

YOU MATTER TO US - CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the You Matter to Us - Corporate Parenting Board was held on Thursday, 3 April 2025.

PRESENT: Mayor C Cooke (Chair), L Henman, D Jackson, P Storey and Z Uddin.

OFFICERS: D Alaszewski, C Cannon, K Dargue, T Dunn, G Field, A Hart, R Horniman, T Jelfs, C McGarry, J McNally, G Nicholson, C O'Connor, K Peacock and J Tynan.

**APOLOGIES FOR
ABSENCE:**

Councillors I Blades, E Clynych, L Mason, M Nugent and L Young.

24/26 WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, introductions were made and the Fire Evacuation Procedure explained.

24/27 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

24/28 CARE EXPERIENCED YOUTH UPDATE

Members were provided with a Care Experienced Youth Voice update. A report was presented to update the Members on activity during the period February-March 2025.

Members were advised that the two care experienced young adults who had been Care Ambassadors for nearly two years had ended their involvement, to allow two more care experienced young adults to have this opportunity. It was advised that the closing date for applications was 4 April 2025.

Members heard that six young people currently attend "We Matter" (Middlesbrough's Children in Care Council) however this number could vary they currently meet fortnightly at Easterside Hub.

It was advised that the Voice Influence and Change Group had been postponed enabling the group to consider what it would look like in the future. However the first social event had been planned for 9 April 2025.

Members were advised that planned action over the coming months included:

- Care Leavers week 27-31 October 2025 – To include Scream Factory and a celebration event
- Easter activity events - 16th April 2025
- Regional CiCC residential -25-27 April 2025
- May activity event - 27th May 2025
- Football event -25th July (to include with older care experienced young people)
- Picnic in the Park - 5th August 2025
- Halloween party - 30th October 2025
- Christmas Party - 10th December 2025

A Care Ambassador questioned if the You Matter to Us Board were any closer to themes and suggested looking at pledges again however it was stated that momentum for pledges would need to be kept and the pledges needed to be timely, achievable, measurable and realistic.

A discussion took place, and it was agreed that themes should be planned across the year with a timetable. The Director of Children's Care advised that there were themes within the Participation Strategy. It was agreed that informal sessions should be arranged to look at an individual theme with feedback being brought back to the You Matter to Us Board. The Mayor requested that a spreadsheet be developed detailing what the Council was doing to support the elements of the Participation Strategy.

Agreed as follows:

1. **that the information provided be noted.**
2. **yearly timetable for themes to be developed.**
3. **informal sessions to be arranged to look at individual themes.**
4. **spreadsheet to be developed detailing support provided by the council to support the Participation Strategy.**

24/29

YOU MATTER TO US - PERFORMANCE

The Director of Children's Care presented the latest You Matter to Us Performance Data. The information provided had been compiled using the Children's Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) based on Ofsted's inspecting local authority services for children (ILACS) Annex A dataset (2020)/inspection report.

The following area's were highlighted:

- Number of children in care had reduced
- Reduction in the number of children coming into care had reduced
- 77 children looked after ceased
- Slight increase in adoptions and special guardianships
- Increase in keeping in touch
- Increase in accommodation suitability
- Increase in access to employment and training.

The Director of Children's Care advised that there had been a shift in the types of cases and supportive orders with a preventative approach were being used rather than care orders when possible.

Members heard that there were 30 cases that were being provided with the right support to prevent entering into S1 proceedings it was advised that it was only when absolutely necessary that cases entered into court proceedings. Very positive feedback had been provided by the courts.

Members were informed of the success of the Reunification Project that was funded through DfE the aim of the project was to return children to their families where it was safe to do so or to guardianships. Members heard that 86 children had been returned to their families, 15 children discharged with a different order, 19 had been returned to their parents with a discharge of orders and 22 children had been placed with a long-term match. The project enabled the team of 4 workers to speak with parents/guardians to ensure the right actions were put in place earlier it had also provided an increase in support groups for kinship carers.

A discussion took place regarding accommodation for care leavers it was advised that a protocol for housing had been developed to ensure housing was appropriate. Members felt that there were not enough housing providers and that commissioning for this service needed to be looked at. It was advised that the number of care leavers moving into private settings had increased, a Member queried if risk assessments were carried out before a young person moved it was advised that risk assessments were carried out on an individual basis.

Members agreed that housing should be a theme going forward and that a whole session be held to look at this, it was agreed that Louise Grabham attends the session.

AGREED, as follows:

1. **That the information provided was received and noted.**
2. **Whole session on housing be arranged with Louise Grabham in attendance.**

24/30

ADOPTION TEES VALLEY - BI-ANNUAL REPORT

This item was deferred to a future meeting of the You Matter to Us Corporate Parenting Board.

24/31

INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER (IRO) ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Quality, Learning and Review was in attendance to present the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report.

Members were advised that the IRO Team comprised of 14 FTE Independent Reviewing Officers, overseen by 2 Team Managers. The team had a wealth of skills and expertise from experience within Safeguarding and Care Planning, Cared for children, Early Help, substance misuse, exploitation, and Children with Disabilities.

The range of skills within the team were complementary and foster a culture of learning and development. The team also had a dedicated IRO who undertook foster Care Reviews. The team had remained stable, with most of the IROs having been in post for over 5 years. All IROs were permanent members of staff. The position of the team in the Children's Directorate structure had remained the same throughout 2021/22 to currently.

The team had direct access to the Director of Children's Social Care and were able to meet on a regular basis to share their insight into the challenges and improvements in practice and plans for our children and young people.

To provide assurance, the IRO team reported progress to the Director of Children's Social Care at Monthly Performance meetings.

The team also contributed to a range of panels which provided senior management oversight of planning for children and young people.

These included: -

- Legal Gateway Panel
- Permanency Monitoring Group
- Child Protection Review Panel

The IRO's maintained their focus on the children and families of Middlesbrough and were committed to making a difference for them. As Middlesbrough's improvement journey had seen improvements in planning for children and young people, the caseloads of IRO's had fallen by 42% between 2021/22 and 2023/24.

The Head of Quality, Learning and Review advised the Board that there had been a major change to the Child Protection Panel, previously Middlesbrough was signed up to the Teeswide Procedure which meant that IRO's sitting on the panel from other local authorities did not have the authority to escalate or challenge a process when a plan was not working however this procedure had now changed.

A Care Ambassador stated that it was positive for a young person to have the same IRO and thanked the IRO team for their hard work.

AGREED that the information provided be received and noted.

24/32

MISSING FROM CARE - POLICE/INTERNAL - SIX-MONTHLY UPDATE

The Head of Partnerships and the Risk and Resilience Manager provided an update to Board Members on Children Missing from Home or Care.

It was advised that a missing child was defined as anyone whose whereabouts could not be established and where the circumstances were out of character, or the context suggested the person may be subject of crime or at risk of harm to themselves or another.

Members were advised that the Children's Society through its research had identified some of the following risk factors in the lead up to a child going missing:

- Arguments and conflicts
- Poor family relationships
- Physical and emotional abuse
- Peer Pressure

- Placed out of the area
- Exploitation

The Head of Partnerships stated that from August 2024 to February 2025 Middlesbrough had 641 missing episodes for 295 children. In February 2025 there were 45 missing from home episodes which involved 19 cared for children, 100% of children were offered a Return to Home interview with 73% completing the interview. It was advised that the Return to Home Interview which was offered to all children who go missing from home or care within 72 hours of their return was a statutory requirement. Of the 45 children who went missing, 7 had gone missing on 3 or more occasions in the month, 6 of these children had been referred or were already known to Harm outside the Home arrangements and had significant professional involvement and robust plans are in place.

Members were advised that as a minimum standard, the following missing cases had to be subject of multi-agency information sharing and problem solving:

- All children who had been missing 3 or more times in a 30-day period
- Any child who has had a missing episode categorised as high risk
- Any child where the return to home interview identifies the child has been or is vulnerable to child sexual exploitation, child criminal exploitation or being trafficked.
- Any child missing from home for 72 hours

Members heard that the Missing from Home Team sat within Children's Services within the Risk and Resilience Team in the Education and Partnerships Directorate. The team consisted of 1 Missing from Home Co-ordinator and 2 Missing from Home Practitioners. The role of the team was to work with children who have had a missing from home or care episode. Children could be signposted to partner agencies as part of engagement work or partners can form part of a multi-agency plan to support the child.

Members were advised that a joint audit with the police was being undertaken on missing children and that additional information including missing episodes – school type, missing episodes – placement type were being included in future analysis.

The Chair requested that a summary of the joint audits be provided to the next meeting of the You Matter to Us Board.

Agreed that:

1. **The information presented be noted.**
2. **A summary of the joint audit with the police be presented to the next You Matter to Us Board meeting.**

24/33

CARE LEAVERS' HUB - VERBAL UPDATE

The Director of Regeneration was in attendance and provided a verbal update to the Board on the Care Leavers Hub which would be based in the Collaboration Zone of Fountain Court.

The Board were advised that the Care Leavers Hub would be operational the first week of June 2025. There were two options available for the Hub either use of the full space or a partition wall could be installed to accommodate additional children's services.

One of the Care Ambassadors questioned if an oven would be made available for young people to use it was advised that there was currently an oven in the space but no washing machine however one would be installed. It was also queried if there had been involvement with the design from young people the Director of Regeneration stated that the space would be handed over to Children's Services as it however everything currently in the space apart from the kitchen was not fixed and could be moved to suit. It was also advised that two of the current toilets would be replaced with showers.

Members all felt that it would be a good space for young people, and it would have a positive impact.

Agreed that:

1. The verbal update was noted.
2. The Director of Regeneration to share the plans via email and consult with young people.

24/34

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