MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

Middlesbrough
moving forward

Report of:	Set out the title of the Senior Manager submitting the report (Chief Executive, Executive Director, Strategic Director of Director

Submitted to:	**Corporate Parenting Board- 12th**

Subject:	Nominet REACH – Digiwise - Elevating young peoples' voices to influence the services that impact on their digital safety and opportunity

Contribution to the guiding principles of the Corporate Parenting Strategy

Your Home

a) We have the vison that all of our children and young people will have safe, reliable online access while they are in care and be offered with the same online opportunities as their peers.

b) We want to ensure that residential and foster care homes have internet connections that are filtered for harmful but legal content and aim to prevent our young people inadvertently accessing inappropriate harmful adult content when using corporate internet connections.

c) We want our carers to be trained and skilled in offering high quality, impartial online safety discussions and to be able to offer advice and information using a range of recommended resources adopting a restorative approach to develop agreements, pledges and/or passports for online use; equipping our children with the skills to become digitally resilient.

Your Family and Friends

d) We want to allow our young people to be able to communicate safely on social media and other online methods such as email

Your Education

e) We want to equip our young people to participate and access online education facilities

Your Adult Life

f) We want to equip our young people to grow up to be good digital citizens

Your Health and wellbeing

g) We want our young people to have quick and easy access to high quality online reporting and support resources tackling online harms, harms which could cause them worry or trauma and for responses to be trauma informed to aide in recovery.

Your Voice and Influence

    h) The purpose of Digiwise is to elevate care experienced young people's voices to influence the development of digital safeguarding policy and for those views to be presented to the correct audience.

Is the report confidential or does it contain exempt information?
No

What is the purpose of this report?
- To update corporate parenting board on the progress of the Digiwise funding bid.
- To identify the findings from our young people and professionals surveys.
- To seek the board's support and to implement the recommendations.

Report Background
In March 2021, Middlesbrough Council were successful in a funding application for £36,220 which is to research, consult and produce a policy/practice document for digital safeguarding for Children Looked After and Children Leaving Care.

Funding by Parentzone and Nominet was allocated to 9 interlinked projects under 3 key areas of which Middlesbrough's sits within Design Challenge 3, that is:

    Elevating young peoples' voice to influence the services that impact on their digital safety and opportunity.

    Care experienced young people have invaluable insight which is currently under-utilised in relation to digital and online safety policy development.

More specifically the project is to ensure care experienced young people can influence the service policies, process and practice that impact on their digital lives. We need to extend participation; diversify and improve channels of communication and feedback.

This is based on significant risks posed to Children Looked After (CLA) being at risk of online grooming and exploitation, exposure pornography, peer pressure to send youth produced sexual imagery and access to drug sales and other harmful products usually via social media.

Since the last corporate parenting board in February 2022 the survey is now completed and this report now presents the findings and recommendations.

The two actions allocated at the previous corporate parenting board 13th February 2022 have been completed. Those are:

- The adoption of the UKCIS Digital Passport for all children looked after.
- Consideration of all residential and foster care staff completing the 'Fostering Network's, Fostering Digital Skills CPD course.

The Digiwise Research and young people's survey
The Digiwise survey contained a series of themed questions which explored children in care online behaviours. It examined young people's data usage, risks and online worries they faced and general online experiences. deep diving into young people's digital literacy we explored the skills of staff who care for them, identifying education interventions offered and the use of agreements and issues around ethics, trust, transparency and privacy.

Appendices
Appendix A. Digiwise Elevating the voice of the child report

Recommendations for Corporate Parenting Board
  1. **That the board note and acknowledge the key findings from Digiwise report**

  2. **That the board support the implementation of the recommendations from the main Digiwise report (see below)**

Key findings from Digiwise project
There are many findings from the Digiwise survey, however the following are the key findings that influence the recommendations.

   a) Most of our young people are exposed to some form of adversity in online spaces, these issues are far reaching.
   b) Young people want data!
   c) That internet speeds are slow and could be better across all settings
   d) There is limited evidence of consistent approaches and overall effectiveness of acceptable use agreements and use of online safety contracts in care homes
   e) Young people want quick and easy access to reporting and support mechanisms, with tools to enable their fast access when faced with crisis.
   f) Lack of consistent guidance on appropriate filtering on both foster home broadband, mobile phone providers and settings on applications with the concept of "safety gates" being employed.
   g) Educating young people through workforce development programme such as the 'Fostering Digital Skills' programme
   h) That we need to educate young people on the risks of being online along with practical tips on how to keep social media counts safe including how to block, report and delete.

Recommendations from Digiwise project
   a) Take all necessary steps to ensure harmful content such as violent, graphic, sexual, hateful and extremist content is minimised and filtered at source within all settings through the use of various "safety gates".
   b) To ensure that our workforce and professionals, carers and residential staff have the skills, knowledge and skills to support young people to gain all of the benefits to being online, whilst still managing their risk.
   c) Being able to offer appropriate, high quality education, interventions and conversation starters when they are needed.
   d) Offer quick and easy access to resources and support for our children and young people.
   e) Consideration to the adoption of the governments UKCIS Digital Passport and the role It can play in building collaborative approaches to digital resilience in care between carer and child
   f) The existing policy *Short breaks and residential services Wi-Fi & Internet use policy* is in place but will be reviewed in light of this research and national guidance.

Why is this being recommended?
Online spaces pose risks to young people just as there are risks in physical locations, these recommendations are designed to safeguard young people whilst in online spaces.

Research from Internet Matters UK shows young people who are vulnerable such as children looked after are at greater risk than their non-care experienced peers due to being more frequently withdrawn, anxious and have lower self-esteem.

In the UK, there are over 65,000 children and young people currently living in foster care with 55,000 foster families.

In Middlesbrough in May 2022 there were 618 children and young people currently living in care with 449 living within foster care, 209 of which are aged 11- 18.

Other potential decisions and why these have not been recommended
Removal of digital devices from young people
Installation of monitoring software
Restriction of data plans and access 3 & 4G connections
- There may be legal implications of surveillance and monitoring of young people's devices
- Feedback from our young people that they would workaround these restrictions which could place them at further risk
- *'A Shared Responsibility, Building children's online resilience'* report, Przybylski. K (2014) evidences that prohibition, restrictions and monitoring are shown to make children less safe and less able to self-regulate their online lives and subsequent risks.

Impact(s) of recommended decision(s)
The author should here set out the expected impacts of the recommended decision(s), under the following headings (where appropriate).

Legal
There are no legal implications

Financial
There could be small implications for additional resources on an individual child level which should be manageable within the child's budget and care plans.

Policy Framework
It is intended that the next stage is that a policy framework will be written, taking into account the findings and recommendations contained within the Digiwise elevating the voice of the child, attached.

The existing policy *Short breaks and residential services Wi-Fi & Internet use policy is in place but will be reviewed in light of this research and national guidance.*

Equality and Diversity
No implications

Risk
Failure to provide effective online safeguarding systems could leave children and young people at a higher level of risk and the organisation which may cause damage the organisations reputation.

Actions to be taken to implement the decision(s)
Following this corporate parenting board all agreed recommendations will be incorporated into SMART actions in order to ensure they are embed in council practice.

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date

	Minutes and background papers submitted to corporate parenting board.	13th February 2022
	Nominet REACH – Digiwise - Elevating young peoples' voices to influence the services that impact on their digital safety and opportunity survey and report	September 2022

If none, author should use 'No background papers were used in the preparation of this report'.

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