

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Tuesday 14 September 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors D Davison (Chair), A Hellaoui, Z Uddin, B Cooper and C Hobson

PRESENT BY INVITATION:

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: A Dixey, Participation People

OFFICERS: S Blood, R Brown, S Butcher, T Dunn, R Farnham, R Hamer, P Jemson, L Beevers, S Chouhan, D Fenny and J Russell

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors T Higgins, C Wright, V Banks, T Parkinson, R Scott, L Garvey, A Preston (The Mayor) and T James

21/1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

21/2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

21/3 **MINUTES- CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD- 20 JULY 2021 AND ACTION PLAN**

The minutes from the Corporate Parenting Board meeting and action plan held on 20 July 2021 were read and accepted as a true record.

21/4 **CHAIR OF CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD- VERBAL UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update to the Board in relation to officers she has met over the past month; these included:

- Debra Cochran; Community Support Officer - Homelessness
- Chris Joynes, Thirteen group, who had agreed to join the Board
- Charlotte Nicol, Culture, who would provide an update to the Board in the near future regarding how young people and care leavers would be involved in the cultural programme.

AGREED- that the update be noted.

21/5 **COVID 19 UPDATE**

The Director of Children's Services provided a verbal update in respect to Covid 19.

The Director advised that within social care there had been no issues with staffing. Staff were looking forward to a gradual return to the office.

1 young person had tested positive to covid in a children's home, however this had been managed following government guidelines.

In terms of schools, there had been no specific issues and it was now the responsibility of the parents to ensure young people carry out lateral flow tests who attend secondary schools. In terms of attendance of our Looked after children; since returning in September, the attendance rate was 98%.

Following the presentation, members queries where lateral flow tests were sourced. In response, the Director advised that lateral flow tests are provided free by the Government and these are either sourced directly by the parents, who sent home by the schools.

The Director was thanked for her update.

Agreed- the update be noted.

21/12 **SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO.5- ORDER OF BUSINESS**

AGREED - in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 5, the Chair agreed to vary the order of business to agenda item 6, 5, 7 and 8.

21/7 **REVIEW OF THE PERMANENCE ACTION PLAN**

The Head of Looked after children and corporate parenting Board provided the Board with regard to progress made against the Permanence action plan.

The Head of service firstly felt it was important to highlight the findings by Ofsted in November 2019:

- **Middlesbrough has a particularly high rate of children in care against national comparators, and this level was increasing.**
- **Children were experiencing longstanding neglect come into care too late, and decisions for them to do so are made in response to a crisis**
- There were serious delays in achieving permanence for most children in care.
- Early permanence was not prioritised for children in Middlesbrough, and there is a lack of parallel planning, which creates delay in achieving stability. There are missed opportunities to place children early for fostering for adoption
- Children subject to care orders have lived at home for several years, without timely and purposeful review of whether the Care Order is still required.
- Children experienced significant delay in securing permanence through adoption.
- Too many changes in social workers also affect the quality of decision-making because new workers do not know children well enough to be confident about the plans that are proposed and agree to changes at short notice.
- When children's placements become fragile, there was a lack of coordinated support for both children and their carers to prevent disruption. Some children, including very young children, have experienced too many changes in placement before their permanent placement is identified.
- Family arrangements were pursued sequentially, and for too long, when children cannot live at home.
- There were delays in securing special guardianship orders for connected carers, although the support provided to many of these arrangements is good.
- **Insufficient attention was given to ensuring timely care planning, particularly for very young children.**
- Senior management panels and inconsistent legal advice provide insufficient scrutiny for understanding children's experiences and to ensure that their needs were met in a timely way.

The Board learnt that the Council's response was that the Corporate Parenting Strategy for Children and Young People in Middlesbrough was signed off and set out the Council's vision for how the Council and our partners will support children and young people who are in our care, and our care leavers, to achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives. Transforming our approach to corporate parenting.

The Permanency Action Plan for Children and Young People was developed in consultation with partners and was built around the six permanency priorities set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The action plan defines how Children's Social Care will achieve the vision.

The Permanency Action Plan would be systematically reviewed and updated as actions are completed, towards achievement of the priority outcomes we have identified over the 3-year cycle of our plan.

The overall responsible Council officer for the Permanency Action Plan for Children and Young People is the Director of Children's Services (DCS). For each of the six priority themes, a senior Council officer has been delegated by the DCS as the accountable lead for maintaining an overview of the priorities set out in the action plan.

The six priorities are as follows:

1. Strengthening Permanency in Our Social Work Practice

2. Growing Our Multi-Agency Partnerships for Permanency
3. Reducing Drift and Delay for Achieving Permanency
4. Improving the Way we capture and Use Our Data for Permanency
5. Supporting Permanency in Education, Employment & Training
6. Supporting Permanency in Education, Employment & Training

The Head of Service went through each of the priorities and identified what has been achieved since the permanency action plan had been launched; full details of these were outlined in the report which had been circulated to the Board prior to the meeting. The Head of Service further went on to state some of the impact/ data and performance in the last 12 months:

- There has been an 23.5% reduction in overall numbers of children looked after since August 2020
- Since the height of 702 looked after children in September 2020, there has been a reduction of 165 looked after children.
- 163 children and young people have ceased to be looked after in the last 6 months.
- The 20/21 adoption score card evidences that in the 12 months leading up to 31 March 2021 the average number of days between Placement Orders and Adoption Order has reduced to 189 days. The 3 year average is 323 days.
- There has been a 56% increase of number of adoption orders in the year 20/21 (25) compared to 2019/2020 (16).
- In this year to date 13 Adoption Orders have been secured.
- There are currently a further 33 children progressing to adoption with Placement Orders
- Since Jan 2021 there has been 54 Connected Carers placements commence and 114 cease
- The number of children in Connected Carers placements has dropped from 210 in Sep 2020 to 112 July 2021. (47% reduction)
- The number of children placed with parents has dropped from 99 in September 2020 to 58 in August 2021. (41% reduction)
- Since January 2021 there has been 17 Placement with Parents commence and 51 cease
- There has been an increased number of children in Fostering to Adopt placements
- Children progress through pre proceedings in a more timely way.

The Board learnt that the Commissioner reported in July 2021 on progress made and identified that:

“Within the permanency strategy considerable progress has been made in the tracking and oversight of children within the care system. This has led to impressive performance in timely moves for more children into adoptive placements and a significant increase in the use of special guardianship etc. We also see evidence of more appropriate use of Public Law Outline, a reduction in emergency hearings and a stronger relationship of trust is described with CAF/CASS (Child and Family Court Advisory and Support Services)”

The Head of Service identified two risks:

- The increase in demand across the service and across the Tees Valley region
- Staffing instability across the looked after and care leaving service could impact on performance and leads to children experience multiple social workers, however there was a strategy in place to identify this.

The Board finally heard the next steps in respect to the action plan:

- Data Team to develop a Permanence Dashboard and Score Card – Performance and progress to be reported to Improvement Board and Corporate Parenting Board
- Life Story Work compliance and quality to be driven
- Reduction and tracking of the number of children residing in external residential placements
- Progress the Permanence Action Plan and report to Improvement Board and Corporate Parenting Board
- Develop further practice standards for Placement with Parent/Special Guardianship Orders and Reunification
- To continue to work with Partners in Practice to develop improved fostering processes.

After the presentation a number of Board members made a number of comments in relation to the presentation. Firstly, a Board member stated that it was enlightening to see how much has been done since the Ofsted report and thanked staff for all their hard work in making the lives of children in Middlesbrough better, and whilst there was a long way to go, the steps made had been huge and a massive achievement.

Another Board member wanted to ensure that our looked after children were experiencing the same life experiences as other children. In response, the Director of children's Care advised that within the child's care plan, hobbies and interests are addressed and we must also ask 'Is it good enough for my child?'. The Foster Carer wanted to ensure that our looked after children are addressed the way they wished to be e.g. a child looked after or child in care and secondly, he outlined that the children are family members and experience what we would do with our own children.

The Head of Service was thanked for her presentation.

AGREED- That the action plan be noted.

21/6

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Chair welcomed Antonia Dixey, Chief Executive of Participation People to the meeting. The Participation People had been brought into the organisation to help strengthen the voice of young people, especially for our care experienced children and care leavers.

The Chief Executive wishes to share plans to get young people to quality assure the services and how they can help develop formal governance arrangements.

The Chief Executive shared the Middlesbrough Care Experienced Youthvoice Road map and what they hoped to achieve in the next few months.

OCTOBER 2021

The Chief Executive outlined that at present there are a small number of young people within the in house care councils and the care leavers' forum and they are looking to grow these groups to ensure they flourish and are fun and engage young people. This would be a phased approach, by firstly asking the care leavers to develop a training programme which tells councilors what it is like to be a child in care in Middlesbrough. It was hoped that this would be delivered as part of care leavers week at the end of October.

In terms of the in house care councils, they want to ensure that the young people own their mandate to strengthen and improve in house services as well as having fun and bringing together young people e.g. having a craft day/ sports day/ making custard pie days.

The Chief Executive stated that as Corporate Parents, this journey was also their journey and their help was needed to help recruit young people to incase councils and the care leavers forum be also to make sure our services / forums are funky where they can have fun and help shape council services.

NOVEMBER 2021

In November it was 'National Takeover', and Participation people were recruiting 50 young people from people to take over Middlesbrough Children's Services. This would not just be shadowing or sitting in a few meetings, but pro produce solutions to big business challenges and looking at our service journeys.

DECEMBER 2021

The Participation People will also be taking our young people away where they will create friendships and have fun.

The Chief Executive also outlined that they were looking at developing a mentor system of young people to adults (Reserve mentoring) and this will be offered by care leavers and in exchange we ask they get taught a life skill.

The Chief Executive also asked the Corporate Parenting Board if there were a business challenge that young people could assist with, and to help with formal governance arrangements. This would be left with the Board to consider.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for her presentation and would await further details of the roadmap as it developed over the next few months.

21/8

FUTURE FOR FAMILIES - UPDATE

The Service Manager for Future for Families, attended the Board to provide an update on the service over the last 12 months and the wider system change for Middlesbrough.

The Service Manager outlined that following the Ofsted inspection, Future for families set about to changing culture, and did this by adopting and adapting the Provocations and Non Negotiables of No Wrong Door (service in North Yorkshire to which Future for families is adopted from). What this meant for Middlesbrough was we needed to think about was important to Middlesbrough and to use provocations and non negotiables to shape a new culture for Middlesbrough.

In the first 12 months, the Service Manager outlined that Future for Families

- have received 163 referrals in 12 months
- Worked with 91 young people and families which is 56% of all referrals
- Currently working with 43 young people and their families
- 3 young people have returned home from residential placements to family
- 2 young people who have had high levels of support 3:1 in external residential were now supported within the hub on reduced staffing levels.
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Within Future for Families, they look to understand the child's journey and this is done by the power of deep dive. Deep dive looks at all the key events in a young persons' life and allow to listen to the young person and share their experiences through support from their workers. We look forward at their aspirations and lastly reflect and look at lessons learnt. Any outcomes are fed back to senior management. Deep dives look to change the way of thinking for professions involved and make an impact on practice. Over the past 12 months approx. 50 deep dive sessions have been completed.

The Board heard that Future for families has also looked at increasing safety for young people in Middlesbrough, by adapting and adopting RAISE- Risk, Analysis, Intervention, Solution, Evaluation. RAISE is a process from North Yorkshire which Middlesbrough has adapted to fit the young people of Middlesbrough.

The RAISE group looks at therapeutic measures to reduce risk for the young people. The service has also done RAISE for young people in the Risk Management group (RMG), Edge of Care or with a group, who may be involved in a worrying situations. The Raise process has also used with young people who may be involved/exploited in organised crime groups (OCG) and have supported with 15 missing plans for our most vulnerable young people , who are not under future for families.

The Service Manager further outlined that it was important to invest time to save time later, and this has been done by upskilling colleagues from across children's social care.

Future for families have looked at the following over the last 12 months:

- Referrals
- The power of communications
- Trauma informed practice
- Future for families have done presentations on themselves to challange their service, by asking, what are we? How can we help?

- Deep dive process for newly qualified social workers, this training has been well received.
- Supervisions training support in the development of training for managers.

Cost avoidance – what does it mean for Middlesbrough?

Lastly the Service Manager outlined the cost avoidance and how future for families has assisted.

- ▶ During 2020/21 two young people moved into the Futures for Families hub where in the previous year they were in external Residential at a cost of £28,000 a week (£1,206,000 for the period of their stay at FFF actual savings) This is the equivalent of Gleneagles short break service for children with disabilities and Rosecroft children's home.

Cost avoidance

- August 2020 – March 21 £919,112.41 this is approx the same as 2x social work teams who support 270 young people.
- 2021 – 2022 £3,897,516.48 (projected cost avoidance)
- 2022 – 2023 £6,487,347.84 (projected cost avoidance)

Following the presentation, the Chair queried what support is provided to families once the young person's returns home. In response, the Service Manager advised that this was done on an individual basis, between the family and social worker and look at their needs. Once it is decided that they no longer need professional support, they will be directed to other outreach support e.g. early help.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

21/9

PERFORMANCE AGAINST CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

The Director of Children's Care was in attendance and provided the Board with information relating to the Corporate Parenting Board scorecard.

The Director advised that the scorecard was in place for the Corporate Parenting Board to see how our performance was progressing and have the opportunity to challenge anything where you saw wasn't meeting target.

The main points to note were as follows:

DEMAND

- There has been an 22.3% reduction in overall numbers of children looked after since August 2020
- Since the height of **702** looked after children during September 2020, there has been a reduction of 157 looked after children.
- 136 children and young people have ceased to be looked after in the last 6 months.
- The number of children in Connected Carers placements has dropped from 210 in Sep 2020 to 112 July 2021 (47% reduction).
- Since Jan 2021 there has been 54 Connected Carers placements commence and 114 cease.
- The number of children placed with parents has dropped from 99 in September 2020 to 58 in August 2021 (41% reduction).
- Since Jan 2021 there has been 17 Placement with Parents commence and 51 cease.
- There is an increased number of children in Fostering to Adopt placements.

- In September 2020 the data evidences that for every child ceasing to be looked after, 1.9 children started to become looked after. This means that more children were becoming looked after than ceasing and the looked after population continued to increase.
- There has been a month on month reduction in this throughout the year until March 2021 when improvements resulted in less children becoming looked after than those ceasing.
- This progress has continued. In June 2021 for every child ceasing to be looked after 0.6 children became looked after. This has remained static for the last 3 months.

Permanency

Placements with Parents – the most recent forecasting model demonstrates a reduction in the number of children subject to care proceedings and placed with a parent.

In September 2020 there were 99 children living at home and subject to a Care Order. This has reduced to 59 children in September 2021. This is 40.4% reduction.

SGOs/CAO- In July 2020 there was a height of 212 children cared for by family or friends in connected carer placements. This has reduced through improvement work to support children to achieve permanence. In August 2021 this reduced to 122 children. (42.4% reduction). 75 Special Guardianship Orders have been granted in the last 12 months.

This has been achieved through increased management oversight within Legal Gateway Panel, Permanency Monitoring Group, an investment in a commissioned service and a drive on performance management.

- There is a 56% increase of number of adoption orders in the year 20/21 (25) compared to 2019/2020 (16).
- In this year to date 13 Adoption Orders have been secured. There are currently a further 33 children progressing to adoption with Placement Orders.
- The local authority is on track to increase the number of children subject to adoption orders significantly in this financial year.
- The graph evidences a significant reduction in the number of days between children entering care to being placed in an adoptive placement. This has reduced from 641 days in January to 364 in July 2021.
- The 20/21 adoption score card evidences that the in the 12 months leading up to 31 March 2021 the average number of days between Placement Orders and Adoption Order has reduced to 189 days. The 3 year average is 323 days.

Placements

- There has been an increase in the number of children placed outside of a 20 mile radius of Middlesbrough. 13 children moved to placements out of Middlesbrough in August.
- When considering placement moves it is important to consider what kind of placement the child is moving to.
- Positively, of the 13 – 3 children were placed in adoptive placements and 3 children placed with family in connected carers arrangements.
- 6 children were placed in foster care – of which 5 placements were in house foster placements and 1 in an external residential placement. The YP that moved to a residential placement moved from an unregulated placement to a regulated placement following a nationwide search for a local regulated provision.
- There has been consistent improvements since November 2020 regarding the number of children who have experienced a single placement in the last 12 months.
- This has remained stable at just below 70% of the looked after population since May 2021.
- In the same period last year 17.3% of the looked after population had experienced 3

or more placement moves. This has reduced to 5.4% of the looked after population in August 2021 and evidences significant improvements to this indicator.

- There is also evidence that there has been a stable reduction in the number of children experiencing placement endings.

Quality and Impact

Of the 177 care experienced young people:-

- 73 young people are in full time education training or employment
- 16 YP are in part time employment education or training
- 17 YP are NEET due to disability or illness
- 16 YP are NEET due to pregnancy or parenting
- 55 YP are NEET for other reasons

This would amount to 50.3% of the care leaving population being engaged in either full or part time education training and employment and 49.7% NEET. A stable 70% of post 16 children in Education, Employment or training (EET) and 40% of care leavers are EET. We have a Board in place who is supported by a number of partners, including social workers and community learning and we look at specific cases as to why they cannot attend EET. There is a specific NEET group with has a specific action plan. There are such complexities which often help it difficult to engage. Community learning help our young people through EYI and routes to work. There are also opportunities for care experienced young people to apply for council positions, and whilst it is early days, we hope that big differences will be seen.

The Director was thanked for her presentation.

AGREED- That the date be noted.

21/10

CORPORATE REFERENCE GROUP

The Director of Children's Services provided a presentation in terms of the Corporate Reference Group. She advised that Board that:

- The Corporate Reference Group (CRG) was established following the Inadequate Ofsted judgement of Children's Services to provide a whole council approach to supporting and delivering against our improvement programme.
- The group is made up of representation of all directorates and operates at a Director and Head of Service Level, whilst being chaired by the Chief Executive.
- The group took some time to move from a general information sharing session to one with focused intentions.
- It was agreed that the group would focus on; How the group can support and strengthen the improvement outcomes identified by Ofsted in January 2020, ultimately strengthening the delivery of the Children's Service Improvement Programme; developing and delivering against a wider ambition for all children of Middlesbrough.

The Director advised that the group has moved from information sharing to more focused workstreams:

Work Stream 1 – Holistic delivery of the Children's Services Improvement Plan

- All directorates have reviewed the original Ofsted outcomes and provided contributions to strengthen delivery against them. These contributions now form part of an internal delivery plan which is monitored monthly through the Corporate Reference Group.

Work Stream 2 – Wider ambition for all children of Middlesbrough

- We have internally reviewed our Middlesbrough Children Matter (MCM) priorities with the aim of making these more child friendly. The children's strategy will be informed by our existing MCM vision, mission and brand.
- We have commissioned Participation People who will support us in

undertaking a town-wide Children and Young People's consultation to ensure our priorities are reflective of their views.

- The model we will be using to undertake the consultation is a Young Researcher model. This will see us recruit and train 25 young researchers who will be responsible for undertaking the consultation, analysing the data, and co-producing the strategy.
- Draft material has been developed for our Young Researcher recruitment campaign.

The Director finally outlined that next steps of the group:

- Submit a report to Executive to gain political buy in to the approach.
- Co-produce our strategy with children and young people.
- Development of supporting delivery plan and governance structures.
- Communicate the strategy across the town.
- Work with partners and businesses to gain collaborative buy in to the delivery of the agreed priorities.
- Continue to work with our young researchers to hold Middlesbrough Council and partners to account for delivery against the agreed commitments.

The Director was thanked for her presentation.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

21/11

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

No items.