

YOU MATTER TO US- CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the You Matter to Us- Corporate Parenting Board was held on Thursday 29 February 2024.

PRESENT: Councillors C Cooke - Elected Mayor (Chair), D Jackson, J Kabuye, T Livingstone, Z Uddin and G Wilson
A Hart and H Sharp, Care Ambassadors

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: J Carrull, S Hetherington, M Farrow-Tait, P Harrison, T Mbah, J Morgan and S Turner

OFFICERS: D Alaszewski, V Banks, T Dunn, R Hamer, G Nicholson, S Lightwing and J Tynan

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were submitted on behalf of R Brown, C O'Connor, S Didsbury, K Glew and C Heaphy

22/2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

22/3 **MINUTES - YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - 28 NOVEMBER 2023**

The minutes from You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board, held on 28 November 2023 were submitted and approved as a true record.

22/4 **CARE EXPERIENCED YOUTH VOICE UPDATE- DECEMBER 2023- FEBRUARY 2024**

A report of the Voice and Influence Manager was presented to update the Members on activity during the period December 2023 to February 2024.

During December 2023 the care experienced young people held their Christmas party at the Riverside Stadium and also enjoyed a bowling event. In January the group met and discussed ideas for activities in 2024 which included budgeting, cooking, creating an independence checklist and visiting a theatre. A talk on personal finances and how to budget was also provided. In February a session was held to inform young people how they could get involved in their Children Looked After Review and how this could be improved. A guide for young people would be created as a result of the feedback from the session.

The older care experienced young people/adults had participated in the following:

- Attended the 'We Matter' groups in December 2023 and January 2024.
- The Care Ambassadors supported the Participation Team with the engagement sessions at the special schools in Middlesbrough.
- Helped set up the room for the 'We Matter' Christmas party and made sure all the young people had a great time.
- Joined the Youth Council for their Christmas meal.
- 24 January 2024 - Interviewed candidates for the Director of Children's Care post.
- 24 January 2024 - Five older care experienced young adults met with the Care Ambassadors to hear all about the wonderful work they do. The group decided they wanted to create another Forum so they and others could have a voice. The first meeting was held on the 13 February 2024.
- 30 January 2024 - The Care Ambassadors, the five young adults who were going to attend the new Forum and two older members of 'We Matter' met with their Corporate Parents to talk more about the Pledges that had been made. An action plan had been created to make sure decision makers acted on what they had said.
- 31 January 2024 - Helped deliver a slot during the Mandatory Children's Services Induction session, where they explained their roles as a Care Ambassadors.

Planned actions for the next few months included:

- Continue meeting with Corporate Parents and monitor progress with the Pledges.
- Continue to work with the 'We Matter' and put on events to engage with more Children Looked After. Engage more with older care experienced young people through the Forum and encourage them to become Care Ambassadors.
- Have all our care experienced young people/adults set up as volunteers. Create ASDAN awards to provide accreditation for their work and the young people they work with Work with the Commissioning team to create 'Young Commissioners'
- Meet with more care experienced young people who live in residential care.
- Involve 'We Matter' and the Care Ambassadors to take part in the Regional Children in Care Council work, attend the conference on the 3rd April and go on the residential 12-14 April.

The group requested that six key decision makers were identified to attend to Regional Children in Care Council Conference on 3 April 2024.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

22/5

YOU MATTER TO US- PERFORMANCE DATA

The Director of Children's Care presented the latest You Matter To Us Performance Data. The information provided had been compiled using the Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) based on OFSTED's inspecting local authority services for children (ILACS) Annex A dataset (2020)/Inspection Report.

The following issues were highlighted:

- Concerns around health and dental checks.
- Updated assessments for children.
- Children returning home to live with parents.
- Unaccompanied asylum seekers.
- Financial data set.
- Care leavers.

The ChAT tool provided an overarching analysis of the key performance data and identified some trends around children looked after. Comparison from January 2023 to January 2024 showed a reduction of 50% in children coming into care. Work continued around improving performance on decision making and the timing for dental checks and health assessments.

Middlesbrough's cohort of unaccompanied asylum seekers was currently below the quota and discussions were taking place with another Authority as to the infrastructure that would be required for Middlesbrough to support more young people. This could also potentially provide a financial stream for the Council.

Regarding the number of children returning to live with family or parents, some analysis had been undertaken around the original decision-making. It was clarified that the decisions that were made had been correct when children came into care but sometimes the work needed to ensure that they were returned home safely had not always been completed as quickly as would have been preferred.

Work was also being undertaken with Connected Carers, who were classed as Foster Carers and on Special Guardianship Orders, to try and reduce the numbers of children in care.

Audits were undertaken on the last ten children or young people that came into care to try and learn from those experiences and ensure that there were consistent thresholds for early help and prevention.

It was noted that all Corporate Parenting Boards used this same level of data. The service needed to ensure that children received timely reviews and visits and, when it was safe to do so, were returned to parents or under a Special Guardianship Order.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

CHILDREN IN CARE HEALTH UPDATE

The Interim Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children/Children in Care NENC ICB presented a report, the purpose of which was to:

- Demonstrate the duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in care.
- Assure the corporate parenting board that health services to children in care were provided without undue delay or geographical prejudice.
- Demonstrate the aim of the Looked After Health team was for sustained improvement in the health and wellbeing of children in care and those leaving care.
- Ensure the child's voice around health issues were included wherever possible.
- Report on compliance to statutory targets from the Looked After Health Team for Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust.

The report considered compliance for initial health assessments, review health assessments, health registrations and health passports.

Local Authorities were responsible for ensuring a health assessment of physical, emotional, and mental health needs was completed for every child within 20 working days of becoming looked after. Statistics relating to the Initial Health Assessments undertaken in Quarter 3 were detailed at Table 1 of the submitted report.

Review Health Assessments had to take place at least every six months before a child's fifth birthday and at least once every twelve months after the child's fifth birthday within the month they became looked after. Statistics relating to the Review Health Assessments undertaken in Quarter 3 were included at Table 2 of the submitted report.

Compliance with initial health assessments within timescales was less than 10% and with review health assessments, less than 90%.

Challenges faced included:

- Delays in receiving medical consent for initial health assessments was 100% in Q3.
- A lack of available clinics for initial health assessments accounted for over 89% of the delays.
- Throughout Q3 the Harrogate and District Foundation Trust team had experienced significant sickness within the team, which impacted the team's capacity to undertake review health assessments.

Actions taken to address the issues were as follows:

- Rapid improvement workshop remained in place.
- A service review with the Designated Nurses and the Senior Clinical Commissioning Officer was in progress and regular contract meetings remained in place.
- Tees Valley CiC service introduced the RHA risk assessment tool to ensure that children and young people had their health reviewed in accordance with need as opposed to due date.
- This risk assessment had been used throughout Quarter 3 to assess the risk in relation to the team's capacity. The Named Nurse risk assessed the health records of all the children who had been allocated to the staff members not at work. It was reassuring to see that out of 36 risk assessments, there was only one young person who had increasing risk and needed seeing as a matter of urgency.

A Member queried the delays in receiving medical consent for initial health assessments (IHA). It was clarified that the consent had to be obtained by the Social Worker and signed by parents to agree to their child receiving an IHA. Social Workers had been reminded to ensure that they obtained the consent at the same time as the Section 20. However, it was reiterated that this was not delaying the IHAs being undertaken as this was due to the lack of clinic availability. It was highlighted that social care and health needed to look urgently at how the current position could be improved.

It was noted that data on actual health needs was not information that would generally be shared with the Board. The requirements of the commissioning arrangements were that assessments were done within timescale and that children's health needs were met.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

22/7

CORPORATE PARENT PLEDGES TO CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

The Director of Children's Care gave a presentation in relation to the Corporate Parent Pledges to Care Experienced Young People.

The purpose of the pledges was to ensure that young people were holding the Corporate Parents to account and that progress on the pledges was regularly monitored through the Board.

The following updates were provided within the presentation:

On 23 October 2023, care experienced young people met with the Interim Director of Children Care and the Service Manager for Residential and Resources to talk about what additional support they wanted to improve their experiences.

On 9 November 2023 at the You Matter To Us (Corporate Parenting Board) wider engagement session, Corporate Parents heard what young people had said and made pledges to improve their experiences. The pledges were included in the presentation.

On 30 January 2024 – at the You Matter To Us (Corporate Parenting Board) wider engagement session, Corporate Parents worked with care experienced young people to understand more about what they wanted.

All pledge-makers who were present at the meeting were invited by the Mayor to provide a brief verbal update on actions taken.

A plan of action had been developed to monitor progress on each pledge. The Mayor suggested that the Care Ambassadors should sign off on completed actions.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

22/8

ANNUAL UPDATE FROM SOUTH TEES YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE

The report outlined the offer to children who were looked after and also open to South Tees Youth Justice Service. Some brief caseload demographic information was included to provide some context to the Board. The report also focussed on the key achievements in the last twelve months and planned future development.

The vast majority of looked after children and care leavers did not get involved with the justice system, however they remained over-represented compared with others in the criminal justice system. In December 2022 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published information which showed that children in care appeared to enter the justice system earlier than children who had not been in care. Whilst imprisonment was a relatively unusual outcome, a high proportion of those in custody had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Information contained within the Local Authority Interactive Tool, showed that in Middlesbrough in 2023, 3% of children who were looked after had been convicted or were subject to a Youth Caution. This was in line with the North East (3%) but above the national (in England 2%) figures.

The breakdown of open cases between 1 January and 31 December 2023, was included at paragraph 10 of the submitted report. The largest proportion of children open to the service were white British boys aged fifteen or over. 13.3% of children open to the service in 2023 were children looked after. The STYJS Executive Management Board met on a quarterly basis and scrutinised caseload information relating to first time entrants to the system, re-offending and use of custody. This multi-agency Board offered challenge to the service in relation to the data and had responsibility for monitoring and responding to any

disproportionality issues.

The Service had successfully introduced three key new projects within the last 12 months: Turnaround, Immediate Justice and Custody Navigators.

Turnaround was a new programme developed by the Ministry of Justice (MOJ), providing funding to Youth Justice Teams to enable them to intervene earlier and improve outcomes for children on the cusp of entering the youth justice system. The overall aims of the Turnaround programme were to:

- Achieve positive outcomes for children with the ultimate aim of preventing them going on to offend.
- Build on work already done to ensure all children on the cusp of the youth justice system were consistently offered a needs assessment and the opportunity for support.
- Improve the socio-emotional, mental health and wellbeing of children.
- Improve the integration and partnership working between YJS's and other statutory services to support children.

Turnaround went 'live' in January 2023 and was funded until March 2025. STYJS had been given a target number of children to work with, and to date only 1 out of 45 successful closures had gone on to re-offend. Sadly, the eligibility criteria for Turnaround precluded Looked After Children, however it did allow the service to work with children subject to Early Help and Child in Need, and therefore the service worked closely with colleagues in those services with the aim of preventing escalation in both children's care and the criminal justice system.

In relation to Immediate Justice, the Government published the 'Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan' in April 2023. The Cleveland Police Force area was identified as one of four areas to receive funding in respect of 'hot spot policing' and additionally 'Immediate Justice' as part of this government plan. In partnership with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the other two Cleveland Youth Justice Services (YJS), a model of service delivery for Immediate Justice was developed. Known locally as 'Making Good', STYJS now worked with children from the age of twelve who were referred in by Community Safety colleagues following a second incident of anti-social behaviour, thus working with them in a pre-crime space to prevent escalation in to the criminal justice system. Educational and Restorative activity took place alongside reparative activity, which was victim led. The criteria for this project was less restrictive than Turnaround and all children including those who were looked after were offered this intervention. The project was funded until 31st August 2024.

With regard to Custody Navigators, in conjunction with Cleveland's Unit for the Reduction of Violence (CURV), the three YJS's in Cleveland had developed a 'Custody Navigator' model focussed on providing immediate interventions when young people presented at custody, followed by advocacy to ensure appropriate longer term local support is offered and accessed. Four case workers were now placed into the custody suite in Middlesbrough to support people who had been detained because of a serious violence offence. This offered the opportunity for 'reachable and teachable' moments to engage with young people involved in serious violent offending, and at an earlier point than ever before. Navigators sought to identify opportunities to develop a trusting relationship whereby the detainee could be referred to appropriate support through a tailored service plan that connected them to services such as counselling, mentoring, or help with conflict resolution, employment or substance misuse. Navigators would liaise with Social Workers of Looked After Children and share information about the custodial episode, and could continue to provide ongoing support to individuals beyond release where appropriate. This pilot would operate across Cleveland until March 2025.

A further key achievement for the service had been the introduction of the 'Inclusion pathway'. The Pathway created a mechanism which enabled Case Managers to access support for young people who were at risk of disengagement from education. The pathway had been designed to promote engagement in the education system, improve attendance, prevent exclusions (fixed-term and permanent), improve attainment and deliver well-targeted educational support. The STYJS Inclusion Pathway was endorsed by the Middlesbrough Council scrutiny panel as a means of raising the needs of young people at risk of exclusion. The Education specialist within the service advocated for Looked After Children in such

circumstances to make sure their voice was heard and any additional needs taken in to account.

Since January 2023 STYJS had commissioned a highly specialist speech and language therapist (SALT) to meet the needs of the YJS service. The role of the SALT therapist included direct speech and language therapy intervention with young people, further assessment of children's speech, language and communication needs including the development of personalised plans and recommendations which would influence their experiences within the justice system (Court or Police), and indirect speech and language therapy intervention. The SALT therapist had reviewed all the written information and correspondence used by the service with children and families, and offered staff training to raise awareness of Speech Language and Communication Needs and strategies to support children. This provision was highly valued by staff, and positive comments had been received by parents and carers in relation to the service provided. The importance of this work could not be underestimated when such high numbers of children in custody had additional, and often undiagnosed, needs.

The three projects were all time limited, with funding due to end by March 2025. The risk was that funding might not continue, and these highly valued projects might be lost which would be detrimental to the children who could benefit. The challenge for the service would be to find a way to either mainstream the projects into the service, or maintain some elements, which of course would need to be funded. The longevity of each of these projects would be determined by external evaluation and consultation with external bodies (such as the Ministry of Justice (MOJ)).

The Service would engage with all external evaluations relating to time limited/funded projects in order to maximise involvement and contributions to consultation processes. The STYJS Board would also be kept abreast of developments on a quarterly basis and might need to escalate discussions to a more strategic level depending upon the outcome of decisions made by external bodies.

STYJS would continue to deliver targeted staff development sessions to raise awareness of working with Looked After Children within the criminal justice system, and also continue to deliver sessions as part of the Principal Social Worker's 'Hot Topics' sessions to raise awareness of work within the Children's Social Care workforce.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

22/9

FOSTERING UPDATE

The Interim Head of Service, Placements and Resource, presented the Annual Report 2023/2024 on Fostering which included statistical data on the Fostering Service.

The Service continued to have the highest number of children placed with in-house fostering families. Overall, there had been a reduction of 24 children in foster care over an 18 months period due to a number of reasons. The largest number were children moving from connected care arrangements to family arrangements, such as Special Guardianship Orders. In the previous 11 months there had been 17 connected carers deregistered in this respect.

In February 2023 Middlesbrough Council increased payments to foster carers and introduced level payments instead of banding. This meant that Middlesbrough Council were now competitive with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) and over the last 12 months there had been an increase in approved foster carers. In 2023, 11 foster carers were approved compared to the previous 12 months when 1 was approved. There were 7 foster carers in assessment which would increase the number of placements to Middlesbrough children by a further 12 placements. There had been a number of new foster carers who had transferred from other Local Authorities (LAs) and a number from IFAs to Middlesbrough Council.

Over the previous 13 months, no connected carers assessments had gone out of the 24-week timescale. Timescales and practice guidance was in place on connected assessments making them more robust and child-focused. The service was stable with no agency workers across the three teams. A Social Worker was DDP trained to lead and offer Dyadic Developmental Parenting to carers and social worker consultations. The fostering service now received the same training offer as both Residential and Resources, giving social workers

and carers greater knowledge and support.

A weekly stability discussion took place between Futures for Families and Fostering to prevent placement breakdowns for teenagers in fostering arrangements and the impact of this would be detailed in future reports.

The creation of a dashboard for Fostering was underway which would give managers greater oversight of the service, and enable data to be more quickly accessible allowing managers to spend more time with staff as well as the ability to complete observations.

There were a number of issues causing concern which were listed as follows:

- The number of children that continued to be placed in unregulated connected care placements as a result of no, or negative, assessments.
- A failed launch of the “Mockingbird” fostering model in May 2023. This would be relaunched in May 2024 with consultation meetings currently ongoing in this regard.
- The recruitment of foster carers and marketing was handled regionally, led by TFC, under the umbrella of Foster with North East. Since its inception in September 2023 there had been a reduction in enquiries leading to initial visits.
- Available capacity with foster carers to care for teenagers in an emergency following placement or family breakdowns. Don't have enough carers for teenagers.

Added complications included:

- Restrictions on how the Council advertised for foster carers having to use Foster with North East material and not being able to share the benefits of being a carer in Middlesbrough.
- Foster carers raising the instability in the wider social work workforce (Children and Young People having multiple social workers).
- Placements for larger sibling groups were difficult to find.
- Some connected carers choosing not to take a Special Guardianship Order due to the financial support offered.

The service continued to aim to be able to meet the needs of 70% of looked-after children through in-house fostering provision by the end of 2025 and needed to recruit a substantial number of fostering families to achieve this. A planned marketing campaign aligned with the terms of Foster with North East to target Middlesbrough residents over the coming 12 months. Trauma-informed training for foster carers and support in understanding how to create a trauma-informed environment with support from service. All young people aged 12 plus to have access and support to the Pathway to Independence Booklet which offered support in developing skills as they reach adulthood.

It was noted that a further 12 foster carers would need to be recruited over the next year to meeting the 70% target. Given the number of enquiries received recently this would be challenging. A marketing flyer would be included in council tax envelopes issued to Middlesbrough residents in the next month to encourage people to become foster carers. The recruitment team also attended major public events in Middlesbrough, such as the MELA, to promote the service.

It was highlighted that the pathfinder around Foster with North East would become compulsory within the next year and the majority of Local Authorities would be taking part for another year.

In addition to the initial training offered by Foster with North East, Middlesbrough also provided its own in-house training for foster carers. This included restorative and trauma-informed training which demonstrated a wider range of support for Middlesbrough carers.

With regard to Connected Carer arrangements, it was estimated that up to 70% of those carers would be willing to move to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) if the financial arrangements were more favourable.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

NORTH EAST AND NORTH CUMBRIA CARE LEAVERS PROJECT - MIDDLESBROUGH

A report was presented that provided an interim update on the Care Leavers project from the North East and North Cumbria (NENC) Child Health and Wellbeing Network. The report outlined the key findings of a recent questionnaire, summarised the projects' purpose, expected outcomes and next steps.

Within the footprint of NENC there were high numbers of cared for children and therefore the population of care leavers was significant. Care leavers were more prevalent to suffer inequalities than their peers who had not been subject to the care system. There was a commitment to levelling up and reducing inequalities faced by vulnerable groups within the region. The project aimed to firstly engage with care leavers to understand what life was like for them and gain understanding of their day-to-day experiences which might impact on their wellbeing. Consideration would then be given to consider how services could work together, share good practice, and engage better with young people to improve life outcomes for them.

Using the Core 20 Plus 5 Toolkit, the population of Care Leavers had been identified in Middlesbrough. Consideration of data around mental health, housing, and work/education was identified.

The Project Objectives were as follows:

1. To hear the voice of our young people. To effectively work with our young people. Capture their opinions which could help the development of a co-produced project that was meaningful to them both qualitative and quantitative methods.
2. Data collection. To understand the needs of our young people on leaving care within an area of NENC to provide a representation of our cared for population using publicly available data.
3. Share learning across the NENC footprint via the creation of a report to be shared with key stakeholders.

Research undertaken to date included:

- 3 health inequalities were identified through the core 20+5 analysis, those being: food insecurity, emotional health and accommodation. This information was used to shape the professional and Young Persons Questionnaires.
- A 20-question survey was sent out to all members of Middlesbrough Children's Services staff, asking for feedback on current services, what professionals thought were the key issues young people faced, and how services could be improved to ensure maximum efficiency.
- A 24-question survey was sent out to senior management and team managers to pass on to every young person in their service to gain feedback on young people's views on services on how they could be improved, this was still open for responses.
- 32 professionals responded to the survey.

The professionals survey covered three main topics: mental health, housing and cost of living. The topics were highlighted as important through the core 20 + 5 analysis and the questions were structured around this.

Initial findings highlighted that the majority of professionals felt that emotional pressure had increased for young people leaving care. Some professionals believed the lack of fostering provision and young people being placed in residential homes, also had an impact on young people's emotional health. One professional stated one of the biggest impacts of young people's emotional health was increased accessibility to street drugs. Professionals suggested that more awareness of VCSE services could help young people to be identified by more specialised services, as some also stated that most referrals go through to CAMHS or a GP.

Concerns about housing were mostly about capacity, with one professional describing it as a "lottery" due to what is available at the time, and the location of the property. Some felt the risks in the community was a huge concern. Ensuring those young people who were more susceptible to exploitation were placed in an area that did not have known criminal and sexual exploitation was vital. Professionals suggested more flexible and social support and more individual need to the end of care with a step-by-step approach to independence.

The impact of the cost-of-living crisis had been reported nationally as having a great impact on the expenditure of families and individuals. Most professionals noted that one of their biggest concerns was the regular and increased use of foodbanks. Some staff noted that Universal Credit was quite low, the current rate being £66.00 per week. A question was also raised as to “why are so many care leavers on Universal Credit.”

Professionals were interested to know how the addition to the protected characteristics would impact the offer from the local authority. Raising aspirations and increasing opportunities for care leavers was a key theme identified when asking professionals what could be done to deal with the cost-of-living crisis.

The next steps would involve undertaking a detailed analysis of the professionals’ data and the analysis of young people’s responses. Recommendations from the findings would inform project work to support Care Leavers in Middlesbrough. Project developments would continue to be communicated to key stakeholders.

AGREED that the information was received and noted.

22/11

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

None.