

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Wednesday 28 October 2020.

**PRESENT:** Councillors A Hellaoui (Chair), T Higgins (Vice-Chair), M Nugent, J Platt, Z Uddin, C Wright and J Walker

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillors

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

**OFFICERS:**

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors L Garvey and J McTigue

20/30 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor McTigue and Councillor Garvey.

20/31 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/32 **MINUTES- CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - 17 SEPTEMBER 2020**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 17 September 2020 were read and accepted as a true record.

20/33 **ACTIONS - 17 SEPTEMBER 2020**

The Democratic Services officer provided an update on the actions taken at the meeting on 17 September 2020 and outstanding actions from previous meetings.

**AGREED- That the actions be noted**

20/34 **FEEDBACK FROM OFSTED MONITORING VISIT**

The Director of Children's services provided feedback to the Board following the recent Ofsted monitoring visit.

The Director first outlined that Children's Services now had a new logo- Middlesbrough Children Matter, which was a positive step and would provide focus.

The Board were made aware that this was the first virtual inspection , which had been carefully planned and carried out of 2 days. Prior to the inspection, the Council had provided documents and evidence for the Inspectors.

During the visit, the inspectors reviewed the progress made at the 'front door' of the service, with a focus on:

- the quality and screening of referrals,
- the identification of and response to risk,
- the understanding by partner agencies of threshold decisions for social work support,
- and the quality of initial assessment and planning

A range of evidence was considered, including electronic case records, case discussions with social workers, the elected member for children's services and senior leaders, and management and performance reports provided by the local authority.

## Overall findings

Ofsted outlined that the local authority has made **some** progress in improving certain areas. The word some is used by Ofsted as a mean of evidence progress. The areas of improvement were as follow:

- the social work practice in their 'front door' service
- the immediate response to 16-17-year-old homeless young people
- performance monitoring including a new quality assurance framework
- their strategic oversight of services for children and young people.

The Board were made aware that in terms of the multi-agency Children's Hub (MACH), Middlesbrough had a joint MACH with Redcar and Cleveland, however from the first inspection, it was evident that Middlesbrough did not have sufficient oversight of the service and therefore it was decided to disaggregate, which has been great progress.

Despite the progress the Director outlined that it was pointed out that leaders know that there is significant work to do in improving the quality of practice for children and young people in other areas of the service which remains not good enough.

The Director outlined some of the strengths of findings:

### Leadership

- The Director of Children's Services has demonstrated a determination and vision for improving the quality of interventions that will make a difference for children and their families.
- There is a continuing commitment from the Chief Executive and lead member both of whom are fully engaged in the improvement work.
- Senior leaders have a realistic understanding of the endemic weakness in social work practice informing an appropriately focused improvement plan.
- There has been an exponential increase in demand due to a necessary change in the application of thresholds for service, and a lack of throughput of children's cases.
- Manager oversight has also improved some areas of social work practice, but this is not consistent. The supervision of social workers is not always regular or effective.
- Caseloads are too high and are affecting social workers' ability to provide a timely service for children and their families. The Director outlined that the service was embarking on a significant piece of work to address this and look at resources.
- Safeguarding partners represented on the improvement board are increasingly engaged and showing increasing ownership of their part in the improvement of children's services.
- A model of quality assurance, 'Audit for Excellence', is starting to provide a robust practice of auditing linked to individual and team performance. Combined with the improved performance monitoring there is a collective ownership of performance and prompt identification of gaps in practice. This is informing team and wider service improvements.
- It was also noted that we have scrutiny and challenge from our members, which is a positive step.

### Middlesbrough Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH)

- This visit found substantially improved practice in the Middlesbrough MACH in the quality of referrals and screening, and the decision-making and manager oversight.
- Screening takes account of the child and family's history, and of the multi-agency information forming a balanced analysis of risk.
- Management oversight at this early stage provides direction and guidance for the social worker in how to screen the contact.
- Workers seek consent appropriately, and it is clearly recorded including when consent is needed to be overridden.
- Most contacts by partner agencies are converted to a referral for a social work service. This demonstrates that there is an improved understanding of thresholds by referring agencies.

- When children are identified as needing an immediate response, strategy meetings are held promptly, and in most cases, all safeguarding partners are represented.
- Strategy meetings explore risk.
- Lack of safety planning at the point of the Strategy meeting is a missed opportunity to ensure that partners understood their role and the actions necessary to keep children safe.
- Young people aged 16-17-years old who present as homeless, are now screened effectively to establish their needs, risks and vulnerabilities, with appropriate progression to a referral for an assessment.

**Assessment**

**Team**

- The quality of some children's assessments has improved since the last inspection.
- Most assessments are not completed within a timeframe which supports the child's identified needs.
- Risk is better understood through a recognised risk methodology
- The child's voice is heard through direct work. However, children's voices and their lived experience is not consistently seen in all casework.
- Children's identity and diversity needs are narrowly understood
- Children's plans are not consistently effective in outlining the plan of intervention and a contingency for when children's circumstances are not improved.
- Often the initial plan developed from the assessment is brief. Better plans identify the area of need and provide clear timescales in which to see improvement and a contingency plan if this is not achieved.
- There has been a rigorous approach to safety planning for children during to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the service completed 2,700 safety plans for the most vulnerable children in Middlesbrough.

In terms of next steps, the Director advised that they were continue to be under scrutiny , although one aspect which would be constantly under review would be the recruitment and retention of social workers.

- The Commissioner would undertake a 6 month review between 9th , 10th and 11th November which would be a series of focus groups, meetings with leaders and thematic meetings.
- Ofsted's next steps; there will be an assurance visit, which will look at the whole of children's services.
- Focus on improvement – Ofsted will undertake a full inspection between October 2020 and March 2021. This will include 3 inspectors for a 3 day inspection.
- Regional self assessment

The Chair thanked the Director for her presentation and commended the service for their improvements.

A board member questioned what the caseloads for social workers was currently and whether sickness levels of social workers had increased.

In response, the Director outlined that on occasion caseloads have been 30, however this was just a number and did not take into account the complexity of cases. The Director of Children's Care advised that sickness levels for social workers had increased slightly, however sickness across the whole of the Council had increased. Covid-19 and work related stress have been a factor , however further details of sickness would be brought back to a future meeting of the Board.

Another board member also commended social workers who have remained on the front line to conduct 1:1 sessions with families whilst putting their own lives at risk.

With this, the Chair asked the Directors to pass on the Board's thanks and gratitude to the social workers, for their continued dedicated during this time.

**AGREED:**

1. **That the update on the monitoring visit be noted**
2. **That the Board received sickness level information in relation to social workers at a future meeting**

20/35

## **VOICE OF THE CHILD /PARTICIPATION UPDATE**

The Chair welcomed the Voice of the Child Coordinator to provide an update to the Board on work surrounding participation and work of our member of Youth Parliament for Middlesbrough. The Coordinator firstly thanked the Board for making Participation a standard item

The Board were shown a video blog produced by the Member of Youth Parliament for Middlesbrough, Muskaan which provided an update on progress since the last meeting. The key messages were as follows:

- The Member of Youth Parliament - Muskaan (MYP) and Deputy Member of Youth Parliament - Batool (DMYP) were sad to see their Participation Officer Beth leave for University, however they were thrilled to meet Laurie who will support them. Laurie is up to date with their priorities and they are meeting regularly.
- Muskaan and Batool worked with Abi Tang and other MYPs in the North to organise and plan a Recycling convention. Then helped and worked as a facilitator for the convention, gathered ideas and knowledge to use in our own area.
- The representatives tried to meet with Councillor Antony High to discuss our ideas for Middlesbrough but the meeting wasn't the most successful due to technical issues so they will try to reorganise a date to re meet.
- ReuseRefill campaign- they are trying to battle during more lockdown restrictions to be able to start our reusable bottle campaign around Middlesbrough. They have collected contact information and ways for them to take part however Covid is a massive issue and has impacted.
- The representatives are still trying to organise development of the Youth Council, however they have decided to wait till after the New Year to take it to schools as there's still too much uncertainty and schools are bust with COVID.

The Panel were pleased to hear of their progress and looked forward to future updates.

In terms of wider participation, the Voice of the Child Coordinator provided a presentation on work underway.

### **Participation**

- Developing the Tell Us More Survey - a process to allow children, young people, parents and carers to give honest feedback on the service that they receive. The tell us more survey had over 100 responses and in terms of care leavers, the service engaged with 89 young people. The Board requested that a breakdown of responses be brought back to the next meeting of the Board.
- Reviewing the Nation Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS) contract and the usage in Middlesbrough. The number of young people engaging are quite low so the Participation team is working to address this.
- Reviewing the communications with young people, parents, carers and the workforce.
- Developing the Middlesbrough Children Matter website -This website will be the hub of information for children, young people, parents and carers. The service hope to launch the website on 13 November 2020. The Coordinator advised that she is hopeful that now there is one central point for information sharing, more young people will become interested in joining groups. There has always been difficulty with this, however it is not just in Middlesbrough. The Coordination and Support worker recently attended a Regional Participation Network and workers all shared the same view. Young people are tired of virtual meetings and cannot wait to meet.
- Finalising plans for a virtual Youth Council network- Working with Members of Youth Parliament and Councillor Antony High to plan a virtual launch due to COVID.

### **How have we been supporting/ encouraging participation through COVID?**

Whilst Covid-19 has changed the way we live and run our lives, the Coordinator outlined that in one way, it has helped the Participation team rethink the way they engage with young people. The team has:

- Launched the GovNotify text service for Care Leavers- allows the service to send text messages directly to the young persons phone with updates, opportunities and information.
- Launched the GovNotify text service for Children's Care staff- allows the service to send information to our workers, for example: NYAS information to promote with children and young people.
- Promoting the use of Youth Voice Middlesbrough social media platforms- Using young person friendly platforms to engage with our young people and promote opportunities and information.
- The use of Webex; Zoom; Skype; Facetime and GoogleMeets- The service offer the use of all these platforms to engage with our young people to run social groups.

In terms of communication, the Director of Children's Care advised the Board that all Children Looked after now have a laptop and all foster carers were issued with mobile phones to aid communication with social workers and birth parents.

Mini Children in Care Council (mini CICC), Children in Care Council (CICC) and Care Leavers forum

In terms of groups, the Coordination advised that Board of the current numbers and activities underway:

**Mini CICC** - Currently 3 members of the group, who live within the same placement. The boys meet every 3 weeks for a virtual games night. They find the night fun, but are looking forward to meeting properly for pizza and sweets!

**Children in Care Council** - There is currently only have one member of the Children in Care Council , however has recently said they do not want to engage with the virtual meetings but wants to attend the meetings when CICC is able to meet. The young person in question, however is part of the Young Commissioners Group and therefore does have a say in how we shape Council services.

**Care Leavers forum-** The group meet fortnightly and speak regularly via the Care Leavers forum whatsapp group. There are 4 members of the group. Recent tasks of the group have included the recruitment of the Director of Children's Care, the recruitment of the Participation Officer, the development of the Tell Us More Survey and they have been heavily involved in the plans for Care Leavers week.

A Board member praised the Coordinator for her work, however mirrored her comments by saying further methods of engagement need to be explored to get more young people on these groups. The Coordinator in response outlined that it is hard, as quite often young people just want to be seen as everyone else, and with Covid it is impossible for visit schools, the virtual school or groups and therefore when it is safe to do so, it is hoped this can resume.

**Care Leavers Week- 26 October 2020- 1 November 2020- Plans**

The Coordinator advised that Care Leavers week ran from 28 October 2020 - 1 November 2020 and the Participation team were busy engaging with Care leavers.

- through Twitter, there had been key messages from the Director of Children's Services, Director of Children's Care and Interim Head of Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting, expressing how proud Middlesbrough is of their young people.
- Text service- competition a day e.g. favourite sing, favourite joke , Favourite films and series. These texts go to the Personal advisors for the young people and then directly to the young people.
- social media campaigns
- useful links and support e.g. mental health

The Chair thanked the Coordinator for her presentation.

**AGREED-**

- That the information be noted
- That a breakdown of responses from the Tell me more survey, be brought back to the next meeting

20/36

**MULTI- AGENCY LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP (MALAP) - RELAUNCH**

The Chair of Corporate Parenting Board provided the Board with a presentation in relation to rethinking the Multi agency looked after partnership (MALAP) and how the Corporate Parenting Board could work more effectively with the MALAP.

The Chair advised that she had been working with the Vice Chair, Director and Children's Services and the Director of Children's Care to highlight some of the issues with the MALAP, including for example, how it feedbacks to the Corporate Parenting Board, ways of engagement, the need for clear strategies to raise awareness and developments and the need to address concerns raised from the Ofsted report.

In order to do this, the Board were made aware of the need to rethink priorities and aims of the MALAP, to include:

1. covering topic areas related to MALAP activity and deliver against Corporate Parenting Board strategies
2. connect with priorities of Children Looked After
3. devise a workable strategy whose outcomes may be easily reported back to CPB

4. engage members of CPB
5. be readily accountable for the delivery of outcomes and able to consider ways forward.

By doing this, the Chair outlined that we were linking to the guiding principles of care leavers (e.g. your home, your friends and family and your needs and wishes) as well linking to the priorities of care leavers (e.g. prevention on the edge of care, permanency planning and voice, participation and influence).

The Chair therefore outlined that it was hoped that in order for the Corporate Parenting Board to challenge and contribute to the MALAP, this could be done through a series of spotlight reports, which would:

1. decide upon relevant topic
2. organise a group of members of CPB to investigate
3. investigations to be completed between each CPB meeting
4. results reported back to meeting (agenda item)
5. evaluation of findings
6. actions determined
7. make decisions to implement changes/improvements
8. review methodology after some SPOTLIGHT reports
9. Support offered to all members conducting investigations
10. verification that reports are accountable and validated through Performance Management and Quality Assurance processes.

Suggested topics could look at:

- the role of members in Corporate Parenting
- young people delivering training to corporate parents
- life story work
- meeting children's health needs and improving performance in health assessments
- children placed at a distance from town
- The offer to care leavers (to link with Care Leavers Week)

From discussions and from agreement from Board members, it was agreed that the first spotlight report would conduct a review into how other Corporate Parenting Boards in other Councils Local Authorities as work effectively together.

The objectives of the review would be to :

1. to investigate practice elsewhere
2. to compare practice
3. to tease out aspects of excellent practice
4. to ascertain to what extent we can adapt our practice to make it excellent
5. To implement improvements
6. 4 members will work on the spotlight report- Councillors Garvey, Higgins, Walker and Wright
7. Each member will be provided with a template of questions to ask
8. Each member will be given contact numbers etc
9. Discussions will be noted
10. Ideas will be fed back and coordinated
11. A report will be given and conclusions drawn in the next Corporate Parenting Board meeting

The Chair welcomed comments from Board Members in which they were all in favour of the suggestion. A Board member raised concern that there is a lack of understanding amongst other Councillors as to the role of the Corporate Parenting Board, which is fundamental as we are all Corporate Parents. It was also noted that the membership of Corporate Parenting Board should be extended to allow as many Councillors as possible to sit on the Board, this however was a constitutional decision and would be put forward to the relevant officer for discussion.

Another Board member outlined that it was important that Councillors took this role seriously and whilst receiving support from Council officers in terms of contacts and questions, that the process should be member led and therefore spot light reports should be written by the members.

The Head of Virtual Schools further made a suggestion that a spotlight topic could look at raising the profile of elected councillors/ Corporate Parenting Board . In response, the Voice of the Child Coordinator outlined that a piece of work could be undertaken to link with Middlesbrough Children Matter by which every Councillor made a pledge to our children looked after, and they would be challenged on this. Further discussion and work would be undertaken on this.

It was further suggested by the Director of Children's Services that the MALAP spotlights be reviewed after 2-3 meetings to ensure the focus and aim were correct. This was agreed by the Board.

The Chair thanked the Board and officers for their contribution.

AGREED

1. That the review of MALAP be agreed.
2. That the first spotlight report be conducted and reported back to the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board.
3. That Voice of Child Coordinator arrange a meeting to discuss raising of the profile of Councillors with young people.
4. That the Democratic Services officer speak to the relevant officer in relation to membership on the Corporate Parenting Board

20/37

## **THE POLICE AND THEIR SUPPORT TOWARDS CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER**

The Chair welcomed Chief Inspector Deb Fenny from Cleveland Police to the meeting. Although The Chief Inspector had been present at previous meetings of the Board, the Chair had sent some questions prior to the meeting to gather further insight to her role within the Force and with children looked after.

The Chief Inspector answered the following questions:

**Please could you provide an overview of your work and your contact areas'.**

The Chief Inspector outlined that she was Lead in the Force for child abuse and vulnerable adults across the 4 local authority areas. She also lead a special detective team that dealt with child abuse and lead management of the MACH on the south side.

The Chief Inspectors role also engaged services within the centre of Middlesbrough that support victims of domestic abuse, vulnerable adults and sex offender management unit.

Further to this, the Chief Inspector sits on the Quality and assurance group and Chairs the development and working group for the South side whilst sitting on the equivalent on the North.

The Chief Inspector further added she was the lead in the force for the Encompass project which worked with schools.

**How can you support us in our role as corporate parents?**

The Chair Inspector had a place on Middlesbrough's Corporate Parenting Board and also sits on other local authorities Boards, Stockton being the main. The Inspector would act as the main conduit for the Police and outlined she would be happy to share learning and initiatives from other local authorities with the Board.

How do you see your role fitting into the wider improvement plan within children's services? E.g. Partnership working generally, the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, police powers of protection, development of the MACH, strategy discussion meetings.

In terms of the wider improvement plan, the Chief Inspector outlined that she had oversight of all of the MACH and overseeing the restructuring of the teams resources. This was a large piece of work for the Chief Inspector and the Improvement team, and they had employed an outside agency to look at their capacity and demand on resources to ensure their work was succinct and ensure that the Police work more coherently with partners.

**How is your service supporting the Future for Families HUB and wider children looked after work within Middlesbrough?**

The Board were made aware that the Police have a presence within the HUB, however this was not within the Chief Inspectors remit.

**Are you aware of the wider Middlesbrough Children's matters work?**

Lastly, the Chief Inspector advised that she was aware of the work and had been part of strategic and operational meetings. However if there were specific themes and issues which needed to be discussed, she would need further details prior to contributing from a police perspective.

The Chair thanked the Chief Inspector for her contribution and outlined that having a police presence on the Board was essential to ensuring everyone was on the same page for our vulnerable children in Middlesbrough.

There was a brief discussion in relation to language used e.g. child abuse/ child protection, however this was an issue across the Council and work was ongoing to ensure child- friendly appropriate language was used.

In terms of the work with neighbouring Local Authorities, the Chair asked whether the Chief Inspector had any top tips on how other authorities Corporate Parenting Board's work with the police. These would be brought back to the future meeting of the Board.

**AGREED**

1. That the information be noted
2. That further information on working relationship between the Police and Corporate Parenting Board's in neighbouring authorities be brought back to a future meeting

20/38

**VIRTUAL SCHOOLS UPDATE**

The Head of Virtual schools was in attendance following a request from the Corporate Parenting Board in relation to transition of Children Looked after from year 11 to 12 and year 5 to 6.

The Corporate Parenting Board has also requested the data in relation to Key stage 4 results, however the Head of Virtual schools advised that these results were not yet validated, however the Board had a right to query and therefore she would provide an overview of results.

In terms of transitions, the Board were advised of the following:

**Year 11 to year 12**

- There were 40 children in year 11 who transitioned to year 12 whilst in the care of Middlesbrough Local authority. All children are Rated RAG on complexity of the transition need.
- 7 (17%) RAGed red in June meaning we thought these young people were at the greatest risk of becoming Not in Education, employment or training (NEET).
- 9 (22%) Young People were RAGed yellow indicating there were some barriers to overcome but the local authority were confident in securing placement for those young people.
- 5 (12%) young people are currently NEET with very complex backgrounds. The Local authority predicted 7 as they were able to secure placement for two complex young people.
- 34 (85%) of Young people went onto education placements, 11 went to different placements from where they had planned to go in July (e.g. had enrolled on a hair and beauty course but changed courses) but none the less entered Further education.
- The Local authority now have 54 Young people in Year 12 which is a 14 Young person increase since July
- With a total of 15 NEET (meaning 10 new to care are NEET)
- There are 47 young people in Year 13
- 17 being NEET.
- 23 are in Education



- 4 Are in Employment or training
- In total there are 101 post 16 students.
- 69% of Care Leavers are in Education Employment or Training
- 31% are NEET

In term of support for those young people who are NEET, the Head of Virtual schools outlined that there has been significant work undertaken to address this. Councillor M Smiles, Executive Member for Communities and Education had attended the Virtual school governing body and a discussion had taken place to how we can link children looked after into Council apprenticeships. The Virtual schools had been working with the Interim Head of Looked after children and Corporate parenting to assign every young person with key worker from the pathways team and there had been some discussion surrounding establishing a virtual college.

#### **Year 6 Transition**

- There are 27 Students in Year 6
- All students have a school place
- 81% are educated in the borough (which is approx. 22 students )
- 70 % have been in care for over 12 months (approx. 19)
- Male/ Female split around 50/50
- 24 in mainstream schools
- 2 in Special Schools
- 1 in an Alternative Provision

#### **End of key stage 4**

The Head of Virtual Schools advised that Board that the reformed GCSE qualifications are awarded on a grade scale of 9 (the highest grade) to 1 (the lowest). This scale is aligned to key grades on the previous A\* to G scale.

GCSE results are based on students being awarded their centre assessed grade or calculated grade, whichever is higher. The outcomes presented are core subjects Math and English grades. These grades are un- validated

At KS4, 30 children from the 40 children on roll had been in care for more than 12 months.

Of the children who had been in care for 12 months or more, 16 attended a mainstream school.

- $\frac{1}{4}$  of looked after children who attended a mainstream school achieved English and Math at level 5+.
- Of all children who were looked after for 12 months or more 13% achieved grade 5+ in the Basics measure, a pleasing increase on previous years as in 2019 10% and in 2018, 3% of students achieved this outcome.
- There is clear evidence that being looked after by Middlesbrough for more than 12 months has a positive impact on educational outcomes as all the children achieving 5+ had been looked after for 12M+ however there is some travelling distance to close the gap between Children looked after and their peers.

The Chair thanked the Virtual Head for the information. A Board member queried whether all children looked after had been supplied with a laptop from the DfE, which was discussed in a previous meeting. The Head responded by advising the Board that 948 laptops had been

supplied by the DfE, which was shortfall for the number of children looked after under the care of the local authority. Due to this, the virtual schools had worked with head teachers to identify supply and demand. Schools however had the ability to order laptops directly through the DfE portal which should hopefully ensure all children looked after are issued with a device.

**AGREED- That the information be noted.**

20/39 **MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS FOR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER**

Meeting deferred

20/40 **CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD STRATEGY- CONSULTATION**

The Project support officer for the Corporate Parenting Programme was in attendance to provide an overview of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Board were made aware that the Programme Manager for the project was Rachel Farnham and the Project support officer had been involved in project work, part of this has been in the improvement board, in which the Corporate Parenting Strategy has been developed with Directors and key officers.

The Board were advised that the Strategy as currently out for consultation and any feedback would be appreciated. The Programme Manager advised that the consultation is an online link, but he would welcome any feedback via email or over the telephone.

It was agreed that a further separate session on the strategy would take place to allow the Programme Manager to feedback to the Board/ all councillors on the results from the consultation.

**AGREED-**

- **That the information be noted**
- **That a further session to discuss the Corporate Parenting Strategy be arranged.**

20/41 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.**