

**CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD**

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Wednesday 10 February 2021.

**PRESENT:** Councillors A Hellaoui (Chair), T Higgins (Vice-Chair), M Nugent, J Platt, Z Uddin, J Walker and C Dodds

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillors

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:**

**OFFICERS:** S Blood, S Butcher, K Dargue, T Dunn, R Farnham, P Jemson, T Parkinson, Bradshaw, Hunter and Russell

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors A High, J McTigue, C Wright, V Banks, R Brown, N Ayres and R Scott

16 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

17 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

18 **MINUTES FROM CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD MEETING HELD ON 14 DECEMBER**

The minutes of Corporate Parenting Board held on 14 December 2020 were read and agreed as a true record.

19 **COVID-19 UPDATE**

The Chair invited the Director of Children's Service to provide an update in respect to Covid 19. The Director advised that she was updating the Corporate Parenting Board as well as the Scrutiny Panel's. This was an action that came from the Improvement plan and is highlighted within the Recovery plan.

In terms of Social care workers, the Board were advised that all social workers were working virtually, however in terms of visits to children, these should be done face-to face with virtual being an exception. If a child is to be seen virtually, this is to be signed off by a Manager.

In terms of vulnerable children, there is a real push to ensure these children are in school. Children Services receive daily information from Public Health England on those vulnerable children who have covid or who are self-isolating and there is also a direct line for schools to report any absence of a vulnerable child who has failed to attend school with no explanation. A note is placed on the child's file and passed to the Social Worker, then a RAG rating is placed red/amber/green and a safety plan is put in place. The system is working and the service cross reference with attendance spreadsheets from schools.

The Director advised that the attendance levels of vulnerable children in school is not what she hoped and she was encouraging attendance of vulnerable children wherever possible. For example, there was approximately 70% of vulnerable children in schools. Those children who they would be looking to get into schools would be those on child protection orders (at present less than 50%) and therefore there are discussions taking place with social workers to address this.

The Director advised that she reports regularly to REACT, which is with representatives from the Department of Education, who hold Middlesbrough to account regionally. Staffing is measured between 0-10% of staff who are not available, however the staff sickness levels are quite low.

Following the update, a number of questions posed:

1. Have all escorts for school transport been vaccinated?

In response, the Board were advised that all escorts have been vaccinated.

2. In terms of vulnerable children, is it compulsory for them to attend school?

In response, the Director outlined that there is very strong guidance to suggest all vulnerable children should attend school as it is the safest place.

3. Social worker visits- how often do these take place?

The needs of the child vary and this is determined by the needs of the child.

4. How are situations of vulnerable children not attending school being addressed?

In response, the Director advised that vulnerable children are allocated a social worker and they are strongly encouraged to attend school.

5. Although, the Board is aware that teachers carry out lateral flow tests, when is it likely for teachers to be vaccinated?

All Middlesbrough schools are open and all staff who work in special schools have been vaccinated, as they are not just teaching but also undertaking a caring role.

In terms of vaccinations for all teachers, central government is not of the opinion that they should be priorities and that we should work through the 9 priority groups, and then wait for those to be called if they do not fit within the priority groups. Middlesbrough and other local authorities are critical of this stance, so the Board were advised Middlesbrough would continue to work with teachers unions/ Academy Trusts and the Department of Education and lobby change. Many teachers are anxious and are resentful that their position is not considered within the priority groups, especially as there is evidence that Covid is transferred through children.

6. Have foster carers been vaccinated?

In response, the Board were advised that foster carers have been prioritised and appointment have begun to be circulated.

The Chair thanked the Director and her staff for the excellent work in rolling out the vaccines to teachers from special schools.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

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## **UPDATE FROM CLEVELAND POLICE - PHILOMENA PROTOCOL**

The Chair welcomed Detective Chief Inspector 754 Deb Fenny to the meeting to provide an update to the Board on the Philomena Protocol.

The Detective Chief Inspector outlined that the Philomena Protocol went live across the 4 local authorities in January 2021, and the Force was still in the process of recruiting the missing from home coordinators to promote the protocol across the local authorities. Once the coordinators were in post, they would be deployed across the force and embedded within the departments to ensure a coordinated approach was carried out in the event of a 'missing from home'.

As outlined at the last meeting, the Detective Chief Inspector outlined that the protocol is used when a child in care goes missing and used for the high risk child who go missing from home. As the protocol had just been relaunched, there was currently no statistical information on its roll out, however it was hoped more

information could be provided to the Board at the March meeting.

The Chair asked whether it would be possible for the Protocol to be circulated to all Board members and for the Chief Inspector to provide a data set of effectiveness since it came into place and comparisons to previous years.

### **AGREED- That the update be noted**

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### **VOICE OF THE CHILD/ PARTICIPATION UPDATE**

The Chair welcome the Beth Bradshaw, Voice of the Child Manager and Laurie Hunter, support officer for the Member of Youth Parliament (MYP) of Middlesbrough to the meeting.

The Support officer firstly shared an online blog which had been produced by the member of youth Parliament for Middlesbrough and Deputy Member of Youth Parliament. .

The Support officer read out the blog from the Deputy Member of Youth Parliament from Middlesbrough, which was as follows:

*Hi everyone!*

*I'm Batool (the DMYP) and recently, alongside (the MYP) Muskaan and Middlesbrough Council, we have launched Middlesbrough's very own Youth Council! We had the launch meeting on the 14th of January and had 22 wonderful attendees. During the launch we explained the aims of the Youth Council and got to know a bit about each other and how everyone would like the Youth Council to be ran. It's important for us to be flexible around other young people's timetables since we understand how hectic life can be. We also played a Kahoot quiz, which became slightly competitive but fun nonetheless! Our agenda for the next session is to elucidate to everyone the components of a meeting, so the Chair, minute taker and Blogger and also collate what the Members' priorities are. This way, we can hopefully have a vote and decide what to campaign about/ focus on for the future. I can't wait!*

At the meeting, Muskaan are the Chair and Batool was minute taker. The Support Worker shared some of the positive feedback the Youth Council from some of the participants. The Youth Council has made a big influence on young people's mental health and they are happy and excited to see its future.

The Chair asked the Support Officer to convey the Board thanks to the MYP, DMYP and Youth Council members and asked whether in the future whether members of the Board could be invited to one of the meetings.

The Voice of the Children Manager went on to provide an update to the Board in relation to Participation. Her presentation was to update the Corporate Parenting Board on participation activity across Children's services.

The following areas were discussed:

#### **1. Middlesbrough Youth Council**

22 Young people aged 11-18 attended the initial launch meeting – January 2021.

At the second meeting of the Youth Council, the group **consulted on their key focus areas and agreed the following:**

- A Curriculum for Life
- Tackle Child Poverty
- Increase racial awareness in the curriculum
- Free University

- Take Action on the Climate Emergency

**The group agreed that:**

- Meetings would take place every 3 weeks
- Young people will be allocated specific roles to support the group.

This will be decided by an election process.

The Coordinator also advised that they had been looking at wider participation through the children in care Council and have been engaging through social media as well as other communication paths.

The Cleveland Police Youth Commission held a number of workshops and invited Middlesbrough young people to attend, some of the themes were as follows:

- Hate Crime and Online Crime focus group - This will allow young people to provide their experiences whilst helping to identify the forms of Hate and Online Crime. Young people can also suggest ways that Cleveland Police can help reduce Hate Crime and Online Crime.
- Drugs and Alcohol Issues- This survey explores addiction, helps to identify helplines whilst allowing young people to suggest ways to tackle this issue
- Exploring young people's relationship with the Police- Exploring how the relationship between the police and young people can be mended, whilst looking at their stop and search rights.
- Youth Activities and Preventing Offending – A discussion about how youth activities can be implemented in Middlesbrough area to reduce offending or re-offending? What else do young people think can be done?
- Mental Health Awareness - Especially in COVID, mental health issues are more prevalent as ever! What do young people think can be done by the Police to help this

Jo Russell, from Public Health has also organised a Sexual Health focus group – working with young people to help improve the Sexual Health services across Middlesbrough.

## **2. Engagement Groups**

- **Mini CICC**  
5 members - An internal email has gone out to all resource workers and social workers to encourage engagement of children and young people in this group. Sue Butcher has also encouraged staff to have conversations with young people about attending this group.

The young people that attend enjoy the group, as it gives them some 'away' time from school and allows them to be themselves.

- **Children in Care Council**  
The Coordinator advised that this has been the most difficult group to recruit too, however the Care Leavers are looking to facilitate session themselves and a virtual Children in Care Council virtual session ran by Care Leavers will take place in March 2021.

The Care Leavers are currently developing a recruitment video and which they hope will attract new members to the group.

- **Care Leavers forum**  
There are currently 6 active members of the group. They meet weekly and speak regularly via the Care Leavers forum Whatsapp group. A CAMHS worker attends every session to support any mental health needs.

Recent tasks for the groups have been:

- The recruitment of the Participation Officer
- Supporting the Bid for the Digital Resilience – Online safety funding
- Identifying priorities for 2021
- Supporting Care Leavers during COVID e.g. a hug in a mug.

### **3. Wider children's services communications.**

In terms of communication, the service ran Joyful January, where we asked staff to promote the success if our children looked after and care leavers.

### **4. Participation team updates**

- The Participation Officer has been recruited. They will start in **March 2021**.
- Communications and Engagement officer role will be interviewed **February 2021**. The successful candidate will support the Middlesbrough Children Matter vision, wider Children's services communications and the engagement groups in Middlesbrough.
- The Voice of the Child Manager role will be up for recruitment in **February 2021**

The Coordinator advised that the Care Leavers forum, in terms of recruitment of staff, help write the job description and also sit on the young person's panel.

### **Work streams**

- The team will be working alongside the Practice Lead to embed the voice of children and young people on the front line.
- The team will also be working in partnership with the Internal Communications team to ensure a joint up approach to communications to all Children's Service staff and families.
- A participation champion will be identified in the SEN service to lead on a work plan designed to increase the engagement of children and young people in their EHCP, SEN support and independence plans.

The Board congratulated the team and the young people with their progress and role.

The Chair also stated that the Voice of the Child Manager was to be leaving the Council and she extended her thanks and support for all her hard work during her time with Middlesbrough Council.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

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## **MALAP SPOTLIGHT REPORT**

The Chair provided an update in respect to the Multi agency looked after partnership (MALAP) spotlight reports. She advised that the Board that there were now going to be 2 spotlight reports running in parallel with each other.

In terms of Spotlight 1 report, the Chair had been interviewing Chairs of Corporate Parenting Board whose local authority children's services were deemed good to outstanding, however after a discussion with the Chair of the Director of Children's services was now in touch with two authorities who were on the same journey of improvement as Middlesbrough- Wakefield and Bradford.

The Improvement Officer for Middlesbrough also works for Wakefield and Bradford and therefore it seems helpful to speak to these authorities.

The Chair had advised that the Chairs' whom she had spoken to, were keen to develop a Chair of Corporate Parent Board forum, which would allow further exploration and to share good practice.

The Chair invited the Voice of the Child Manager to address the Board to discuss plans for Spotlight 2.

Our aim of the spotlight is to show that the children of Middlesbrough matter by the Corporate Parenting Board.

The Corporate Parenting Board has six focus areas:

1. Your Home
2. Your Family and Friends
3. Your Education
4. Your Adult Life
5. Your Health and Wellbeing
6. Your Voice and Influence.

The aim of the proposal is that each board member is allocated to a specific guiding principle and is responsible for leading in that area.

Each board member is allocated to a specific Guiding principle and is responsible for leading in that area.

It is proposed that board member/s will make a pledge to support that specific area for 6 months. The video will include:

- What their Guiding principle is
- What this means for children and young people
- What their pledge is for the next 6 months
- How this will impact on the lives of children/young people.

#### Next steps

1. An initial meeting for all councillors who are on the Corporate Parenting Board committed to supporting this work will be organised. This would provide more insight on their role. *Expressions of interest to be sent to Susie Blood.*
2. Councillors will be asked to express their interest in 2 areas, some councillors can choose to work together.
3. Council officers will work alongside the councillors to create measurable outcomes for their area and monitor progress.
4. The spotlight reports will be delivered at scheduled meetings throughout the year.

#### AGREED-

- That the progress made with spotlight 1 be noted.
- That an email to be circulated by the Democratic Services officer to all councillors in respect to spotlight 2

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## **ADOPTION TEES VALLEY- BI -ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chair welcomed the Service Manager from Adoption Tees Valley to present the bi-annual report which covered the period of 1.4.20-30.9.20

The Manager advised that she would discuss some of the key issues/ challenges and issue how this has been overcome. The first 6 months of the year has been dominated by Covid which brought challenges, although ATV dealt with the challenges were dealt with well and in terms of children being adopted, the service had placed more children than the corresponding period in the previous year.

#### Covid-19

Covid undoubtedly has had a massive impact on adoptive services, and on planning for children to be placed with their permanent new families.

The government issued amended regulations and flexibilities on operating adoption services and these were reflected upon, including how ATV has used the flexibilities.

The Manager advised that one of the main aspects that stopped initially during the first lockdown of the pandemic was the placing of children. Like many local authorities, Middlesbrough chose to temporarily stop moving children into adoptive families, however continued to develop childrens' care plans and matches to panel.

During this time ATV worked with the Adoption leads across the Tees Valley (Paula Jemson in Middlesbrough) and developed a thorough risk assessment to include everyone who would be included in the child's plan in moving on e.g. child, foster carer, adoptive parents, and all workers.

When ATV decided to start to reintroduce visits, these risk assessments continued and are signed off by the service Manager.

Children began to move into their adoptive families in May 2020. Each placement was underpinned by the risk assessment, taking account of all parties, and in line with Stockton Borough Council policy for covid, and policies for the placing Local authority. In the first 2 quarters 45 children have been placed with adoptive families, compared to 33 from the previous year. Placing children takes integrated collective work with children's services and this has been a real success.

Amended regulations from Government.

The manager advised that the government issues a number of amendments to the regulations, these were as follows:

Adoption agencies were no longer required to constitute an adoption panel but had the power to do so. If they chose to constitute an adoption panel, only 3, instead of 5, panel members, of which one must be an independent person, were required for it to be quorate.

Adoption agencies were permitted to make a decision that a prospective adopter may enter the assessment (Stage 2) even if information in relation to the health of the adopter, and the DBS had not yet been obtained. Where the agency decided that the adopter was not suitable to adopt because of information received in relation to these checks in stage 2, the prospective adopter may not make an application to have their case reviewed by the IRM.

The adoption agency may decide that a child relinquished for adoption does not require being referred to the adoption panel.

The adoption agency may decide not to hold a review of the child's case under adoption agency regulations, where it decides that it is not practicable to carry out a review of the child's case, and it is satisfied that a review is not necessary to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child.

In response to these regulations, ATV agreed to do the following:

A panel has always been convened for usual panel business. No adopter has been approved, and no match has proceeded to a decision, without being considered at the adoption panel.

The Agency produced amended procedures to allow for the possibility that the panel may not achieve quoracy of 5, in unforeseen circumstances. On 4 occasions the agency has operated with 4 panel members, and on all other occasions, there have been at least 5 panel members. The panel is independently chaired, and there is always at least 2 further independent panel members.

No relinquished child has been referred or considered within this period.

The agency has progressed adopters to stage 2 of the assessment process, without having yet obtained health information, and/or DBS information. This has been necessary, as GP's have not been able to prioritise adoption medicals of prospective adopters. This has taken place in 9 cases.

No adopter who were required by regulation to have a medical assessment have been approved without a medical assessment having taken place and considered by one of the Agency medical Advisors.

Social Work Practice

The Board were advised that much of the social work practice has taken place via video conferencing, especially in the early days of lockdown. The Manager outlined that social workers and families reported that where a relationship existed, continuing via video conferencing did not significantly affect assessment work, or support work.

However in the later stages of the period, social workers felt that where they had not met the adopters previously, there was concern about the degree to which they were satisfied that they were able to get to know families without meeting them on more than one occasion. Due to this, the service agreed that more face to face visits were needed and this had been progressed. At all times, children's safety and welfare has been the priority and all adopter assessment work is about finding good safe homes for children. In terms of assessment work, the face to face visits have been limited, however the service has learnt a great deal from the pandemic e.g. about times for meetings.

Adoption panel has operated totally on a video conferencing platform. And whilst initially, Panel Chairs and panel members took some time to get used to this method, it is being used well to manage all panel Business, and there is no evidence of less rigour in considering cases.

The Service Manager expressed that there have been some challenges in respect to checks and medical issues, as whilst ATV has been fully operating, not all employers are in work, and therefore a significant amount of time has been taken up with chasing up the required information.

#### Middlesbrough's situation

In terms of progress in Middlesbrough, the Service Manager outlined that within the first 2 quarters more children were being referred and more being placed for adoption, and more adoption orders have been achieved. The Board were made aware that on the converse there has been some longer adoption scorecard timescales for Middlesbrough as there have been some children who have waited a long time to be adopted. However it is important to remember that there have been some really positive outcomes for children who have been placed, and are now adopted and have achieved a permanent family. In terms of positives, we have had two groups of sibling groups of three children who have been adopted together. Over the period, we have had 7 children over the age of 5 who have been adopted and this is something that should be celebrated.

Middlesbrough Council have had 23 children placed for adoption this financial year, and there have been 19 adoption orders granted.

In terms of timescales, Middlesbrough and ATV have worked closely together and the Service Manager has been attended the improvement board to discuss permanency. We have been working in an integrated way to highlight where there are challenges in terms of some of the processes involved there has been some positive work.

#### Early Permanency

The Board also learnt of the work around early permanence. The Service Manager outlined that ATV have been looking at "whole system change" and have been working with children's services, IRO's and family justice boards to put plans in place to consider Planning for early permanence and looking at the legal measures available. The outcome is that ATV want to look at reducing movement for children in care and helping children be placed at an earlier stage with their permanent carers, which is known has better outcomes for children..

#### Middlesbrough practice week for Children's Services

This will be taking place in March 2021 and information would be shared with the Corporate Parenting Board in due course. ATV will be contributing to this as ATV have been looking at how they can work more collectively with the 5 local authorities.

#### Lifestory work

There have been challenges in Quarter 1 and 2 over lifestory work and there have been in-depth discussions about when life story work is undertaken and whether ATV have the correct model in place.

There has been early planning to develop life story work much earlier and ATV have been looking at digital platforms. ATV are also working with a PHD student from Newcastle University around lifestory work, and we hope to be able to provide some outcomes from this study in near future.



The Manager wanted to recognise the work of her team in ATV and social workers in the Local Authorities and noted the hard work and shared approach from ATV and the local authorities.

Following the presentation, the number of Board members made comment in relation to the lifestory work and although covid has been difficult, it had been positive in adapting different communication methods for perspective adaptors. Paula Jemson also added that there had been a 35% improvement in Middlesbrough of children being placed, which is a huge achievement.

The Chair gave her thanks to the Service Manager and all staff involved.

AGREED- That the report be noted.