

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**A meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 20 December 2022.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Davison (Chair); Councillors: Mawston (Vice Chair) and Uddin.

**OFFICERS:** X Davies, J Dixon, A Hart, L Hunter and K Peacock.

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** F and S – 'We Matter' Group.

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Higgins, Nugent, J Walker and Wilson.

**\*\* DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

**MINUTES – 14 NOVEMBER 2022**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 14 November 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

**EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**ORDERED** that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that, if present, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

**SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD – FURTHER INFORMATION**

K Peacock, Voice and Influence Manager, and L Hunter, Communications and Engagement Officer, were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with further information in relation to its current scrutiny topic. The officers were in attendance to provide information regarding the work of Middlesbrough's Participation Team and were accompanied by four care experienced young people, two of whom currently held apprenticeship positions, and two school-aged young people.

The Panel heard that Middlesbrough's Participation Team facilitated open, safe and inclusive spaces for young people to meet up and express their views regarding the changes they would like to see to improve their own experiences and those of their peers. The Team supported young people to share their views with key decision-makers and professionals, all of whom would act on what had been expressed to positively change services to meet young peoples' needs.

The Participation Team ran several groups that met on a fortnightly basis, and supported them to design and deliver engagement events to capture the wider voice of young people in Middlesbrough:-

- 'We Matter' (Middlesbrough Children in Care Council) – for 10-16 year olds.
- 'Care Leavers Forum' – for 16-25 year olds.
- 'My Voice Matters' – for young people with additional needs.
- 'Youth Council' – for all young people in Middlesbrough.

The 'My Voice Matters' group was currently designing the next Youth Voice Conference 2023 and the 'Youth Council' planned to engage with young people within schools to work on issues identified in their manifesto.

The Officers outlined the current activity taking place with young people, as follows:-

- The Participation Team – had developed a work plan incorporating all of the work it was undertaking with all of the groups. In January 2023, the Team would begin working with all the young people to co-produce the 'Participation Strategy'.
- 'We Matter' – developing its 2023 work plan. This would include regular meetings, holding four engagement events, meeting with the Executive Director of Children's Services, the Director of Children's Care and other key decision-makers. Also meeting directly with Corporate Parents as part of the Corporate Parenting Board and the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.
- 'Care Leaver's Forum' – developing its 2023 work plan. This would include meeting regularly, supporting the celebration event in April 2023 and developing the Local Offer for care leavers.
- 'My Voice Matters' – developing its 2023 work plan, including meeting regularly and identifying key areas it wished to focus on, and meeting key decision-makers.
- 'Youth Council' – developing its 2023 work plan, including meeting regularly, working on its Manifesto and designing a 'Big Takeover' event.

It was hoped that the impact of all the ongoing activity would be that:-

- More young people in Middlesbrough were offered opportunities to have a voice, to be heard and encourage real potential for services to positively change to meet their needs.
- Young people say being part of these groups made them feel valued and listened to.
- Key decision-makers were able to hear directly from young people to influence their decision-making and work towards co-producing services with them and for them.

The Participation Team, and young people it worked with, wanted Corporate Parents, including the Scrutiny Panel, to hear directly from young people to ensure that services were responsive and meeting young people's needs. It was important that as many people as possible were engaged and heard first-hand the challenges young people faced. In addition, an invitation was extended to all Panel Members to all of the groups outlined above and ongoing engagement opportunities.

The Participation Team had undertaken a piece of work with young people from the 'We Matter' (Children in Care Council) group through a questionnaire that it had developed seeking young people's views on the positives and the challenges in their past, present and future. Eleven young people had completed the questionnaire and four of those young people were in attendance at the meeting to talk about their responses directly. Copies of all the completed questionnaires had been circulated to the Panel Members prior to the meeting.

Past - The young people had been asked to think about how they had been positively impacted by a role model or someone who had encouraged or inspired them and who had also supported them to overcome any challenges.

The young people had identified parents and family members, foster carers, children's home staff; social workers, support staff in employment/training settings, teachers and teaching staff as positive and inspirational role models and people who had encouraged them to overcome challenges such as ensuring their views were heard; consistency in social workers; settling into school; finding something they enjoyed doing; overcoming negative thoughts and feelings.

Present – The young people were asked what they felt was going well for them, how they were working towards independence and what form of education, employment or training they were currently in. They were also asked to think about their current independence status and whether

they were happy with the way things were going, how people around them were helping them and whether they were able to express how they were feeling.

In terms of what was going well for them and how they were working towards independence, the young people identified areas such as making new friends; learning a new language; making progress in school, training or employment; working towards qualifications and learning skills such as cooking, self-care and budgeting their own finances.

Future – The young people were asked what their aspirations were, whether they felt they would succeed, how those around them could support them to achieve their aspirations and whether they felt they would be ready for independence. In terms of future challenges, the young people were asked to think about what challenges they might encounter and who they could turn to for help and support.

The young people identified a range of aspirations which included gaining qualifications they were working towards, achieving employment in various career paths; attending university; learning to drive; owning their own home. Most young people identified teachers, support staff, social workers, personal advisors and foster carers as people they would turn to for help/support to overcome any challenges.

It was noted that one young person expressed concerns about who they could go to for help/support once over the age of 25.

The Panel heard directly from the four young people in attendance and had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the responses they had provided.

One of the young people highlighted that Social Workers were often described in negative terms and that this was sometimes due to young people expressing their views in the heat of the moment when things might not be going their way, with their comments reflecting negatively on the Social Worker. However, in their experience, Social Workers were generally inspirational and good role models for young people and felt it would be good to hear more positives in relation to Social Workers. It was considered that despite the local and national issues in relation to Social Worker recruitment and retention, greater promotion of the positive messages from care experienced young people in relation to Social Workers could potentially help to attract and retain Social Workers.

Members had also considered the other completed questionnaires and a discussion was held in relation to some of the responses provided. The following general issues were raised:-

- In response to a query it was confirmed that every child/young person in care was allocated their own Social Worker.
- The young people present felt that they could talk to their Social Worker about any issues they might have.
- From the responses on the questionnaires, the Panel highlighted that housing appeared to be an issue for some young people moving to independence. One young person commented that there appeared to be a lack of interest from some housing providers in relation to care experienced young people and that this was an area that needed to be improved in terms of the suitability and condition of properties made available to them.
- The Voice and Influence Manager advised that the Participation Team was collaborating with care leavers to redesign the Local Offer which was last updated in 2019. The majority of Care Leavers had stated that they did not read the information given to them and had requested a digital version of the core offer. The Team had linked up with Middlesbrough College to work with students who would work with Middlesbrough's care leavers to produce an animation containing the information around support available, particularly around where you lived, financial support, health, etc. In addition the Team was working with Pathways and partner agencies around the current offer to examine whether it was working well and planned to meet

housing providers. It hoped to hold an event in the spring bringing everyone together to undertake a piece of work and to look at the positives and negatives.

The Panel considered that it was very encouraging to hear, and read, the views of care experienced young people that were making active steps towards independence. The majority of young people who had provided their views appeared to be very positive in terms of their goals and aspirations and those around them helping them to achieve this.

The Chair thanked the Officers and young people for their attendance and valuable contribution and hoped that there would be further opportunities for collaboration in the future.

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's current scrutiny investigation 'Preparing Young People for Adulthood and Independence'.

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided a verbal update in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 13 December 2022, namely:-

- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Executive Member Update – Councillor Polano, Executive Member for Regeneration – provided an update on current and ongoing work within his portfolio.
- Revenue and Capital Budget – Projected Outturn Position as at Quarter two 2022/23.
- Corporate Performance Update – Quarter two 2022/23.
- Scrutiny Chairs' Updates
- Next OSB meeting – Thursday, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 10am.

## **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 17 January 2023 at 10.00am, Mandela Room, Town Hall.