspection, mystery shopping and involvement in recruitment), and representation on boards and committees.

'The importance of seeing, observing and hearing the child'

24. Ensuring the Voice of the Child is heard should be a key feature underpinning all work with young people. The views and aspirations of young people must provide one of the foundations for work and young people must be actively engaged in this process.

Young people should have:

¹⁰ <http://www.nottinghamchildrenspartnership.co.uk/media/455989/children-and-young-peoplesparticipation-strategy-2015-19.pdf> - Nottingham Participation Strategy

- Opportunities to get involved in decisions about their care and supervision
- Access to the services they need
- And have a say in how these services seek to work with them

25. In order to achieve this the following standards should apply to all work with children and young people:

- All young people have the chance to participate in a way they are comfortable with and understand.
- Young people's views will be taken seriously and be heard.
- All activities should be interesting, enjoyable and provide the young person with the opportunity to learn.
- Young people should be kept informed around what is going on and what difference their participation makes.
- Time should be taken to explain to the young person when and why their views or suggestions cannot be acted upon.
- Young people's views should be used to inform service developments and improvements.

26. The panel was advised that Middlesbrough Council's Children's Services have identified the need to recognise the voice of the child and is now at the beginning of a journey to build this into its strategic aims and partnership work. An example of this can be seen in the appointment of a Child Participation Co-ordinator. The purpose of which is to co-ordinate Early Help services to children, young people and families to ensure increased participation and improve outcomes. They will ensure the voice of the child is developed and used to inform planning and promote and coproduce the on-line local offer with families and support planning based upon the Voice of the Child.

27. The panel heard that the intended outcomes for the development of the voice of the child is that children, young people and their families will be at the centre of any conversation and are involved in the planning process from the beginning. Services will be shaped by user's experiences, ambitions and expectations, and resourcing will be designed with and for young people. To achieve this a restorative practice approach will be adopted by all staff, and a young people's forum will be established to ensure the voice of the child is at the heart of all developments.

28. The panel was informed that the development of the voice of the child work will continue throughout 2017/18 and have paramount importance at the newly formed Children and Young Peoples Partnership.

Term of Reference B:

To examine the work that the Council, and its partners, is currently undertaking to increase child and youth participation.

29. The panel heard from officers from the Children's Services department who provided an update on work that is being undertaken to listen to the Voice of the Child.

Youth Offending Service

30. The panel was informed by the Operations Manager of the South Tees Youth Offending Service (STYOS) of the work currently being undertaken within the Youth Offending Service (YOS) to ensure the Voice of the Child is heard.
31. The Operations Manager explained that one of the priorities identified for South Tees YOS within the 2017 Youth Justice Plan¹¹ was to create opportunity for the voice of young people to be explicit across the work of the YOS. This improved practice would ensure that the Voice of the Child is clearly evidenced through YOS case management processes and used to ensure improved outcomes for the young person as well as challenging the YOS to further develop engagement processes which were responsive to the needs of individuals.
32. The Panel was informed that the YOS have sought to develop a case management model to engage and secure the participation of young people involved with the YOS. The Operations Manager highlighted the following systems which were being used to engage and support young people.
- All young people agreed a contract which outlined responsibilities of all parties, including information sharing with third parties.
 - All young people were encouraged to complete the AssetPlus Self-Assessment document. This provided the young person and their parent/carer with the opportunities to have an input into the assessment process and case managers used the outcomes from this explicitly in assessments and formulating plans.
 - All young people completed a Learning Style questionnaire, developed with the South Tees Speech and Language Therapy Team to assist the YOS to understand how best to engage them.
 - The YOS assessment process was grounded in the engagement of the young person and their parents, with all young people undergoing at least one 'interview' with their case manager.
 - The outcomes of assessments were shared with the family and case managers were encouraged to seek the young person/parent/carer response to this.
 - Assessments formed the basis of plans which were formulated with the young person.
 - For Referral Orders, young people were afforded the opportunity to attend a community based Youth Offender Panel, a mediation process attended by young person/family member, victim, community Panel Members and YOS staff, the purpose of this was to challenge the young person's behaviour and agree a contract of interventions to challenge this.
 - All young people were engaged with YOS staff based on their 'Scaled Approach' level which governs how frequently they were visited or required to engage in intervention. This is governed by a number of factors including risk and offending.
 - Where young people did not engage and could be subject to enforcement action they were provided an opportunity to explain the reasons for any non-compliance before any final decisions were made on enforcing their programme.
33. The Panel were advised that the STYOS recognised that there were future challenges ahead to ensure that engagement and participation of young people is maximised which included:

¹¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/660018/yjb-business-plan-2017-18.pdf - Youth Justice Plan 2017/18

- Developing a new survey method to gauge young people's experience with the YOS as the Viewpoint process was no longer supported by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP)
- Employing a Support Worker/Apprentice role with a primary function of engaging young people and working with them to understand their experience with the YOS.
- Developing the use of Social Media both as a tool to engage young people but also to monitor and track behaviours.
- Further development of programme of interventions to reflect the changing needs and behaviours of young people.
- Development of the Borough Road site as a contact base for engaging young people in individual and group activity.
- Development of opportunities for YOS staff and managers to meet with young people and their parents to discuss their experience and ways the service could be improved.
- At the end of their YOS programme young people were afforded the opportunity to provide their views on their experience with the YOS using a Viewpoint questionnaire.

Early Help

34. The Panel were advised that Early Help was an approach to support potentially vulnerable children, young people and their families as soon as problems started to emerge, to prevent problems becoming worse. This approach involves every member of the family to ensure that everybody has a voice including children.
35. The Early Help Hub Manager informed the Panel that all families that agreed to Early Help were offered an Early Help Assessment (EHA) previously known as a Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Members were informed that this form of assessment was not family friendly and as a result work has been undertaken with children and young people, alongside professionals, to redesign it. The new assessment was now known as 'My Family Plan' and the Voice of the Child was central to this plan.
36. Members heard that work was currently being undertaken by the Early Help Hub Manager and the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Manager to look at how to encourage education establishments to complete the newly designed 'My Family Plan'. It was explained that where children have SEN Support Plans these plans focus on certain needs. It was advised that these children did not always have an Early Help Assessment plan in place which looks holistically looked at the needs of the family and what could be contributing to the child's difficulties.
37. Members were advised that 'Tell us what you Think' forms were given to those that had completed the 'My Family Plan' to gather feedback and to consider suggestions for further improvement.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

38. The Director of Education advised the Panel that the special educational needs and disability reforms arising from the Children and Families Act 2014 included a requirement to involve SEND children, young people their family and carers in the development and delivery of services provided in the local area. Currently this includes representation of young people and their parents and carers in programme work streams.

39. The Director of Education explained that in preparation for the introduction of the reforms, commencing in 2013 Middlesbrough Council worked collaboratively with Redcar & Cleveland Council, representatives of respective health, social care teams plus parents/carers and young people on a series of six themed working groups:

- Early Help/intervention
- Education health & care assessment
- Development of the Local Offer
- Joint Commissioning of services
- Personal budgets
- Transition to adulthood

40. The Local Area has recently undergone a joint Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection for children and young people with SEND. The inspection was across Education, Health and Social Care. Many positives were highlighted across the whole system, however strong concerns were raised regarding gaining the views of children and young people and not engaging widely enough with them. Ofsted also indicated that children/young people and their carers did not appear to understand the Local Offer (what services were available to them and how they accessed them).

41. The Director of Education explained that following the inspection a review of the Local Offer in 2017 had been undertaken this involved parents, carers and young people on task groups to ensure the Local Offer was re-shaped with families and young people at its heart.

42. A Written Statement of Action has been produced following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission inspection to address the concerns raised.

43. The Director of Education had provided assurance that families and children/young people would remain essential partners in the planning of future service delivery and would have ongoing opportunities for participation through strategic and operational workstreams. This would also link to the SEND Improvement Group who in turn would report to the Children's Trust.

Children's Social Care

44. Hearing and understanding the child's voice and child participation is a central part of Social Work practice from an operational and strategic level. There are areas of good practice across the department and it is a priority for the Children's Care department to ensure there is a consistent approach in all service areas. The importance of gathering children's views and wishes is twofold; firstly it will ensure that each child/young person is consulted about their future so that they can contribute to the decision making. Secondly, they contribute to improving service delivery by sharing their experiences and identifying what works well and what needs to be done differently.

45. The Panel were informed of methods of gathering feedback and encouraging participation in short-term interventions including;

- Practitioners will use evidence based direct work tools to gather children's views
- Focused conversations
- Observations of younger children who are too young to express a view

- One to one and group work undertaken by Resource Workers
- Consultation documents are used for LAC Reviews - The Pledge “A Promise you have to keep” is a document designed by Looked After Children for Looked After Children.
The document asks about placement, family, friends, school, health, spare time and anything else they want to say.
- Consultation documents for Child Protection conferences are sent out prior to conference and then they are discussed during the child’s Conference.
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) visit children prior to their LAC Review to gain the child’s views and wishes about their plan, therefore allowing effective challenge within the LAC Review process
- The IROs actively encourage children to chair their own reviews with their own agenda, this breaks down power imbalance and give a true account of the child’s views and wishes.

46. The Panel were advised of methods of gathering feedback and encouraging participation, for Looked after Children and Children with Disabilities (CWD) including;

- Within Middlesbrough’s Children’s homes, young people have Feedback Questionnaires that they complete twice per year, the nature of the feedback is in relation to the elements of care provided, such as, quality of care, if they feel safe, positive aspects of the home, areas that require improvement, menus, activities etc.
- One to one sessions with an allocated link worker.
- Suggestion boxes.
- All young people must be made aware of the process of making a comment, complement or complaint.
- Children’s Meetings are held within children’s homes on a monthly basis, these meetings usually have a theme, however, children are always asked if they have any issue or ideas for the agenda.
- Every April the disability service hold a Big Event for children in Middlesbrough. This event involves young people and their families participating in music and drama sessions, as well as art and craft activities. During this event young people are asked to complete a questionnaire – this year it was on “what activities would children like to be able to access”.
- Exit questionnaires for care leavers.

47. In Middlesbrough there is a Children in Care Council (CICC). Members of the CICC are a group of young people who were, or had been, cared for by Middlesbrough Local Authority. Members heard that the CICC had recently been involved in the updating of the Neglect Strategy for Middlesbrough.

48. The CICC were also involved in writing proposals for a new area on the Council’s website specifically for children and young people. The aim is to make the website accessible to its target audience, which is the children and young people of Middlesbrough. The website would host consultation forms, feedback surveys and secure contact with professionals working in Children’s Care.

Risk Reduction

49. The Panel were provided with examples of evaluations that are conducted with young people who were involved in risk taking behaviours. The Risk Reduction Manager reported that

following feedback from the evaluations steps were being taken to introduce more digital interventions with young people.

50. The Risk Reduction Manager provided an overview of the Social Norms Survey that is completed by year 9 pupils in secondary schools who participate in the Respect Yourself Roadshow. The annual survey explores a range of risk taking behaviour by young people.
51. It was advised that the questionnaire was administered 3 weeks prior to the Respect Yourself Roadshow and children's answers were used to target interventions towards wrong perceptions and problematic behaviours.
52. The information provided by the children is used in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to inform future commissioning requirements.

Family Justice Youth People's Board (FJYPB) and Barnardo's

53. The Panel wished to gain an understanding of how other organisations listened to the Voice of the Child and colleagues from the Family Youth Justice Board and Barnardo's attended to provide members with an update.
54. In respect of the FJYPB the Panel were advised that FJYPB members represented the voice of children/young people across England and Wales who were in court proceedings. The FJYPB has 50 standing members aged from 7 years to 25 years old. The young people who are board members of the FJYPB share their experiences with others, advise on positive experiences and look at how good practice can be replicated across other services. The Board members also hold Government and local services to account if a poor service has been received. It was also advised that FJYPB members receive a payment when they attended commissions.
55. A National Charter for Child Inclusive Family Justice has been developed by the FJYPB. All organisations that work with the FJYPB have signed up to the Charter which details what the FJYPB expect from them.

The main points in the Charter include:

- Children and young people should be at the centre of all proceedings.
- Children and young people should be kept safe.
- Every child should be respected and treated as an individual regardless of age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation.
- Children and young people should be given the opportunity to meet and communicate with the professionals involved in their case.
- When making a final order, the judge should consider who will inform the child or young person of the outcome.
- Children and young people should be kept informed about the court proceeding in an age appropriate manner.
- Do not use jargon - make language clear, understandable and age appropriate and use methods of communication that children and young people are used to.
- Every child or young person should have the opportunity to give feedback on family justice services, through email, text, telephone or writing.
- Children and young people should be involved in all developments in family justice

56. The FJYPB has devised 10 top tips for family court advisors working with children and young people in the family courts to encourage best practise. The FJYPB have also produced top tips on 'Working with Children and Young People with Autism, For Respecting Children and Young People's Diversity and Working with Children and Young People with a Disability.

57. In respect of Barnardo's the panel was advised that Barnardo's ensured that the voice of the child was at the core of all of its work. The Tees Valley corporate strategy for Barnardo's includes:

- Opportunities to Create Resources - Local Issues, Local Locations, Local people
- Participation Groups - Opportunities for young people to get involved in issues affecting them
- Specific Projects
- Participatory Outcomes for Projects
- Evaluations of Services from young people/parents - Fed into future changes/decisions
- Individualised Work so young people were able to engage in a way that was accessible to them
- Display Boards - The building is their space

Term of Reference C

To empower children and young people to identify ways that the Council, and its partners, could enhance participation and further develop a child- focussed approach.

58. As part of the Panel's investigation the panel requested to meet with young people in Middlesbrough to gather their views on Listening to the Voice of the Child. A round table discussion was held with young people from the Linx Detached Youth Project in Hemlington.

The young people were provided with the following questions prior to the meeting;

- Why do you think the child/young person's voice is important?
- Do children and young people in Middlesbrough feel listened to?
- What are the best ways of engaging children and young people?
- What happens when children and young people are not listened to?
- Do you believe your contributions are valued and acted upon effectively?

59. The following responses were received from the young people during the discussion;

Why do you think the child/young person's voice is important?

'You need to know the needs of a young person and what they would like from a service'

'Young people now, know what younger children want now and it will help them going forward to plan services'

'It is a young person's life you have to listen to them'

'There is not much out there for young people'

Do children and young people in Middlesbrough feel listened to?

'How can you be listened to if you don't access something that gives you the opportunity to be listened to?'

'There are only certain children who get the chance to be listened to and that is only if they access a youth service'

'Not every young person accesses organisations, each young person has a different opinion if they do not access services who is going to ask them?'

'Even if a kid does voice their opinion they don't get listened to because they think you are only a kid'

'When I was younger I didn't know where to go to be listened to'

'I think young people don't speak or raise their voices if they don't see change, they feel it is a waste of time if they don't see changes happening. If they see changes happening they will speak'

It was generally felt that there were limited forums for young people to feed in their opinions and that there should be more places for young people and children to go to where they would actually be listened to. The young people suggested that when forums were taking place they should be advertised more towards young people.

What are the best ways of engaging children and young people?

'Working as an apprentice with young people they engage with you because we are young they connect with us. It is easier for us to understand them'

'We engage young people in youth clubs, we always ask them what they want to do, we write down what they want to do, things like trips'

'In each youth club the young people set their own ground rules, we also do detached youth work on the streets'

'We get our message out using Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, social media is what young people use - young people at Linx are looking at using social media to engage young people to get their views this is something the Council should look at'

'We also do detached youth work as well as we know not everyone uses social media and we follow up with young people after we meet them'

'An App could be developed to engage with young people or a video could be produced to show young people how they can be listened to'

60. The apprentices suggested that it would be beneficial to hold a conference in Middlesbrough for all youth groups to come together to advertise what they do and how young people can get involved. It was also suggested that an open forum could be advertised on social media to encourage all young people to come forward with ideas on what the Council could do for young people in Middlesbrough.

What happens when children and young people are not listened to?

'They won't engage with services'

'They won't provide you with their views'

'The services you provide might not be the right ones'

'Young people won't get involved if they don't think you are listening to them'

Do you believe your contributions are valued and acted upon effectively?

'If young people see change and see it is beneficial to them, it will be like a ripple and they will see that you are listening to what they have got to say, if we don't see things happening we do not feel like our opinions are valued'

Term of Reference D

To identify best practice standards and models of engagement that would benefit the children and young people of Middlesbrough.

61. The Panel heard from the Member of the Youth Parliament of the benefits of setting up a Youth Council in Middlesbrough.

62. A local Youth Council is defined by the British Youth Council as defined by the British Youth Council as a Democratic Organisation that was created, ran and developed for young people by young people. A Youth Council exists to represent the views of young people at a local level giving young people the opportunity to have a voice, discuss relevant issues, engages with decision-makers and contributes to improving the lives of young people in the community.

The benefits a Youth Council would bring to Middlesbrough would include;

- The Youth Council would help services and Councils with opinions, surveys, information gathering and input with projects
- The Youth Council would run campaigns and projects and represent changes young people in Middlesbrough want to see.
- The Youth Council would report back to the young people in Middlesbrough via newsletters sent out to schools, by speaking to young people and social media.
- The Youth Council would ensure that young people's ideas are valued and turned into action.

63. The Voice of the Child Participation Officer and the Head of Partnerships felt that the work of the Youth Council would be extremely beneficial to services in Middlesbrough as it would feed back into the Children's Trust Board which is a strategic partnership and would also feed into the Children's Strategy.

CONCLUSIONS

64. Based on the evidence, given throughout the investigation, the scrutiny panel concluded

that:

- a) The types of participation namely individual, social and public which were identified as best practice in other local authorities are all undertaken by Middlesbrough Council. However it was noted that work currently being undertaken seems to focus on individual participation.
- b) The Panel acknowledges that there is currently a large amount of good work being undertaken within the Council, however this is primarily focussed on Children's Services.
- c) Whilst some children/ young people are aware of their rights the Panel felt that all children and young people in Middlesbrough need to know what their rights are.
- d) From the evidence gathered by the Panel when speaking to young people, the Panel Members felt very strongly that although engagement did take place, young people's views were not always acted upon, making them reluctant to participate.
- e) The panel felt that methods of engagement with children/young people need to be reviewed to include responsible use of social media and technology as a means of engagement.
- f) In Middlesbrough the availability of forums for children/young people to express their views and have an opportunity to have a voice, discuss relevant issues and engage with decision making, is limited. The forums that do exist tend to be for children currently accessing services rather than for all children/young people in Middlesbrough.
- g) The contribution made by the Member of Youth Parliament during this scrutiny panel review was felt to be invaluable. Based on the information presented by the Member of Youth Parliament, it is clear that the establishment of a Youth Council in Middlesbrough would be beneficial to the children/young people of the town.

RECOMMENDATIONS

65. As a result of the evidence received, and based on the above conclusions, the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel makes the following recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Board:-

- a) The Panel feels that a "Top Tips" for Working with Children/Young People should be developed in conjunction with children/young people. This should then be embedded in all departments that work with children and young people.
- b) An e-learning module on the importance of child participation is developed or alternatively a conference is held for staff to attend to ensure that all relevant Council staff understand the importance of child participation.
- c) Young people should be involved in the recruitment process of staff who will be working with children and young people. This will ensure that the views of young people are taken into account on what qualities and skills they feel individuals should possess.

- d) The number of forums in Middlesbrough for children/young people who are not currently engaged in statutory services to express their views is limited. The Panel recommends that an annual conference is held for all youth groups to come together to discuss current issues and express their views.
- e) The Panel recommends that the Member of Youth Parliament is supported to develop a Youth Council. All schools and academies should be invited to become active members on the Youth Council. The Panel also strongly agreed that once the Youth Council is established it should be provided with its own budget to be used to support campaigns, training, activities and participation and is to be used at the sole discretion of the Youth Council. The Panel also recommended that the Voice of the Child Participation Coordinator be awarded a budget to support the work around child participation.
- f) Once a Youth Council is established, its Chair or Vice Chair should be invited to attend Full Council. The Panel recommended that the Youth Council have a standing item on its agenda to provide updates on its work that can be fed back to Middlesbrough Council.
- g) To ensure that all children and young people in Middlesbrough are aware of their rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (child friendly) poster is displayed in all Council buildings that are accessed by children/young people. All schools in Middlesbrough should also be encouraged to display the poster. It was recommended that a mapping exercise is carried out as to where information can be accessed on children's rights and emailed to all schools and academies.
- h) As well as displaying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child poster it is also recommended that a child friendly leaflet "Do you know your rights?" is produced and given to all children/young people accessing Middlesbrough Council services.
- i) A young person should become a co-opted member on the Children and Young People's Trust to ensure that the voice of the child is embedded into the aims and values of the Trust and that it is reflected in plans and strategies developed by the Children and Young People's Trust.
- j) That a child friendly version of the Scrutiny Report on Listening to the Voice of the Child is produced and posted on the Children's Services section of the Middlesbrough Council website.
- k) The use of Social Media to engage with children/young people should be explored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

66. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel would like to thank the following for their assistance with its work:

S Ahmed – Personal Advisor, Middlesbrough Council
 B Bradshaw – Voice of the Child Participation Coordinator, Middlesbrough Council
 A Brown – Director for Children's Care, Middlesbrough Council
 B Carr – Member of Youth Parliament
 K Dargue – Head of Partnership's, Middlesbrough Council

S Davies – Team Manager, Middlesbrough Council
J Lynch – Family Youth Justice Board
P Harrison – Operations Manager, South Tees Youth Offending Service
A McGovern – Barnardo’s
K Peacock – Linx Project
J Scadden – Family Partnership Team Manager, Middlesbrough Council
P Smith – Barnardo’s
J Watson – Risk and Reduction Manager, Middlesbrough Council
A Williams – Director of Education, Middlesbrough Council

The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel would also like to thank the young people from the Linx Project in Hemlington for their assistance with its work.

ACRONYMS

67. A-Z listing of common acronyms used in the report:

- CAF – Common Assessment Framework
- CICC – Children in Care Council
- CP – Child Protection
- CWD – Children with Disabilities
- EHA – Early Help Assessment
- EHC Plan – Education, Health, Care Plan
- FJYPB – Family Justice Young People’s Board
- HMIP – Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons
- IRO – Independent Reviewing Officer
- LAC – Looked after Children
- SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
- STYOS – South Tees Youth Offending Service
- UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
- YOS – Youth Offending Service

BACKGROUND PAPERS

68. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

Reports to, and minutes of, the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 13th October 2017, 8 November 2017, 13 December 2017, 10 January 2018 7 February and 14 March 2018.

COUNCILLOR J BLYTH - CHAIR OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

The membership of the scrutiny panel is as follows: Councillors J Blyth, (Chair), M Walters, (Vice-Chair), D Davison, L McGloin, G Purvis, M Storey, Z Uddin, J A Walker, J Young and Fr G Holland, Ben Carr (Member of Youth Parliament)

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