

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Wednesday 22 February 2023.

PRESENT: Councillors C Hobson (Chair), B Cooper, D Davison (Vice-Chair) and A Hellaoui

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillors

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Matthew and M Nugent

OFFICERS: V Banks, S Blood, T Dunn, A Hart, L Beevers, K Peacock, S Myers, L Hunter, S Turner and C Walker

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors D Coupe, T Higgins, M Saunders, Z Uddin, J Walker, M Smiles, R Brown, Jefferson, T Parkinson, P Rudd, D fenny, Dudding, G Nicholson and K Scraton

22/1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

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22/2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

22/3 **MINUTES-CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD- 11 JANUARY 2023**

The minutes of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 11 January 2023 were agreed and signed as true record.

22/4 **UPDATE ON CHILDREN IN CARE**

The Chair welcomed Claire Sowerby, Interim Director of children's social care to provide an update in relation to children in care.

Audit feedback had been positive and there was good practice in all 3 Looked after children team areas.

The board learnt that as of 06 March 2023, there were 514 children in care, against 702 at the same time in 2020. The Director outlined that this was a movable figure as 14 young people in care were turning 18 between January- March 2024 and it was likely that more young people would move into the care of the local authority.

In terms of staffing, there had been resignations from Kerrie Scarton, Interim Head of Service, Practice Leads/ Children with Disabilities and Paul Rudd, Residential Care Service Manager. Due to the changes in staff, the service wished to invest in our current staff and use existing skills and experience.

The Director was pleased to inform the board that Rob Hamer, Future of families' service manager and Susie Turner, Service Manager, Fostering, had been appointed to work collaboratively. The looked after service was a strength to children's services and therefore this needed to be celebrated and embraced.

AGREED- That the service update be noted.

FOSTERING SERVICE UPDATE

The Chair welcomed Susie Turner, Service manager- Fostering to the meeting, who was in attendance to provide a service update to the Board.

The service manager first outlined that since January 2023, there had been significant changes within the service. On 25 January 2023, the Foster carers fee increase was approved. Since then, the new finance policy has been written and signed off and a new foster carer agreement document created. Two meetings have taken place with carers to launch the new offer, which has coincided with a marketing strategy.

The service manager also advised that the Government had published a review on kinship care, looking at whether kinship carers should be provided with the same support (including financially) as foster parents. The board would be updated if an agreement was made.

Since the new foster carer offer had been agreed, the board learnt that:

- 8 families are undergoing assessment with panel dates booked
- 3 application forms have been received.
- 5 initial visits have been booked
- There were 3 active enquiries
- Foster carers from Independent fostering agencies (IFAs) had enquired about transferring back to Middlesbrough.

The offer means that more Middlesbrough children can stay in Middlesbrough and Carers are feel valued and most importantly more placement stability.

Carers will be held accountable for keeping their training, skills and knowledge up to date.

Success stories since the offer was introduced have been as follows:

- 5 carers who planned to transfer to an IFA are going to stay with Middlesbrough. These carers have 14 children between them.
- The annual cost of these children in an IFA would be £669,000. Some of these children are long term matched.
- We have recruited a resource worker and 2 fostering social workers permanently.
- IFAs and other Local Authorities have expressed that Middlesbrough have set a new standard for valuing and rewarding carers. This is attracting regional attention.

The service manager also outlined that since the fee increase, 4 carers have been able to give up work to provide further support and placements to Middlesbrough children. Between them they have offered 6 bedrooms, and some are able to take sibling groups. Within the fee increase, these placements and invaluable foster carers would have been lost.

She advised that as of 21.2.2023, there were 164 children placed in house with foster carers. This was a cost of £61,000 per week. There were still 158 children placed with IFA and this was currently costing the Council £130k per week. It was hoped that this new offer would mean more carers from IFAS would enquire to transfer back.

Finally the service manager outlined the plans going forward including:

- Bringing more children back in-house from IFAs – regular meetings with commissioning to look at this
- Increase recruitment activity at key events, information evenings etc.
- share children's referrals with carers who are near approval to start the matching process earlier

- Focused recruitment on carers who want to do long term fostering
- plan to deliver more training in house by our Social Workers to cut the costs of outside training and have more control over the content and regularity
- plan to develop a children who foster group for the children of foster carers, so that we can include and value them
- Include unregulated connected carers in our training offer to be ahead of the anticipated changes that the kinship care review will bring

Following the presentation, the panel did raise some concern that this offer had not been looked at previously, however regardless of this, were proud of the offer and what this would mean for Middlesbrough's children. The board heard that the offer does include goods as this is within the finance policy and mileage was also included.

A member outlined that she has attended a foster carers group and there has been some concern regarding a payment. The service head outlined that it was an interim cost of living payment that was paid to all mainstream carers with children between December 2022 and the point the new financial offer was approved.

A board member also enquired about foster carers for children from BME communities, and the service manager advice that there were a number of children placed and this had also been included within the marketing campaign.

Lastly, board members were invited to attend the Foster carer event on 10 March 2023 in the Crypt and to be panel members of Family placement planning. Further information on both would be circulated to the Board.

AGREED- That the information be noted.

22/6

SUFFICIENCY ACTION PLAN

The Chair welcomed Claire Walker, Strategic Procurement and Commissioning Manager to provide an update in relation to the sufficiency action plan.

The Board were provided with a short update, and were made aware that the following actions would be undertaken:

- Refresh of sufficiency action plan
- Manager would be working with the new Directors to develop the action plans. Updates would be provided to the Corporate Parenting Board as appropriate.
- Currently there was a block contract with 2 young people placed and one young person transitioning to enter the block.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

22/7

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

PROCLAIM

The Head of Virtual Schools provided an update in relation to PROCLAIM: Providing Rich Opportunities for Children who are Looked After In Middlesbrough, which in essence was to support and develop the capacity of school staff to meet the attachment and trauma needs for the benefit of the whole learning community.

The Board heard that work was ongoing and 10 Middlesbrough schools had signed up to the PROCLAIM project. In order to publicise the project a video was being produced.

22/8

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

ORDERED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that, if present, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1 and 3 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.

22/9

'WHAT MATTERS TO US' CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

Kathy Peacock, Voice and Influence Manager, Laurie Hunter, Communication and Engagement officer and Adam Hart, level 3 apprentice were in attendance, along with 5 care experienced young people.

The young people worked with the board members and officers on key themes which were important to them:

- Safety
- Mental Health
- Making Memories
- Community
- Education
- Support

It was agreed that the next session would focus on Education.