

**YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board was held on Thursday 3 October 2024.

**PRESENT:** Councillors C Cooke - Elected Mayor (Chair), P Storey (Vice-Chair), E Clynch, L Henman, Z Uddin and L Young

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillors

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Baker (Cleveland Police)

**OFFICERS:** C Lunn, D Alaszewski, V Banks, T Dunn, T Jelfs and N Saunders

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors D Jackson, L Mason, J McTigue and M Nugent

24/1 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Business
Cllr L Young	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.

24/2 **MINUTES - YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD - 18 APRIL 2024**

The minutes of the You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board meeting held on 18 April 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/3 **YOU MATTER TO US - PERFORMANCE**

The Director of Children's Care provided information to the Board in relation to service performance. Members were referred to the 'Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT)' document, which was based on Ofsted's ILACS Annex A dataset (2020) / Inspection Report, and which had been circulated as part of the agenda pack.

It was explained that a focused Ofsted visit had taken place in July 2024. Although the visit itself had lasted two days, when considering such matters as preparation time, preliminary meetings and file reviews, the inspection had run for two weeks overall. Although positive feedback, which recognised that improvements had been made, was received, welcomed, and publicised, it was acknowledged that further improvements were still to be made. The Agency Head of Service had led on the improvement work to date, which had demonstrated both strong oversight and hard work by the teams involved.

The snapshot data for the last six months, which had been circulated to Members, covered the following areas:

- Children Looked After (CLA) with an open episode of care.
- CLA Placements.
- CLA Health and Missing/ Absent from Placement.
- Care Leavers Eligibility, PA Allocation and Pathway Plans.
- Care Leavers Demographics and UASC.
- Care Leavers Pathway Plan and Contact Timescales.
- Care Leavers PA Allocation and In Touch.
- Care Leavers Accommodation Suitability and Type.
- Care Leavers Activity (Education, Employment, or Training).

The Board noted that a reduction in the number of children in care was currently being seen, with 491 children presently in placement. By comparison, in 2018/2019 there were approximately 700 children in care. Work was actively taking place with families in relation to safe assessments; returning children to home; and progressing Special Guardianship Order

(SGO) assessment.

Over the last six months, 68 children and young people had entered care, whereas 87 had moved out. 4% of those moving out had been adopted and 26% had resulted from SGO.

Work had been taking place with SHiFT Middlesbrough to provide intense support to 27 young people. With a focus on crime prevention, activities related to youth custody and juvenile detention matters; legal gateway panels had also been revisited.

Regarding health, the Board noted that of the 381 Children Looked After (CLA) for at least 12 months, 90% had received an up to date health assessment. In terms of dental checks, 84% had received a dental check in the last 12 months. The issue of dental hygiene had been of significant concern previously; the Board welcomed this performance, but it was acknowledged that further work was required to raise this further.

Reference was made to a piece of work that had been undertaken in relation to identifying individuals that were, following new legislation, eligible to receive care leavers support. The number of young people classed as care leavers had and would continue to increase; pop-up hubs had been established to support this process, and significant effort made to contact family members, etc. Ofsted had recognised this as a particularly positive piece of work.

A Member referred to figures pertaining to care leavers' Personal Advisor (PA) allocation and keeping in touch. Clarification regarding the number of 17-18 year olds and 19-21 year olds maintaining contact with the Local Authority was requested. In response, it was indicated that for 17-18 year olds this was 82%, and for 19-21 year olds 89%.

A discussion ensued in relation to CLA missing from placement. The following comments were made:

- The Board heard that officers had undertaken work to strengthen reporting measures, such as implementing weekly updates around serious incidents. It was suggested that consideration be given towards future/ forward planning, and the types of areas where 'deep dives' and/ or more information would facilitate the work of the Board.
- The Chair referred to police resources and queried how missing episodes impacted on these. In response, the Cleveland Police representative indicated that, over the last 12 months, there had been a 23% reduction in the number of young people going missing from home; an 18% reduction in the number of high risk young people going missing from home; and an 80% reduction in repeat missing.

It was explained that a specialist team of officers worked on cases involving missing CLA. When a young person went missing, a risk assessment was undertaken to determine whether they were at high or medium/ low risk. High risk cases involved, for example, potential for self-harm; medium/ low risk involved, for example, young people missing for several days at a time. Depending upon the assessment, resources would be allocated as appropriate. In the case of young people missing for several days at a time, for example, it was explained that this had impact on frontline response because those officers would be asked to assist with the missing team resource. It was noted that Cleveland Police had good response plans in place to deal with missing incidents.

The police representative referred to the Philomena Principles passed into care homes and queried how assured partners felt that, when young people had encountered other partner agencies, that they had also come into police contact. In response, the Agency Head of Service for Corporate Parenting explained that there had been good responses in terms of monitoring with MACH, with a positive response and attendance from Cleveland Police. There had been positive responses around escalation too.

In response to an enquiry from a Member, the Board was advised that the 23% reduction in children going missing from home referred to young people reported as missing by parents, services, etc.

A Member queried the work that had been undertaken to help prevent CLA missing episodes. In response, the Board heard that Cleveland Police's missing from home team had met with regulated care providers to discuss prevention matters. Reference was again made to the Philomena Principles, which was about gaining insight into the lives of young people who entered care homes: understanding where family and friends resided; where they would likely go to if missing; obtaining telephone numbers, social media tags, etc. It was about offering front-end support.

- Children's Services had a specific team dealing with incidents of missing CLA; part of their work was to conduct return interviews with young people.
- The Chair suggested that a 'deep dive' into this area would be useful: to understand the reasons for missing episodes, what the cohorts were, etc. There was significant concern for the Local Authority when missing episodes occurred, and a significant impact on police resources.

A Member referred to Kinship Care, in particular Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), and queried the support available around these. In response, the Board heard that the number of SGOs had increased slightly. There had been some concerns raised from families around whether support would continue once a SGO was put in place; it was indicated that the SGO policy was currently being reviewed. It was indicated that Child Arrangement Orders were having a positive effect for families. Permanency monitoring was carried out monthly.

In responding to an enquiry regarding the definition, number and thresholds around care leavers, the Board heard that thresholds had not changed. Although the associated processes and legal gateway had been aligned across Tees, Middlesbrough's responses were different - which included work as part of the SHiFT Middlesbrough initiative. Reference was made to earlier intervention work to prevent children entering care; improved educational attainment; and the aim to keep children with their families. It was explained that the length of time young people had been in care, and how many days after their sixteenth birthday they had been in care, which determined their eligibility for support. Pop-up drop in sessions to maintain contact and involvement with services had been held; reference was made to mental health support, and the regulations involved in all this work.

The Chair commented on the importance of reflecting on Middlesbrough's service and provision in comparison to other local areas. Openness, transparency and working effectively with neighbouring Local Authorities to uplift standards and offer the best service possible was key. A Board Member referred to travel and bus companies and commented that effective communication with partners would facilitate the processing of travel permits for young people.

In response to a query from a Member regarding the Keeping in Touch statistics, it was explained to the Board that there had been some issues experienced with data recording for PA allocation and the percentage of 17–18-year-olds in touch with the Local Authority. A pathway scorecard was currently being devised which would improve the accuracy of the data. It was agreed that the updated figures would be provided to Members.

**AGREED that:**

1. **The Keeping in Touch statistics would be updated and provided to Board Members.**
2. **The information, as presented, was noted.**

24/4

**EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WHO ARE LOOKED AFTER**

The Head of Virtual School delivered a presentation to the Board, which focused on 'Unvalidated End of Key Stage Outcomes for Looked After Children 2024'.

The Board heard that, prior to entering care, many CLA had had a disrupted education, which included poor attendance; multiple school moves; and multiple suspensions or exclusions. Many had also suffered trauma and had attachment disruptions which impacted upon neurological development. Such disruption affected their ability to focus in lessons, and this could continue until they felt safe and secure. Support staff wanted children and young people to feel safe and secure in the school environment, and this did provide challenge.

CLA may also have experienced many changes whilst in care, which included home moves; school moves; and changes of social worker. All of these affected their ability to make good progress at school.

Regarding the virtual school interim outcomes for 2024, the Board was advised that the information being reported on referred to the attainment for all CLA alongside the 'qualifying cohort', which was children who had been in care for 12 months or more as at 31 March 2023. It was explained that there had been a return to pre-pandemic grading in England this summer as exams and assessments for all qualifications had progressed as planned. The Department

for Education (DfE) had confirmed it was not necessary for students to memorise formulae for GCSE Mathematics and equations for GCSE Physics and Combined Science in 2024. The Board noted that this was the final year that formulae would be provided, and from next year onwards, students would be expected to recite them.

A table illustrating statistical data in respect of CLA attainment at Early Years and Key Stage 2 was provided, as follows:

	All CLA National 2024	All CLA Regional 2024	CLA Statistical Neighbourhoods 2024	CLA 12m+ M'brough 2022	CLA 12m+ M'brough 2023	CLA 12m+ M'brough 2024	M'brough All child 202 %
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Early Years GLD	41	42	46	27	44	22.2	62
KS2 R/W/M	33	36	38	32	39	31	60
KS2 Reading	52	55	58	52	44	56	71
KS2 Writing	45	45	51	49	50	50	72
KS2 Maths	52	46	44	52	50	50	72.
KS4 Basics 4+	-	-	-	18	16	14	55
KS4 Maths 4+	-	-	-	21	24	24	59
KS4 English 4+	-	-	-	30	29	24	66

In terms of a comparative analysis between Middlesbrough and the wider regional and national data, the Board was advised that although a good indication, it was important to be mindful that the cohorts were small, for example: there were nine children in one of the cohorts this year, and therefore any minor change could alter the statistics significantly. In addition, it was important to recognise and understand the caveats of the data, for example: the support plans that were in place to help children to achieve. Members were advised that Key Stage 4 data would be provided at a future meeting once it had been produced.

The Board heard that a 'deep dive' exercise had recently been undertaken, which had resulted in seven issues being identified. These were: Attendance; Stability home and school; PEP quality; Suspensions; Quality of teaching and learning; Sufficiency of SEN and AP places; and Change of Social Worker. In terms of next steps to address these issues, these were outlined as follows:

- PEP would be completed before a home move.
- The school moves policy would be relaunched.
- The school holiday request policy would be relaunched.
- There would be priority access to specialist schools and AP without drift and delay.
- EOTAs would be tracked and monitored through: priority access to EP assessments; publishing of the Social Worker ed. Handbook; and relaunch of the Virtual School drop ins.

A Member referred to placement moves that occurred in Y11 and the impact that this had on the respective child's education. It was queried whether there was either a policy or formality in place to safeguard against moves in the final year. In response, it was explained that children were not moved in that year unless something occurred that was outside the control of the Local Authority; sometimes placements did break down. In such situations discussions would take place, with the virtual school being involved to help avoid any disruption.

A Member referred to the issue around the recruitment and retention of social workers. It was queried what impact a high turnover of social workers had on the welfare of children, and what evidence base there was for this. In response, the Board heard that a study had been undertaken in 2015 by the Universities of Oxford and Bristol - 'The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data'. A link to the research paper would be provided to Members following the meeting. The Director of Children's Care referred to the Council's recruitment strategy and commented that there had been increased stability in terms of recruitment and retention more recently.

A Member commented that Y10 forms part of the GCSE programme and that children should not have been moved during this year. In response, the Head of Virtual School explained that there was national guidance around this; children should not have been moved during key stages.

**AGREED that:**

1. **The Virtual School Head would provide a link to the research referred to during her presentation, which noted the factors that contributed to good educational outcomes for CLA.**
2. **The information, as provided, was noted.**

24/5

**DISCUSSION ITEM - TRAINING FOR MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

The Director of Children's Care opened a discussion regarding potential training opportunities for Board Members, all Elected Members, and officers in relation to the role and responsibilities of Corporate Parents. Reference was made to training that other Local Authorities had undertaken, as well as training and development work that had been offered previously at Middlesbrough.

During the discussion, Members made the following suggestions:

1. That formal training sessions be established for all Board Members and LMT to attend.
2. That informal training sessions be set-up in partnership with Youth Voice for all Board Members to attend.
3. That training for all Elected Members, to explain and emphasise their role as Corporate Parents, be undertaken before Full Council meetings.

The representative from Cleveland Police advised that they would like to be involved in the development of training activities, wherever possible.

**AGREED** that the suggestions made in respect of training and development opportunities for Members and Officers be considered.

24/6

**DISCUSSION ITEM - YOU MATTER TO US MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE**

A discussion ensued in relation to Board membership and attendance/ representation at meetings.

It was commented that a housing representative would be sought and added to the attendee distribution list as soon as possible. Representatives from Health were also being considered.

A Member suggested that when Looked After Children completed Y6, a card with a congratulatory message, signed by all Board Members, be forwarded to them.

A Care Ambassador raised the matter of communication between partners; It was felt that this could be improved. It was commented that, as service users and the voice of over 400 young people, the Care Ambassadors were in the best position to assist partner agencies. Fellow Members of the Board recognised this; the Director of Children's Care highlighted that, having attained lived experience, the voice of those individuals were stronger and louder than others and it was important that these were heard. Board Members wanted to ensure that Care Ambassadors were part of training activities and fully involved in Board meetings. It was agreed that a standing item for the Care Ambassadors would be included on future meeting agendas.

**AGREED that:**

1. An appropriate housing representative would be sought and invited to future meetings.
2. A standing item for participation representatives would be included on future meeting agendas.

24/7

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

None.