

CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD

A meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board was held on Tuesday 20 July 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors D Davison (Chair), A Hellaoui, T Higgins, C Hobson, L Garvey (Vice-Chair) A Preston and J Walker

PRESENT BY INVITATION:

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

OFFICERS: S Blood, V Banks, R Brown, S Butcher, P Jemson, T Parkinson, P Rudd, R Scott, D Skaife, M Myrie, Beevers, S Bonner and S Chouhan

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors Z Uddin, C Wright, K Dargue, T Dunn, R Farnham and B Cooper

21/93 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

The Chair received the apologies for absence.

21/94 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

21/95 **MINUTES- CORPORATE PARENTING BOARD- 21 APRIL 2021 AND ACTION PLAN**

The minutes and action plan from the meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board held on 21 April 2021 were read and accepted as a true record.

21/96 **COVID- 19 UPDATE**

The Director of Children's services advised that the Covid-19 update was agreed to be presented to the Corporate Parenting Board, along with the two children's scrutiny panels as long as it was appropriate to do so.

The Director outlined that there had been a spike in covid 19 rates. Middlesbrough has an infection rate of 1,359.6 per 100,000 population and back on 21 April 2021 the infection rate was 26.2 per 100,000 population. This has had a significant impact on schools, the list of schools where bubbles have burst and staff are self-isolating has risen.

To date, 38 schools have had burst bubbles, 173 staff are self-isolating and 2,045 children are self-isolating.

In terms of staffing, the Chief Executive has advised that all staff must work from home, except unless there are exceptional circumstances and all council meetings, which do not require a decision will continue to be held virtually.

With the summer holidays and rate of covid, there is a need to keep an eye on service delivery to children and young people.

In terms of children looked after who are self-isolating, however the Head of Virtual Schools advised she would circulate a report to members in due course.

AGREED-

That the update be noted

ACTION-

Information regarding number of children looked after self-isolating to be circulated to Board members.

PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The Chair welcomed the Head of Strategic Services and Participation officer to the meeting.

The Head of Strategic Services outlined that the participation work-stream has been a victim of Covid, as the suspension of physical meetings has had an effect on participation of children and young people nationally. Covid has affected how the Council has been able to progress the voice and influence and strategic planning. Children and young people have been involved in the past year with virtual learning so there was a degree of screen fatigue and therefore trying to engage outside school virtually has been difficult at times.

To conquer this, the team have redesigned the Participation Strategy, with the focus on recovery. To assist with this, the Head of Services had used vacant positions to resource a company called Participation People, who will work with the Council to deliver a year Participation Service for children and young people in Middlesbrough. Participation People deliver award-winning youth voice development & evaluation projects and training, with public and charity organisations across the UK. They have worked with/are continuing to work with other local authorities including Birmingham, Greenwich and Dorset and the Participation People contributed to achieving the highest election turnout in a seven year history of the Young Mayor scheme, standing at 73% of young people voting in the London Borough of Newham Council.

The Team have developed a road map and this will be delivered to the Participation and Communication Board, which will outline the key pieces of work to be undertaken.

Some of the work which Participation People will be involved in is as follows:

- Over the next 6 months, they will be working on a campaign to support our understanding of identity of young people and families in our town to improve the way the Council support them. Looking at “what makes me”, which was highlighted in the Ofsted Inspection report.
- There will be a focus on youth participation and engagement events that will be ran over the next 12 months for Middlesbrough Youth Participation champions and Corporate Parents.
- Re-design the engagement strategy to support how we can engage young people after lockdown.
- Strengthen the involvement of SEND children and young people and hard to reach group in all participation activities.

In terms of good news stories, the Head of Strategic Services advised the following:

- One of the Care Leavers, Xavier started his apprenticeship with Middlesbrough Council as the new Youth Training Development Officer.
- 2 of our young people from the Care Leavers Forum have been asked to join the Middlesbrough Family Placement Panel.
- Working closely with the SEN team to start developing a new SEN focus group for young people.
- The Participation Team are working with the Task and Finish group for NEET/Care leavers in order to make opportunities more available to our young people.
- Our young people did a great job attending the briefing for ‘Your Voice and Influence’ as part of ‘Our Middlesbrough Family Week’. They had lots of comments about how well they spoke.
- There was now an award dedicated to Middlesbrough Children Matter in the Civic Community Awards 2021.

The Head of Strategic Services brought the Participation Officer in to provide information to the Board on the participation groups (Children in Care Council (CICC) and Mini Children in Care Council (Mini CICC)).

He advised the Board of the following:

- There has been difficulty holding these groups due to Covid, however the first virtually meeting took place with 5 young people which was fun.
- Numbers are improving but they are waiting for face to face meetings and they are excited for this.
- Young carers have also shown interest in the Care leavers forum, but again they are waiting for the forum to be held face to face before they commit.
- Regardless of this, the Participation officer outlined that there has been more engagement from Young People in both groups through weekly phone calls and the Pathways Team have been working closely with the Participation Team to introduce care leavers to the forum.
- Some of our young people from both groups met with Ofsted during the inspection.
- More engagement from Social Workers and IROs passing on young people who may be interested in joining our groups.

Next Steps for CICC and Mini CICC

1. Continue to increase engagement working with others across Children Services who can refer young people
2. Start planning for our first face to face meeting
3. Agree on workshops that will take place once lockdown has finished
4. Start focusing on how we will make a difference across Children's Services by using the groups voice

Next steps for Care Leavers Forum

1. Continue to engage with new members who are interested in joining the forum.
2. Put together a proposal of events for Care Leavers Week
3. Plan how we want the group to run after lockdown

Following the Presentation, a Board member queried how many young people were involved in the participation groups. In response, the following information was provided:

- Youth Council- between 10 and 20 members
- Mini CICC- 5- 6 young people
- Care Leavers forum- 5 members with 3 consistent members.

The Participation officer outlined that the youngest young person they speak to is 8 years old and eldest was 24.

Outside the groups, the Team have been engaging with young people, through surveys in the schools. A Board member asked whether there were comparators e.g 5 children out of how many children looked after and also the questions asked in the questionnaires. The Head of Strategic Services outlined that this would be circulated to members.

A Board member also outlined that we should celebrate that young people are joining but we should look at different ways of how we can make the groups more appealing. However the groups made up a small part of the participation that was taking place.

In terms of apprenticeships, the Chair queried whether the Council kept in touch with our care leavers who hold apprenticeships and whether there was a possibility to offer more to care leavers.

The Participation Officer advised that there is a task and force group so we are aware of job opportunities and ensure these go out through the text and email service. The Head of Looked after Children and Corporate Parenting also advised that the group meet monthly to review all care leavers who are NETT and this is done in participation with virtual schools, community learning and youth offending service and additional partners. They group look at opportunities as well as apprenticeships.

In terms of social media, the team would be working with Participation People to find out what means/apps of communication they use and this will be rolled out with Middlesbrough young people.

The Care leavers forum have a whatsapp group, and the Voice of the Child have looked at setting up a social media plan e.g. facebook, twitter etc.

AGREED:

1. That the information be noted
2. That comparative numbers relating to CICC, Mini CICC and Care leavers be circulated to the Board.

21/98

PERFORMANCE FIGURES ALIGNED TO THE CORPORATE PARENTING STRATEGY

The Analytics Manager was in attendance and provided the Board with information relating to the Corporate Parenting Board scorecard.

The main points to note were as follows:

Numbers and trends

CP1- Number of children in care in Middlesbrough-Trend

- Children looked after numbers have vastly improved, dropping down below the 550 mark for the first time in 13 months and continue to decrease month on month.
- Children looked after were down 19% in comparison to the same point last year and 24% down in comparison to the highest number recorded in July-2020 at 692.
- In recent months between May and June this year Children looked after have decreased by 2.1%, below the 2020-21 target.

CP2- Gap between Middlesbrough and Regional Children in care Rate per 10,000 – Trend

- The rate of Looked after Children per 10,000 started to steadily decline in August-2020, recently reaching the lowest rate in 13 months at 56.51 - a 8.4% decrease in comparison to the same point last year.
- Though still remain above all external benchmarks, we are showing significant improvement.

CP3. Ratio of children entering to leaving care – Trend

- The ratio of children starting a period of care was showing a steep decline, while those ceasing a period of care is showing a sharp increase. The ratio of children entering to leaving care was down by 81% in June-21, in comparison to the highest point in Aug/Sept-20. The current value is below the 2020-21 target.

CP4. Proportion of total CS budget spent on CiC services – Trend

- The proportion of total Children's Services budget spend on Children in Care services has improved significantly since Sept-20 at 79.40%.
- Though in comparison to Q4 2020-21 the proportion has increased by 1.4% in Q1 2021-22, remaining above the 2020/21 Target by 3.3%.

CP5. FTE Caseloads between 15-20 – Trend

- FTE Caseloads between 15-20 reveals the peak caseload % was in January - 2021 at 41.80%, still 2.9% below the 2020-21 target.
- The steady decline started in February -2021, slightly peaking in May- 2021, improving to 28% in June-21.

Permanency**CP6. Average number of weeks children spend in care (Ceasing Care in Month) – Trend**

- The average number of weeks' children spend in care displays peaks in January 2020, with the highest recorded in Aug-20 at 361.00, a 162.45% difference between the lowest number of weeks recorded in June-2020.
- Since the peak, the average number of weeks have improved, falling below the 2020-21 Target. This highlights the positive turnaround for children in care, with increases in those ceasing care month-on-month.

CP7. % of CiC where plan of permanence has been ratified – Trend

- The % of children in care where a plan of permanence has been agreed gradually increased month-on month, recently exceeding the 2021-21 target by 4% in June-21. This highlights that the timeliness of permanence agreements are significantly improving.

CP8. % of permanence arrangements resulting in Special Guardianship Order (SGO) – Trend

- The % of permanence arrangements resulting in SGO was above the 2020-21 target, 20%, across all recorded months. The highest recorded % was in November-2020 at 30%, a 6% difference in comparison to June-2021 at 24%.

CP9. % of Children in Care placed with parents on care orders at home – Trend

- The number of Children in Care placed with care orders at home exceeds the 2020/21 target across all months, peaking in Sept-2020 at 15%. In recent months the % has slowly declined, reaching the lowest in June-21 at 11%, a 2% decrease in comparison to 13 months prior.

CP10. % of CiC secured in adoptive placements VS % of Children Adopted – Trend

- The number of children that secured an adoptive placement remains relatively stable, reaching 4% in July/Aug-20. The significant improvement of CLA numbers in the last 6 months has had an impact on the slight decline in both the number adoptive placements and the number of children adopted.

CP11. Average time in days between entering care and placed in adoptive placement-Trend

- There was no data due to ALB who do the data for the country had changed the indicator, and therefore there were finding a slightly different indicator and would report at the next meeting.

Sufficiency and Placements**CP12 % of CiC placed outside of 20 miles of home postcode - 12 Month Trend**

- The % of children in care placed outside of 20 miles of home postcode remained above the 2020-21 target, 15%. The % remained relatively stable ranging from the lowest recorded % in Nov/Dec-2017 at 17% to the highest recorded in June-21 at 20%. The average % of children in care placed outside of 20 miles of home postcode averages at 18% over the last 13 months.

CP13 and CP14 - 12 Month Trend (% of Children in care placed in in-house foster placements VS % of Children in care placed with Connected Carers)

- The % of children in care placed with Connected Carers continues to be the higher % of placement types, accounting for 21.8% of all CLA placements in June-2021. Though the % of In-house foster carer placements showed a steady improvement since Feb-20, reaching 21.7% in June-2021 - only 0.1% difference

when comparing to Connected Carers. Both placement types began to outperform the 2020-21 targets in May-2021.

CP15 and CP16 - 12 Month Trend (% of Children in care in residential placements VS % of Children in care in external residential placements)

- The % of children in residential placements and external residential placements remain above the
- 2020-21 targets across all recorded months.
- The actual number of residential and external residential placements has remained stable but increased as a proportion of the overall CLA total, which itself is decreasing dramatically.
- The % Children looked after in residential placements has reached 14% in June-2021, a 1.6% increase in comparison to 13 months prior, and the % of external residential placements reached 9.3%.

CP17. % of CiC in single placements in last 12 months - 12 Month Trend

- The % of children in care in single placements in the last 12 months has remained below the 2020-2021 target in all months recorded, other than in March- 2021 when the % peaked to 85.5% - 15.5% above the outlined benchmark.
- The % declined since the peak, reaching 64.9% in June-2021.

CP18. % of Care Leavers remaining with former foster parents – Trend

- The % of Care Leavers remaining with former foster parents began to gradually improve in March-21, recently reaching the highest % recorded in May-2021 at 13.1% - a 2.1% increase in comparison to 13 months prior.
- Care Leavers remaining with former foster parents slightly declined in June-21 but still remains above the 2020-21 target.

CP19. % of CiC/CL placement breakdowns in last 12 months

- The % of children in care/care leaver breakdowns in the last 12 months seen a considerable decrease
- since Jan-21, reaching the lowest recorded in May-2021.
- The % increased in June-21 by 0.7%, though this could be due to the increase in Care Leavers and
- Children looked after ceasing care.

Quality and Impact

CP20. % of FFF young people who were on the edge of care and did not become Looked After

- The % of FFF young people who were on the edge of care and did not become CLA has been relatively stable, with a steep decline in Nov-20 when the number of children in care was relatively high.
- In recent months the % has been 100% - 20% above the 2020-2021 target.

CP21. Number of IRO challenges resolved at Stage 1 or 2 (i.e. informally or first formal stage)

- The number of IRO challenges resolved at Stage 1 or 2 was extremely low in September-2020, and has seen steep increases across recent months - reaching 100% in December-2020, February-2021 and April-2021.

CP22. % of Post 16 Children in care in Education, employment and Training – Trend

- The % of Children in Care Post 16 in EET continued to improve in recent months, reaching the highest % recorded in April-2021 at 70%, since declining 1% in May/June-2021 which still remains above the 65% 2020-2021 Target.

CP23 - % of Care Leavers in Education, employment and Training - Trend

- The % of Care Leavers in EET remained relatively stable across all recorded months, until Nov-20
- when the % started to decline - reaching the lowest % in March-21 at 39%.
- However the % increased by 4% in June-21, at 43% - remaining below the 2020-21 Target.

CP24 - % of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation – Trend

- The % of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation out performed the 2020-21 target from November to December 2020 - reaching 96%.
- This was followed by a slight decline in March- 2021, reaching 86%, which increased by 3%, to 89% in June-21.

The Manager was thanked for this presentation, following which a number of questions were raised:

Firstly a member queried why single placements had increased. In response, the Director advised that generally it was usually if the child had complex needs. Sometimes being in a group isn't for the child and the emotional, health and wellbeing of the child and young people was paramount.

With regards to Children and young people being placed 20 miles away, the Chair queried what was being done to address this. The Director advised that wherever possible, the Local Authority try to place children in Middlesbrough and are trying to recruit foster carers. Middlesbrough do have their own children's homes as well as future for families (edge of care to prevent young people entering care) and Daniel Court (9 beds for young people). A child or young person may have to be placed outside the areas due to their needs, however this would require Director approval. Middlesbrough has been successful in bringing back some young people into foster placements with the help from Future for families and Innovate.

Future for families have been working with Innovate have looked at the number of children and young people who have been placed outside the area but can be returned to Middlesbrough. Future for Families currently have 3 young people living in the Hub and are working for 43 young people who they are working with to try and prevent them entering care.

A member queried what proportion of foster carers working with Middlesbrough live outside the borough and it was advised that this information would be provided at a future meeting.

Another Board member enquired about staff within social care, in terms of their Caseloads./ welfare of staff/ satisfaction rates of social workers

In response, the Director advised that there were currently three managed teams, the first aligned to the looked after children service, and the others assigned to assessment service and are working to help reduce numbers of caseload numbers. Caseload numbers have come down for some social workers, average caseload was 19.6 but within the Children looked after it was slightly lower between 15 and 19. Caseloads were regularly reviewed.

The Council do have agency workers however most recently had launched a workforce development strategy and within the Strategy, there was a section on recruitment and retention. The Council were looking for experienced social workers and have factored in a golden hello to ensure our salary was matched with neighbouring authorities and after a year they fall in line with the retention wage.

A question was raised as to whether it would be possible to take on apprentice social workers, who would then become experienced social workers. In response, the Director outlined that Middlesbrough do grow their social workers and welcome talented people and who have resource workers who are talented. However due to the complex cases, it was not possible to address this was possible.

Lastly, the education of our children looked after was posed and the Head of Virtual Schools, advised that during Covid, children have continued to attend school and most thrived having the smaller ratios during lockdown. Key stage 4 and GCSE results would be analysed and sent to the Virtual school government body prior to being presented to the CPB.

AGREED- That the date be noted.

21/99

MIDDLESBROUGH FOSTERING ANNUAL REPORT

The Head of Residential Services provided an overview of the Foster Carer data set for 2020/21. He advised that the report sent to the DFE was huge and therefore the information has been streamlined, however if members wished to have the full report could be sent to Members if required.

The Residential Manger provided details in relation to the following:

- Fostering Households – as of 31 March 2021 there were 145 number of households and 264 places.
- Fostering Households by Care type- the Board were advised that those offering longer term placements had reduced and this was part of the recruitment strategy in the future, this included speaking to short term foster carers regarding their terms. There was an increase of foster to adopt and work was underway with a number of connected carers who had a special guardianship order (SGO)
- Number of households approved in the year (and trend)- see above
- Placement use at 31 March 2021- there were currently 160 children placed with foster carers; 45 vacant places; 55 places not available (due to needs of the child or illness of foster carer) and 4 short break placements.
- De-registrations in the year and reasons- 2 foster carers de-registered last year as they decided to care for the children for longer term under a SGO; 11 foster carers left the service or to work in other areas; 11 left due to standard of care issues. The average of de-registrations is about 10% so Middlesbrough is slightly higher, however this could be down to a number of issues.
- Application in the year by status
- Number of not available places at 31 March 2021 and reasons- key information regarding
- Number of Carers at 31 March 2021 by ethnicity- foster carers are predominantly white British (235 out of 248 foster carers) however part of the recruitment strategy was to recruit foster carers from other ethnicities.
- Number of Carers at 31 March 2021 by training status- the training for foster carers has gone from strength to strength. There had been 199 work books completed and the service have developed their own training offer and since this going live there have been 380 courses completed by foster carers. There was a robust training offer and the service was now looking at designing further training surrounding life story work etc.
- Complaints- there had been 1 complaint which was not upheld, this was dealt with swiftly.
- Allegation- 6 allegation were raised (4 made by children and 2 made by other sources)
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The Manager finally stated that he wanted to praise the foster carers during the last 18 months due to the unprecedented pressure covid-19 had placed on them. He advised that nationally foster carers numbers were low, however Middlesbrough was working with their partners in practice in North Yorkshire at ways they recruit foster carers and there was currently a recruitment campaign in place.

The Manager had also met with the Commissioner, who had provided details of local authorities who were seeing an increase in foster carer numbers (Wakefield and Bradford for example) and Middlesbrough were in conversation with them. There was a shortfall in foster carers for those to care for a child with disabilities; teenagers ; children unaccompanied and sibling groups and the service was currently looking to recruit foster carers to the Future for families service. As part of the medium term financial plan, there would be an increase in child age allowance to support foster carers.

In terms of marketing, there were adverts in Jobs North East, Twitter, facebook

lovemiddlesbrough magazine, discussing with a foster carer to speak on the radio and a social worker wrote an article regarding what it is like to be a foster carer for the lovemiddlesbrough magazine.

The Manager outlined that after discussions with their partners in practice in North Yorkshire, they would be focusing their recruitment in September and January. Middlesbrough have a 16.2 % requests but nationally recruitment for foster carers are low- it was the same trend across local authorities and private adoption agencies.

A Board member also outlined it would be useful to have something to give to prospective foster carers (a news article or a poster). She advised that care leavers were looking at developing feedback forms and it may be useful to put feedback/ stories from foster carers into a booklet. This idea was applauded by the Board and further discussions would take place.

The Chair thanked the Manager and Board Members for their contributions.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

21/100

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

Ofsted Focus Visit

The Director of Children's Services advised that there had been an Ofsted Focused Visit and the report was published on 15.07.2021. The Director outlined she would circulate a presentation to Board members and if there were specifics that the Board members wishes to focus on, this could be added to the agenda going forward.

The visit was conducted by 4 social care and 1 educational inspector , who looked at the service with a covid lense.

They were generally pleased with the Local Authority had dealt with the situation and Middlesbrough had put in place the major incident plan swiftly and we put in place new ways of working across the Council.

There were some positive comments made in relation to partnerships, especially the way the local authority engaged with schools , however there were comments made that the Local authority need to understand more about children missing from education.

In terms of main findings:

- Demand for children's services has steadily increased over the past year
- Front door work has improved.
- Inspectors provided positive comments in relation to our work with children and the relationships with children and young people in terms of care leavers.
- Social work is focused.

In terms of improvement:

- We have Variability in practice
- Lack of suitable foster placements in children's homes but this is external.
- too many care leavers in NEET

There was a significant focus on Education and the Inspector stayed focused mainly on virtual schools.

There looked to ensure that children were in registered provision, rather than unregistered and that 2 children had their appropriate education provision.

The visit was varied and they inspectors looked at SEND provision

There were two additional recommendation from the focused visit, which were additional to the recommendations made at the full ofsted visit which are being worked on regularly.

Firstly, we needed Management oversight for those vulnerable children and those with special needs and secondly, the Local Authority need to focus on the identity of children and young people and their diverse needs.

Next steps

The Commissioner had been working with Middlesbrough over the past week and would be writing to the Minister. Initial feedback was positive.

Looking towards an Ofsted Monitoring visit which would come at the end of the year/ early 2022.

Corporate Reference Group

The Director of Children's Services outlined that the group which is Chaired by the Chief Executive which looked at two aspects. The first looks at how all the Council Directorates can contribute to children's improvement agenda and there is a plan in place. Secondly, how the Council can revise Middlesbrough Children Matter, so that there is a whole council commitment. The Chief Executive outlined that they thought they had a set of outcomes which they thought were correct for children and young people, however young people need to be the leaders on this and there was a plan for consultation in place, so that they were written in a child/young person friendly way.

This was due to be considered by the Executive in October 2021 for political sign off and it was outlined that this would be brought to the Board in the next meeting for input.

AGREED-

- That the information be noted.
- That the Chief Executive provide a presentation to the Board at the next meeting.