

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

Report of:	Director of Children's Care
Relevant Executive Member:	Executive Member for Children's Services
Submitted to:	You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board
Date:	13 March 2025
Title:	Children in Care Update
Report for:	Information
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Safe and resilient communities
Key decision:	Not applicable
Why:	Report is for information only
Subject to call in?:	Not applicable
Why:	Not applicable

Proposed decision(s)

No decision required, information only.

Executive summary

The information below provides an update for the Corporate Parenting Board for March 2025. The report is an outline of current numbers of children in our care and their circumstances in relation to permanence and education, training and employment.

The report is intended for information and further discussion by the committee.

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To inform the committee of the current numbers and brief circumstances of children in our care.
- 1.2 To inform the committee of actions being taken to improve the experience and outcomes for children in our care.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Corporate Parenting Board

- Acknowledges the information presented.
- Makes any recommendations and actions required.

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

3.1 Not applicable

4. Background and relevant information

4.1 We currently have 508 children who are cared for. 345 are supported by the Children Looked After Teams. 21 of our cared for young people are supported by Social Workers in the Children with Disability Service. 147 children and young people are subject to permanence planning within the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service and 3 children are cared for and open to the Assessment Teams.

4.2 Of those subject to care planning the majority are subject to legal processes in order to determine children's plans of permanence. We have 2 children in our care who are currently subject to Deprivation of Liberty Orders under the jurisdiction of the Court of Protection.

4.3 The additional 3 Social Workers in the cared for teams, funded by the DfE, will cease this month, as a result of the funding coming to an end. Although reunification work was already underway in the Corporate Parenting Service, this gave us additional capacity to review all children, open to the cared for children's teams. An additional 1.5 workers were also recruited for the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service to provide a similar resource. Reviews have continued to determine whether other Orders are suitable. This work has also assisted us to understand the barriers to carers pursuing alternative orders. It is apparent that funding and support post Order are the key concerns for carers. Increasingly we are in receipt of requests for the equivalent of Staying Put funds post 18 years for young people, before carers will consider becoming long-term carers for a child or young person.

4.4 The process of reunification is lengthy to complete the necessary assessments, as well as obtaining adult medicals for potential carers and updated DBS checks, which causes delay. In addition, the Court will allocate hearings when space in timetables allows, which

can also impact on timeliness. As much work as possible is completed prior to the case being filed to Court, to reduce delay once within this arena. However, on occasion, Guardians have not completed their work prior to the first hearing and request that the hearing is adjourned for them to complete their tasks, therefore creating further delay.

4.5 There were 4 applications for discharges of Care Orders made in February. The plan to apply for an additional 2 discharges of Care Orders continues to progress and will be made in March/April. One child's Care Order to be discharged has been filed with Court and a date is awaited. 6 applications for Special Guardian Orders will be made by the end of March. Work will continue regarding reunification and discharging of Orders, when the DfE workers finish. This will be from within the current teams across cared for teams and safeguarding and care planning, as this will be 'business as usual', for the service. Work has progressed with the teams over the past year, to move to a culture where Care Orders are continually reviewed, as opposed to being in place until a young person reaches 18, as well as work with the Courts to seek the least intrusive Order at the final hearing. This planning is progressed with the support of the IRO's who review plans for children and young people.

4.6 The Corporate Parenting Service has been working to establish a permanent workforce. In March 2024, there were no permanent managers within the Corporate Parenting area of the service. As of the 1st April 2025, the Head of Service, Service Manager and all 4 Team Manager roles will have permanent staff in them. All of the post holders were here with Middlesbrough on an agency basis and have converted to permanent posts. This has provided consistency for staff within the service, but also for the children, young people and families, during this transition. Similar work has progressed in the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service.

4.7 Approval was given in February 2025, for the Modernising Fostering transformation project to begin. This project covers a range of tasks. It will see the creation of a Kinship Team, which will provide support to carers, when Orders, such as, Special Guardianship Orders or Child Arrangement Orders have been granted. The service will also implement a review process to check that Support Plans continue to meet need or amendments can be made as required, to reflect changes within the family. The Team Manager has been recruited for this team and the Social Workers are now being recruited.

4.8 We are continuing to recruit foster carers, so that children and young people can live with carers who can meet their needs, locally. The aim is to reduce the use of Independent Fostering Agencies and residential children's homes, where appropriate. A review has commenced, of all children who have had 2+ moves, to further develop the wrap around support to foster carers. This seeks to have support plans in place, so that support is available to them at the earliest opportunity, should escalations of concern occur, to stabilise placements. We will establish a Mockingbird Constellation, which provides a model of linking foster carers, to create their own support network within their constellation. This is a recognised model for foster carers and is established in other Local Authorities.

4.9 Regarding 16 and 17 year olds, we have 111 young people. 14% (16) young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET) and 60% (67) are in employment, education or training (EET). 28 children show as having no defined outcome and data is being worked on within the teams to resolve the recording issues.

4.10 There are 249 care experienced young people who are open to the Pathways Service. 71 are aged between 21 and 25, with 176 aged between 18 and 21. 47% (118) care experienced young people are not in employment, education or training (NEET), 51% (127) are in employment, education or training (EET). 4 young people show as having no defined outcome and data is being worked on within the teams to resolve the recording issues.

4.11 The Pathways Service has continued to develop following the focused visit by Ofsted in July 2024. Work continues with Housing and Health to advise needs as soon as they are known, to assist with forward planning. A Care Leavers Hub is being established to replace the pop-up drop ins.

5. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended

5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

6.1 Not applicable information only report.

6.2 Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion

6.3 Not applicable information only report

6.4 Climate Change / Environmental

6.5 Not applicable information only report

6.6 Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers

6.7 Considered within the report.

6.8 Data Protection

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

None – report for information only.

Appendices

None.

Background papers

None.

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