

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Tuesday 30 November 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors C Hobson (Chair), A Hellaoui, T Higgins, M Saunders and B Cooper

OFFICERS: S Blood, V Banks, R Brown, S Butcher, K Dargue, T Dunn, P Jemson, T Parkinson, P Rudd, S Davies, Rowan, Davies, Jefferson and C Breheny

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors Z Uddin, C Wright, R Farnham, N Ayres, R Scott, D Davison, L Garvey and A Preston (The Mayor)

21/28 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following members declared an interest:

Councillor	Type of interest	Reason
A Hellaoui	Non Pecuniary	School Governor
T Higgins	Non Pecuniary	School Governor

21/29 **MINUTES- CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD- 19 OCTOBER 2021**

The minutes from the Corporate Parenting Board held on 19 October 2021 were submitted and approved as a true record.

21/30 **PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE- PARTICIPATION PEOPLE**

The Chair welcomed Hannah Wiseman- Specialist and Targeted from Participation People to the meeting. Hannah firstly showed a video which provided information and feedback from Middlesbrough Council's Big takeover.

The Big takeover was aimed at engaging young people from across Middlesbrough to get involved in decisions within Middlesbrough Council and took over the role of a Head of Service. 32 young people took part in the takeover and 5 were from care experienced backgrounds. The Board heard about the experience of the care leavers during the Big Takeover week and about their big business challenges.

The feedback from the young people and Head of Service has been excellent.

Board members outlined that they were excited to see the project develop and from speaking to young people they had enjoyed the week and were asking about the next take over. The Board learnt that all the young people who took part had been invited to attend a young champions group, to ensure the young people could get involved in future projects.

What it was like to be child in care workshop

A councilor workshop took place on Monday 25 October 2021, during Care Leavers week and was facilitated by care leavers. Part of the session asked the participants of the group to make pledges to the children in care in Middlesbrough.

The Pledges were shared with the Board and would be circulated.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

21/31 **COVID 19- UPDATE**

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

Main areas were as follows:

- Covid levels had remained lower than in previous months
- There was pressure within schools due to covid and winter sickness bugs
- Storm Arwen had caused some damage to schools, leading to the closure of Priory Woods School and partial closure of Outwood Academy Acklam.
- All secondary school students and teachers were now wearing masks in communal areas, as per guidance issued by the Department of Education.
- Social work practice was continuing, however extra precautions were being taken due to the rising rates of covid infection.
- Those staff who have signed the blended working agreement will look to start returning to the office in December, however this may change depending on rise of infection. Staff have been advised of the new office arrangements to ensure we comply with covid guidance.

Following the update, the Chair asked if a further reminder could be circulated to parents of primary school children to ensure they wear masks when entering school premises. This would be followed up by the Head of Access to Education.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

21/32 **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 7, 8, 6, 10, 11,12, 9 and 13.

21/33 **INDEPENDENT VISITOR REPORT TO CHILDREN'S HOMES (REGULATION 44 VISITS)**

The Head of Residential Services provided the 6 month Regulation 44 key themes to the Board.

For clarity, the Head of Services outlined that from April 2015, the Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards came into force. Regulation 44 requires an independent person to visit at least once a month to make a rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children in the home's care.

Since April 2021 there have been 42 regulation 44 inspections completed. These are all forwarded to Ofsted as part of the inspection process. Each month, the visits have a theme; for example, in May 2021- Safeguarding, June 2021 – engaging with the wider system and most recently in October 2021- risk assessments.

The Head of Service provided some of the comments which have been received; examples if which were as follows:

1. It remains evident that the home is making significant efforts to support young people's input and have consideration for their views, wishes and feelings.
2. Gleneagles has been a life line for my children who speak so fondly of the service and the staff (parent)
3. I love it here the staff take care of me (young person)

The Head outlined to the Board, that over the past month, 2 of the services had been inspected and there had been positive comments made.

There have been a number of recommendations following the visits, however these are few. The recommendations were as follows:

- Ensure to record duration of fire drill evacuation CHR 12. Next fire drill rectified this.
- Ensure reg 40s, missing and BASE forms are sent for review next visit. Include a clear rationale as to why regulation 40 notifications have not been submitted when this has been considered. This was with the Head of Service for sign off.

- Ensure to send BASE 78 for review. Reg 11 – again this was with the Head of Service for sign off.
- Seek to identify some training for staff in relation to a condition displayed by one young person Reg 13 – this was completed within 4 weeks of the recommendation.

Following the presentation, clarity was sought as to where the Independent reviews came from. In response, the Head of Service advised that all reviews were recruited by the National Youth Advocacy Service (NYAS). The most recent Independent Visitor was an ex- social worker for Middlesbrough who had a good understanding of the children's homes and national standards.

A Board member also questioned what the Head of Service deemed to be the challenges and how the service would move forward. The Head of Service outlined that it had been a very challenging year as in terms of covid and there were major staffing issues due to isolation. The service was currently looking to recruit members of staff and it was felt this would lead to a better service for our young people.

AGREED- That the presentation be noted.

21/34

FOSTERING REPORT- QUARTER 1 AND QUARTER 2

The The Service Manager for Fostering provided a presentation in relation to the quarter 1 and quarter 2 fostering data.

The following areas were discussed:

- Number of carers and places
- Number of Carers by Primary Care type
- Number of Carers approved
- Placements, and
- Recruitment

The Service Manager advised what was working well within the service, these were as follows:

- The service has successfully appointed permanent experienced social workers
- The leadership within the fostering service was stable
- The fostering academy was being developed and was due to be launched early 2022. This has been bought in as there has been reports across the whole Country that foster carers need the right foundations in terms of support and assessments. The Academy would continue this support.
- The service was heavily focusing on staff development and have a plan for this learning throughout 2022. This would provide in-depth training for staff.
- The Service will be implementing the Mockingbird model of practice, which is evidence based for creating stability for our children. Funding has been approved and further information would be provided at the next meeting.
- Assessments under regulation 24 are reducing in timescale from referral to completion. Previously this has been an areas of vulnerability.
- Training support and development offer to Kinship/connected carers continues to increase and this is further supported through working with kinship carer groups.

In terms of communication, a Board member queried how we receive feedback from foster carers with regard to the provision Middlesbrough offers.

- Methods of communication was as follows:
- Monthly supervision with supervising social worker
- Management team always accessible and Duty system is available in the absence of their supervising social worker.
- Monthly consultations
- Number of social workers now attend the foster carers association meetings (held monthly)
- Facebook page
- Quarterly newsletter
- Slido questionnaire (digital questionnaire)- this will be repeated in the New Year
- Support groups for connected and mainstream carers.

The Head of Service further outlined that a communication strategy was being finalised which would bring together all of these key communication strands.

A Board member outlined it would be interesting to view feedback /analysis from the online questionnaires. This information be provided at a later date.

AGREED- That the information be noted.

21/35

MIDDLESBROUGH CHILDREN'S SERVICES- VIRTUAL SCHOOL- INTERIM ANNUAL REPORT 2020/ 21

The Head of Virtual schools was in attendance to provide information in relation to the Virtual Schools Interim report. The Boars were advised that all Virtual Schools Heads were expected to present an Annual report, which will be submitted in March 2022.

The Interim report was not a statutory requirement, however it was felt Corporate Parents should be informed how children looked after are academically progressing prior to March 2022.

The Head outlined some of the highlights from the report:

- Work of the staff within the virtual school must be recognised
- Middlesbrough schools should also be congratulated for ensuring our children looked after receive the best possible education. All Children looked after have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) and the Virtual schools tried to ensure that they are present at every review meeting so that the PEP can be challenged and support schools to provide the best education.
- In terms of PEP completion, 100% of children had a plan within the timescales provided
- Children received many challenged in 2020, especially in relation to social, emotional and mental health and it was recognised that support young people and support schools.
- Headstart (managed by Wendy Kelly) provides an excellent service, however virtual schools wanted to ensure they knew what support children were receiving. The Virtual schools commissioned ABC counselling to ensure children looked after were fast tracked to receive the correct mental health support. The virtual schools also offers the attach, aware and trauma informed programme. 2 schools had completed the programme and a further 6 schools had signed up to complete this.
- Online training has continued and we offered more indepth support by ensuring PEP advisors contacted schools weekly to offer additional support if required.
- Middlesbrough Virtual Schools is rare in that it offers an Intervention Centre, which offers 1:1 tuition to children who are not meeting academic levels and who can assess the provision.
- The Virtual schools also celebrate success and were able to take a group of young people to Darlington Hippodrome to see Horrible Histories. It has been rare over the past year to do face to face activities and enrichment so this was a lovely experience for the young people and staff involved.
- In terms of academic outcomes, it was difficult due to the variables which need to be taken into consideration. The Head of Virtual schools outlined that normally there would be national and local benchmarks for children looked after and children not looked after. These benchmarks were not currently available.
- There had been a dip in Key stage 2 and within early years, but at key stage 4, outcomes appear to be higher than pre covid. However the Board were made aware that making year on year comparisons was difficult to make good inferences. Many factors affect the academic achievement of a child looked after all affect the outcomes.
- In terms of the gap at key stage 2, all children looked after are given £1,000 grant for their transition to key stage 3 (secondary). For those children not meeting targets, the virtual schools meet with secondary schools and individuals are offered 1:1 support within the intervention centre. The areas of concern are also identified within their PEP and monitored regularly. This key stage cohort, struggled with transition and had historical attendance records and well as a high level of SEN.
- There have been 0% looked after children permanently excluded from Middlesbrough schools in the past 4 years.
- Through Covid, it was also noted that children looked after do better academically

with higher adult ratios. Fixed terms exclusions decreased during covid for children looked after, however increased when all children returned to school.

- A Care leaver also congratulated the service in securing laptops for all children looked after during the lockdown, as this tackled digital inequality.
- Attendance for children looked after was higher than children not looked after.
- It was important to celebrate achievement of children looked after. During Care leavers week, the Virtual School worked with colleagues in Children's Services to ensure that all children received a package in the post with a gift and a personalised card noting how we, as corporate parents are proud of them for their individual achievement. Individual achievements are celebrated through awards and there is an attendance award for any child looked after who had 100% attendance.

The Board noted the excellent achievements of Key stage 4, but had concerns that these were teacher assessed grades (TAG) but these were potentially over inflated, and therefore these may vary when the routine GCSE papers return to be externally marked.

The Head of Virtual schools also outlined that the service had been successful in receiving Post 16 pilot bid of £64,000, which meant post 16 could continue with their next stage of education.

The Head of Virtual schools was thanked for her presentation.

AGREED- That the information be noted.

21/36

SOUTH TEES YOUTH OFFENDING SERVICE

The Chair welcomed the Head of Partnerships to the meeting to provide an overview of the South Tees Youth Offending Service (STYOS) and its support for children looked after.

A briefing paper had been circulated prior to the meeting and therefore the Head of Service outline she would provide the key points to the Board.

In terms of the National context, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) for England and Wales is an independent public body appointed by the Secretary of State for Justice, who have a statutory responsibility to oversee the whole of the youth justice system. The YJB published their Strategic plan 2021-2024 in October 2021 and the document outlines their vision, mission statement, and three strategic priorities which are underpinned by the central guiding principle of a 'Child First' youth justice system.

The YJB are clear that the justice system must see "*children as children first, and offenders second*". In line with the Child First vision, the YJB wants to make sure that children are not unnecessarily criminalised as a result of their vulnerabilities and the challenges they face.

In order to achieve these strategic aims, Youth Offending Service's are required to produce a Youth Justice Plan each year which details their local priorities. South Tees Youth Offending Service has developed a strategic youth justice plan for 2021-22 aligned to the values of the YJB, and as part of this will look to embed the child first principle in to operational practice.

Youth Offending Service's have three key strategic priorities on which they are measured;

- To reduce first time entrants to the youth justice system
- To prevent re-offending by children and young people
- Reduce the use of custody for young people (both sentenced and remanded)

Quarterly performance data is returned to the YJB in relation to the three national outcome measures, and also reported to the STYOS Management Board along with a number of other performance indicators.

In terms of the role of Youth Offending Services;

- Youth offending teams (YOTs) supervise 10–18-year-olds who have been sentenced by a court, or who have come to the attention of the police because of their offending behaviour but have not been charged – instead, they were dealt with out of court (Out Of Court Disposal).
- YOTs are statutory partnerships, and are multidisciplinary, to deal with the needs of the whole child.

- The service was required to have staff from local authority social care and education, the police, the National Probation Service and local health services
- The Youth Justice Board (YJB) provides some funding to YOTs. The YJB also monitors our performance and issues guidance about how things are to be done (for example National Standards)
- HMIP are their regulating body

In terms of the Youth Justice Plan, The STYOS 2021-2022 Youth Justice Plan was submitted to the YJB in June 21. The Plan details:

- YOS Performance 2020-21
- The YOS Budget for 2021-22
- Details of Service Structures
- Staffing Arrangements
- Partnership Arrangements
- Risks to Service Delivery
- Service Priorities for 2021-22

In terms of caseload demographics, the Head of service showed a table which showed a data snapshot, which outlined that the majority of young people who have been open to the service within this six month time frame were white British boys aged 17, 15% of whom were looked after children, however this figure is changeable.

The profile of the types of offences committed by young people and the factors impacting on the offending by young people were detailed in the STYOS Youth Justice Plan.

In terms of what STYOS can offer children looked after, the Head of service outlined that: STYOS:

- Work with care home staff and Police to identify appropriate responses to young people who offend in residential settings, including the use of restorative intervention as a solution to challenging behaviours
- Ensure active STYOS attendance at all planning or strategy meetings for young people with CLA status
- STYOS safeguarding case managers provide an essential link to Children's Services teams in both Local Authorities as well as providing advice and guidance to colleagues on safeguarding issues and processes.
- Ensure all Intervention Plans for CLA are shared with young people, their carers and colleagues from Children's Services
- Developed joint supervision arrangements between STYOS and Middlesbrough Children's Services
- Developed a working agreement between STYOS and Early Help to ensure joint planning and supervision arrangements are in place, the aim being to reduce escalation in the criminal justice and / or looked after system by working collaboratively.
- STYOS provide a 'single points of contact' for the Multi Agency Children's Hub to provide information and advice on young people known to STYOS.
- Reciprocal arrangements are in place to offer access to case management systems and this allows the MACH to ascertain if the case is open to STYOS and/or YOS staff to systems to identify if new referrals are known to children's services and ensure that joint working commences at the earliest opportunity.

In terms of key development over the past year towards supporting children looked after. In 2019, STYOS was inspected and HMIP recommended that 'there is specialist education provision, in the Youth Offending Service to meet the needs of children and

young people who are not accessing suitable education'. The link between education and YOS was key as we know there is a risk of 'NEET' young people becoming involved in criminality. A member of staff was employed to specifically look at this and there have been three key developments in the last 12 months:

1. Strengthened the relationship with the Virtual school and have developed a joint protocol. This joint working improves communication and supports the Virtual school to create robust Personal Education Plans, and enables young people to be identified for support at an earlier point.
2. They have developed a Children looked After (CLA) 'NEET' forum – Information Sharing Agreement in place with Middlesbrough College has been written which enables Looked After Children to be supported by the College to reduce their risk of becoming NEET.
3. Joint Custody protocol - for young people who are given custodial sentences. Protocol aims to improve information flow, and robust planning in place to improve the transition between the community and custodial establishment to aid resettlement.

STYOS recognises the needs to offer an 'over and above' service to our Looked After Children.

- Caseloads are monitored to ensure we do not have over representation in the criminal justice system
- Systems and processes in place to robustly manage our CLA in our service
- Collaborative and joined up work with partners. Protocols and joint working arrangements ensure clear lines of accountability.
- Young people are offered a good service, appropriate to their need and supported by trained, skilled professionals

Challenges and next steps:

- Covid – adapted ways of working with our young people, and will continue to ensuring the right digital solutions are in place.
- Developing understanding and responding to the risks presented by young people at risk of or involved in serious violent crime and exploitation. This was a strategic priority.
- Prevention – longer term sustainability of the current model to divert young people including CLA away from the criminal justice system. Prevention is not a statutory function and YOTs do not receive specific funding, therefore we are exploring longer term funding solutions and continue to work with colleagues in community safety and the police to try and divert young people from the CJS.
- Embed the positive developments in ETE and monitor the impact of this work
- Progress will be monitored via YOS Management, YOS Board and YJB.

Following the presentation, a Board member queried whether the service sees new cases or generally repeat offenders. In response, the Head of Service advised it was a mix, as they do have a reduction of first time entrants coming through the system but have a challenge as have about 50% who come through as repeat offenders.

Another Board member asked for clarity in terms of STYOS partners and what were the consequences for the young people who did not comply to their terms.

In terms of Statutory partners, STYOS link with the Local Authority, colleagues in Social Care, Cleveland police, the national probation service, and health but also have partnerships with numerous voluntary services e.g. who deal with substance misuse.

In terms of the consequences for young people, it depends at what starting point they come in to the system. There are numerous sanctions and disposals (out of court/ in court). Regardless, the disposals and outcomes are carefully considered to ensure the decision is right for the young person and also the community, SYTOS have offending behavior

programmes (1:1 or group) and restorative justice practitioners engage with all identifiable victims of youth crime, restorative practice was a strategic priority for STYOS in 21/22 and the service is working towards an accreditation status. In terms of consequences for those who don't comply with their disposal they are either returned to Police (if on an out of court disposal), or dealt with via breach process in the Court arena. Non-compliance is taken very seriously and the service ensure that enforcement action is taken where appropriate. A Board member also asked whether it would be possible to look at the reoffending rates of when they do end the order, looking at the whole situation and why they do reoffend. STYOS carefully track and monitor re-offending however are not currently informed of offences committed by a young person after the age of 17. These post-18 offences impact the reoffending data and so is not comparable with nationally published reoffending statistics. Re-offending figures are reported to the Board and YJB on a quarterly basis.

The Head of Service was thanked for her presentation.

AGREED- that the information be noted.

21/37

PERFORMANCE AGAINST CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

The Head of Looked after Children and Corporate Parenting 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 18.1% reduction in overall numbers of children looked after since November 2020, evidenced on graph 1.
- Since the height of 702 looked after children during September 2020, there has been a reduction of 167 looked after children.
- The rate of looked after children per 10,000 of the population has reduced from 165.1 in September to 159.4 on 29 November.
- This remains higher than our statistical neighbour where the rate of looked after children per 10,000 is 125.5.
- 125 children and young people have ceased to be looked after in the last 6 months. 103 children have become looked after in the same period

In November 2020 the data evidences that for every child ceasing to be looked after, 1.8 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 4 months.

Permanency

- In October 25 children ceased to be looked after. Data evidences that the average number of days that these children were looked after was 151.8 days. A review of the data shows that of these 25 children 5 had been looked after for 5 years or over. 3 of which had turned 18 years.
 - This evidences improvements from last month when permanence was secured for children who had been looked after for long periods of time.
 - There have been 9 SGO/CAOs granted in October and a further SGO at the end of September granted that was not recorded in the September performance report. This is largely due to Innovate Phase 2 working through assessments and reaching the stage where applications are lodged and considered by the court.
 - 34 SGOs have been secured in the last 6 months leading to permanence for looked after children, 90 SGOs have been secured in the last 12 months.
- Placements with Parents** – There were currently 51 children placed with parent. 39 of these children are subject to a full Care Order. All are tracked by

- Permanence Monitoring Group through to revocation of Care Order.
- In September 2020 there were 99 children living at home and subject to a Care Order. This has reduced to 51 children in September 2021. This is 51.5% reduction. 6 children ceased to be looked after from a placement with a parent in October.
- Data shows an ongoing downward trend.

Adoption

- 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 17 Adoption Orders have been secured. There are currently a further 32 children progressing to adoption with Placement Orders. Only 2 children are not linked to adopters
- The local authority is on track to increase the number of children subject to adoption orders significantly in this financial year.
- Data evidences that the number of days between children entering care and being placed in an adoptive placement has reduced from 641 in January 2021 to 382 days.

Placements

- The Head of service advised that Graph 1 data shows an increase in the number of children in placed outside of a 20 mile radius.
- 33 children commenced a new placement in October. Of which 18 children were placed in Middlesbrough and a further 8 in the Teesside region.
- Of the 7 children that were placed outside of Teesside – 1 child was adopted, 1 placed in a Young Offenders Institute and 4 children were placed in external residential placements. These were 4 complex young people.
- Targeted work is underway to move children in a planned way to in-house residential placements.
- In terms of Graph 2 – Data shows an increase in the number of children placed with in-house foster carers. 20.4% of looked after children are placed in in-house placements which is 0.6% below target and improved performance.
- There has been a reduction in the number of children in Connected Carers placements, evidencing more children securing permanence. The performance in this area is exceeding the target. Of 29% of children in care being in Connected Carer placements. There are currently 24.3% with less being better.

Placement Stability

- The data evidences that of all the children currently in Middlesbrough care, 65.9% have had only one placement in the last 12 months. This was 4.1% below the target of 70%
- At the end of October 2021 – 37 children looked after by Middlesbrough had experience 3 or more placement moves in the last 12 months. (6.9% of the population).
- Positively this has reduced from 39 in September 2021. This has reduced from 136 in the same period last year. There has been a 71.3% reduction in the number of children experience experiencing multiple moves. This is lower than the regional and statistical neighbours and the England average and is very strong performance.

Finally the Head of Service outlined some of the quality and impacts:

Visits

96% of looked after children have been seen within the last 6 weeks. This was a 1% decrease from last month. This has been consistently high at over 90% since May.

Supervision/Management Oversight

91% of looked after children have had a supervision within the month of October 2021. There were 36 children who have not been supervised within October. This was a 3% decrease from last month. This has been consistently high at over 90% since

May.

Personal Education Plans

Performance in relation to PEPs remains high at 94% of children having a recorded PEP within the last 6 months. This performance has remained consistently high and has not dropped below 93% for the last 12 months.

Health Assessments

90.8% of health checks have been conducted and recorded within the last 12 months. This does not take in to account those older children who have refused a medical assessment. This has been a 0.7% reduction since September 2021. Performance has been consistently high at over 90% for the last 12 months.

Following the presentation, a Board Member asked whether it would be possible to view other data sets linked to the scorecard, e.g. gender/ ethnicity/ aspects of special educational needs to view targeted statistics.

The Head of Service advised that at present there are more males in care than females, however would be happy to provide closer analysis.

The Director of Children's Services advised that it would be useful for the next scorecard to focus on slightly varied data, provided a different range (as discussed), which would widen discussion. This would cover why children come into care and the number of children who have been prevented coming to care due to the edge of care service.

AGREED

- That the information be noted
- That the information be provided in another form at the next meeting.

21/38

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT

The Interim Principle Social Worker was in attendance to provide an overview of the Independent reviewing officers' (IRO's) annual report.

The report was a statutory requirement and provided information on the Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and their contribution to improving outcomes for children in care, care leavers. In Middlesbrough the IROs have a dual role and therefore the report included those children subject to a Protection Plan. The report focuses on the reporting year April 2020 to March 2021.

. The statutory duties of the IRO are set out in Section 25B (1) Children Act 1989;

- Monitor the performance by the Local Authority of their functions in relation to the child's case;
- Participate in any review of the child's case;
- Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child concerning the case are given due consideration by the appropriate authority; and
- Perform any other function which is prescribed in Care Planning Regulations.

There are two clear and separate aspects of the function of an IRO:

1. Chairing the child's review; and
2. Monitoring the child's case on an ongoing basis.

In Middlesbrough there are 14 IROs overseen by 2 team managers. The service has increased in capacity.

Over the year period, there has been a significant demand on the service. As the IRO's have a dual role, there was also a demand and there was a larger number of children requiring a child protection plan and therefore the caseloads for an IRO increased to just over 100 during the reporting period.

This has been addressed by introducing the team managers and there is additional agency staff to reduce the number of children per IRO.

The report was based on - If Middlesbrough was a village of 100 population, what would that mean for our children, in terms of number and performance and what does that performance mean for our children?

The Officer provided the Board with key messages about children in care and what the quality assurance tells us about children in care, all details were included within the report.

In terms of improvements for children in care, the service wishes to:

- Ensure children to have plans of permanence as early as possible, and to be part of developing their own plan.
- That all children (at least 95%) to be seen before their review by their IRO, as well as keeping in touch between reviews to make sure that children and young people benefit from having a relationship with their IRO. For children who are not living in their forever home, this should be more often so that the IRO knows that the plan for the child is progressing, and if it's not, then this can be addressed as soon as possible.
- That IROs to raise issues (using the Issues Resolution Process) when there are concerns about the timeliness and quality of all plans for children, this includes care plans for permanence, EHCPs, PEPs and Health plans.
- IROs will be working on making sure everyone who cares for the children and works with children has high aspirations, which means have high hope, dreams and goals.
- If IROs make recommendations about what should happen for you, they need to make sure they are SMART

Feedback regarding IROs has been reassuring, and comments have included for example:

*My IRO is great I have had her for a while now and she always makes sure I'm heard and my wishes are pushed forward. My IRO is great I have had her for a while now and she always makes sure I'm heard and my wishes are pushed forward. I think the IRO system is very useful - **CHILD***

The Interim Principle Social Worker further discussed the key messages for children on a child protection plans.

In terms of improvements, the Board were made aware that the service wish to:

- Ensure all children have a child protection in conference in timescales, unless there is exceptional circumstances (so 95% of the time).
- When the conference takes place, the service want everyone to feel properly prepared, particularly parents and the child. The service want children to feel able to attend and speak at their conference, but if this isn't possible we want to make sure that children's views are gathered by professionals or an advocate and meaningfully contribute to the conference.
- The service want to make sure that between conferences, the conference chair continues to check on the progress of plans, and if there is any worries about the plan not achieving the agreed outcomes, then the IRO will swiftly raise an issue. It's important this is done in a constructive way as a critical friend, working with the Social Worker and other professionals to address issues as early as possible for children. This will include making sure that Core Group Meetings happen regularly.
- The service want children to have child protection plans that quickly make a positive difference, this means we will have less children with plans that last over 15-months. And want less children to have more than 1 child protection plan.

To achieve the goals for children with a protection plan the service will hold regular challenge clinics to increase oversight from Managers and Senior Managers. These clinics help us to understand any patterns in practice that we might need to change. During 2020/21 there has been challenge clinics on;

- Children with a protection plan over 15-months
- Children who have had more than 1 protection plan.

In terms of priorities for 2021/22 the Interim Principle Social worker outlined that the IRO improvement journey will remain closely linked to the Children's Services Improvement Plan and the priorities for 2021/22 will be;

- Maintain compliance with KPI's (ICPC, RCPC, CLA Review timeliness)
- Increase child participation, including visits before reviews
- Mid-way reviews for all children is a minimum standard, with increased continuous oversight for those without stability and permanence
- Increased scrutiny and challenge when permanence is not achieved in a timely way
- Strengthen the impact of IRO Challenge and demonstrate IROs have high aspirations for Middlesbrough children
- Create specialisms within the IRO Service, to better support particular groups of children i.e. care leavers, unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- Increase support and feedback mechanisms for parents
- IROs contribute to overall practice priorities by monitoring quality of performance

Following the presentation, the foster carer outlined that we need to ensure children in care are addressed the way they wish. In response, the Chair agreed and advised that further work was progressing on this.

The officer was thanked for her excellent report.

AGREED

That the report be noted.

21/39

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

Foster Carers and social workers

The Chair addressed the public advising that if anyone wished to become a foster carer or social worker to please contact Middlesbrough Council.