

## Review of the Child's Journey

### Children and Young People Select Committee

How you feel right now

Pick all the feelings you're having right now and add your own.



OK



Calm



Anxious



Hopeful



Confused



Angry



Excited



Enthusiastic

**Final Report**

**January 2019**

Children and Young People Select Committee  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Municipal Buildings  
Church Road  
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## **Select Committee membership**

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Councillor Barbara Inman (Vice Chair)

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## **Acknowledgements**

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

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## **Foreword**

As a Committee we believe it is incredibly important that as a Council we listen and act on the voice of the child. This enables us to better understand their lived experiences and more effectively respond to their needs.

This review represented an opportunity to test how we do this across various levels of engagement; from the opportunities to engage with the Council at the strategic level to involvement with individual children and young people.

In addition to hearing from a range of Council and partner services, we have discussed the review with young people from Bright Minds Big Futures, Eastern Ravens, Let's Take Action and the Young Inspectors.

Their contributions were vital for informing our work, and it is clear there is a great deal of good work taking place. We have suggested a number of recommendations as we must continually seek to improve, especially in this crucial area of Council service delivery.

On behalf of the Committee we would like to thank all those that have contributed to the review and commend this report to you.

**Councillor Carol Clark**  
**Chair**

**Councillor Barbara Inman**  
**Vice Chair**

## Original Brief

### **Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?**

The Council Plan 2017-20 includes the key objective for Children's Services of working collaboratively, effectively and efficiently.

Children's Services Strategy 2017-2020 includes a specific commitment to listening to the voice of the child and those who we work with, as part of a focus on feedback.

### **What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?**

We want to challenge how effectively we plan and deliver services across the whole of Children's Services which re based on the views, and lived experiences of children.

We want to test out how effectively we do this at a number of levels:

1. At the level of individual children and young people – how we involve them in decisions and processes which impact on them – do we seek their views; how effective we are at this; and how effectively we use views as part of assessments planning and decision making;
2. At the level of service design and commissioning – how we seek out the views of children and young people about specific services, and whether we could be doing more to support, engage and develop the roll of young people as not simple receivers of a service, but as co designers and commissioners of services
3. Strategically – how effectively we engage and involve children and young people in setting strategic direction and priorities for Children's services and for the Council as a whole.

## Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report presents the outcomes of the Children and Young People Select Committee's review of the Child's Journey.
- 1.2 The purpose of the review was to assess and challenge how effectively the Council plans and delivers services which are based on the views, and lived experiences of children. Listening to and acting upon the voice of the child leads to better outcomes, better practice, co-designed services, and, ultimately, change. In particular, the Committee has sought to test whether services demonstrate the importance of:
  - a) seeking to understand the 'lived experience' – what is life really like for the child, not just in a snapshot of an assessment process;
  - b) demonstrating a systematic and cultural commitment;
  - c) ensuring systems and practice are in place and leading to improved outcomes;
  - d) joining up across partners;
  - e) identifying and using better tools where necessary.
- 1.3 There should be an expectation that using the experience of children will lead to a change in practice. The importance of listening to and acting upon the voice of the child, and the quality of this practice, is a consistent theme in all inspection reports for Local Authorities.
- 1.4 The Committee approached this by seeking to understand interaction with children and young people at a number of levels:
  - a) the strategic – how effectively we engage and involve children and young people in setting strategic direction and priorities for Children's Services and for the Council as a whole;
  - b) service design and commissioning – to determine how views are sought on specific services, and whether more could be done to ensure young people are involved in co-production of services;
  - c) the individual - how does the Council involve young people in decisions and processes which impact on them.
- 1.5 Although the Committee has not undertaken a deep dive across all the levels of engagement, Members have been able to conduct a 'temperature check' using a number of case studies and the opportunity to hear from a range of young people and services.
- 1.6 The review has showcased a number of methods of involvement at all levels of the Council's interaction with children and young people, and suggestions to improve these further. Members have been particularly pleased to see the initiatives that are being led and developed by children and young people, including the work of Bright Minds Big Futures and children in our care.

- 1.7 The Committee's recommendations are mainly grouped into the three themes of the review, as follows. The Committee recommends that the Council:

In terms of strategic engagement -

1. **Requires all those working with children and young people to promote a culture and use of language which recognises individuality, respects young people's preferences on language, avoids labelling and use of jargon, and emphasises the child or young person at the heart of all we do;**
2. **Endorses the development of the Bright Minds Big Futures Big Committee and requests further updates on its progress;**
3. **Proposes that the Corporate Parenting Board continues to engage, and work closely with, the Let's Take Action Group;**

In terms of service change -

4. **Ensures that future safeguarding partnership arrangements retain a focus on the voice of the child as part of its active learning process;**
5. **Supports the expanded role of the Young Inspectors beyond residential care home inspection;**
6. **Undertakes a specific piece of work with the Big Committee on how the Council can evidence young people's views have an impact on care planning;**
7. **Undertakes consultation with children and young people to redesign the children in care / looked after review process;**
8. **Encourages all schools to respond to views expressed by pupils through examples such as the secondary school wellbeing survey (Schools Health Unit Exeter - SHUE) survey, which demonstrate the need for a strong pupil voice;**

In terms of working with individual children and young people -

9. **Notes that the Committee welcomed the commitment to using appropriate tools for engagement, and consideration should be given to widening their use where appropriate;**
10. **Ensures a continued focus on the child's lived experience is embedded into assessment and care planning and that this is monitored through audit and supervision.**



## Introduction

- 2.1 This report presents the outcomes of the Children and Young People Select Committee's review of the Child's Journey. The purpose of the review was to assess and challenge how effectively the Council plans and delivers services which are based on the views, and lived experiences of children. In particular whether services demonstrate the importance of:
- seeking to understand the 'lived experience' – what is life really like for the child, not just in a snapshot of an assessment process;
  - demonstrating a systematic and cultural commitment;
  - ensuring systems and practice are in place and leading to improved outcomes;
  - joining up across partners;
  - identifying and using better tools where necessary.
- 2.2 This approach is necessary to ensure all those involved understand that and shared planning continues to focus on the best outcome for the child or young person.
- 2.3 The Committee approached this by seeking to understand interaction with children and young people at a number of levels:
- a) the strategic – how effectively we engage and involve children and young people in setting strategic direction and priorities for Children's services and for the Council as a whole;
  - b) service design and commissioning – to determine how views are sought on specific services, and whether more could be done to ensure young people are involved in co-production of services;
  - c) the individual - how does the Council involve young people in decisions and processes which impact on them.
- 2.4 The Committee has not undertaken a deep dive across all the levels of engagement under consideration, however Members have been able to conduct a 'temperature check' using a number of case studies and the opportunity to hear from a range of young people and services.
- 2.5 The review has been supported and informed by officers from across Children's Services. The Committee has considered information from members of Stockton Youth Assembly and Big Minds Bright Futures, Let's Take Action (Children in Care Council) and Young Inspectors group, Eastern Ravens, staff from across Children's Services, and the Clinical Commissioning Group.
- 2.6 Recognising the increasing pressure on the Council's finances, it is imperative that in depth scrutiny reviews promote the Council's policy priorities and where possible seek to identify efficiencies and reduce demand for services.

## Background

- 3.1 Listening to and acting upon the voice of the child leads to better outcomes, better practice, co-designed services, and change.
- 3.2 There should be an expectation that using the experience of children will lead to a change in practice. The importance of listening to and acting upon the voice of the child, and the quality of this practice, is a consistent theme in all inspection reports for Local Authorities.
- 3.3 The Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board (SLSCB) has placed a high priority on hearing the voice of the child. The multi-agency members of the Board seek to obtain assurance that things are being done to support and improve the lives, safety and wellbeing of children and young people.
- 3.4 One of the established key lines of enquiry for the Board when considering reports is whether: 'the voice of the child is clear enough?'
- 3.5 The key themes are that children say that they need for effective safeguarding are:
  - Vigilance: to have adults notice when things are troubling them.
  - Understanding and action: to understand what is happening; to be heard and understood; and to have that understanding acted upon.
  - Stability: to be able to develop an on-going stable relationship of trust with those helping them.
  - Respect: to be treated with the expectation that they are competent rather than not.
  - Information and engagement: to be informed about and involved in procedures, decisions, concerns and plans
  - Explanation: to be informed of the outcome of assessments and decisions and reasons when their views have not met with a positive response.
  - Support: to be provided with support in their own right as well as a member of their family.
  - Advocacy: to be provided with advocacy to assist them in putting forward their views.
- 3.6 New arrangements are being put in place for the coordination and assurance of children's safeguarding activity through joint arrangements with Hartlepool Council in a new Safeguarding Partnership.

# Findings

## Strategic Level Involvement

### **How effectively do we engage and involve children and young people in setting strategic direction and priorities for Children's services and for the Council as a whole?**

- 4.1 A new approach to strategic participation and engagement of children and young people was agreed in 2012. This included the formal election of a Member of the Youth Parliament (MYP), and the establishment of a more representative Stockton-on-Tees Youth Assembly (SYA).
- 4.2 Since their inception, the roles of **Stockton's MYP and Deputy MYP** have provided excellent opportunities to represent the Borough's young people at the regional and national level, campaign and organise events, and contribute to debates including the annual meeting in the House of Commons.
- 4.3 Elections for the MYP are held every two years and are next due to be held in February 2019; they are administered by the Council's Electoral Services, and method of voting closely follows the process for 'adult' elections. Candidates must be between 11 and 18 years of age during their term of office. They must live, work / volunteer (for a minimum of 14 hours per week), or be in education for more than the equivalent of three school days a week, in the Stockton Borough Constituency.
- 4.4 The electorate is made of pupils at participating schools. Between seven and eleven Secondary schools participated in previous elections and the Council would seek to increase the numbers of participating schools in 2019 with the aim of all Secondaries and Colleges taking part.
- 4.5 This exercise in democratic engagement is seen as being key in encouraging young people to become regular voters in adulthood. A number of improvements have been suggested for 2019 including printing candidate election pledges on ballot papers, and removing the restriction on the number of candidates from individual schools.
- 4.6 The MYP also chaired the **Stockton-on-Tees Youth Assembly**. The remainder of its membership was drawn from a range of existing forums including secondary schools, youth clubs, Black and Minority Ethnic representatives, young carers, young people with special needs, and children in our care.
- 4.7 The intention was for the Youth Assembly to have a wider voice in community matters and the ability to feed into and support the Council's decision making structures. Features of its work included:

- the Annual Borough Wide Debate – this was attended by the Council’s Elected Membership and appropriate stakeholders to support the establishment of priorities for the Assembly’s work programme for the forthcoming year;
- the ability for the Assembly to comment on Council consultations, scrutiny reviews and undertaking consultations themselves around the priorities set;
- appropriate awareness raising and publicity within the Council and externally;
- production of an Annual Report at the end of each year setting out what has been achieved.

4.8 Attendance at the SYA has been variable in recent years and through changes to Council service delivery there has been less capacity from Youth Direction to support some of the wider work outside of meetings that the Assembly was designed to deliver.

4.9 A more recent initiative has been the development of **Bright Minds Big Futures (BMBF)**. This was originally an activity-led initiative designed to engage young people and seek their views in making Stockton-on-Tees a great place to grow up – to ‘bring young voices to the table’. Membership has been developed through young people seeking to participate rather than via a representative model. The youngest member was 13 and the upper age limit was 21 and 25 for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

4.10 BMBF members have been able to provide support to events, join the SBC Correspondents initiative to record and promote SBC events, attend conventions and consultations, and take part in social action. Young people are also able to gain accreditation through volunteering with BMBF. BMBF has been judged a success by the young people involved, and there is a more engaging and less corporate feel to its work. Prospective members were able to engage informally before joining.

**SIRF CORRESPONDENTS**  
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**SIRF CORRESPONDENTS**

**SIGN UP NOW FOR SIRF18!!!**

**Do you know a young person aged 13 or over who would like to join us as part of the SIRF Team?**

Last year, 18 young people joined us for 7 days. They took over our social media producing posts, live feeds, interviews, reviews and views on SIRF17. They also wrote a regular blog for the main SIRF page!

It's a great opportunity to gain valuable work experience and achieve a vInspired award (the only national volunteer accreditation recognised by UCAS and the National Apprenticeship Scheme)

**Other benefits include:**  
 Access All Areas Pass  
 Official Correspondents Merchandise  
 Travel & Food expenses  
 The potential to join a team working all year round on events and activities

For more information on the role of the Correspondents and how to apply, check out [www.stockton.gov.uk/bmbf](http://www.stockton.gov.uk/bmbf)

Advert for SIRF Correspondents

- 4.11 There is a cross over in the membership between SYA and BMBF, and using learning from BMBF, members of the Assembly have proposed changes to this forum.
- 4.12 Members of the SYA presented their case for change to the Committee to inform the review. Young people reported that they felt the Assembly model meant that they were 'spoken to' and not able to take the lead on its work. Some members of the group were relatively young and would feel more able to contribute in an informal environment. SYA members also wanted the ability to be more flexible and responsive to emerging issues. The case for change was as follows:

'The need for change:

Some SYA Members do not attend meetings regularly  
Recruitment to the SYA is slow and the membership rules are restrictive  
We do not feel young people can be the driving force behind the SYA in its current format  
At present, SYA meetings often feel without direction

We will argue for:

Bringing the SYA work into BMBF by replacing the SYA with a new committee – to be called the 'Big Committee'  
Changes to membership and recruitment  
Various means for the new committee to improve on the SYA's effectiveness

Format of Meetings:

No limit on number of representatives from one school or college  
Meeting agendas are decided upon by the members  
Meeting in a less formal setting than SYA meetings

Improving Effectiveness:

Meetings every six weeks rather than four weeks  
The agreed elected members and council officers invited to attend every other meeting  
Other guests attend on the invitation of committee members  
Applications to speak to committee considered by members before approval

Changes to Recruitment:

Minimum delay for new members to join us  
Schools not directly involved in selecting members  
Presentations in schools to attract new members  
Use of BMBF social media pages to create further promotion  
Committee members to carry out informal interviews

## Membership:

Current SYA and BMBF members to be invited to join the new Big Committee  
Annual membership review, considering who has been an active committee member

## Our Vision

The Big Committee will be well-known amongst young people of the Borough  
More dedicated and young volunteers will be brought into the Big Committee  
Young people of the Borough become more engaged with their community'

- 4.13 The Big Committee would therefore become the formal element of BMBF and replace the SYA. Members endorsed the proposals put forward in the presentation. The Big Committee started its work during the period of this review as it was important to be responsive to this case for change.
- 4.14 As the Big Committee develops, it was noted the Select Committee would wish to see a continued dialogue with senior Council Officers and Councillors, while recognising the need for the Big Committee to set its own programme. The concept of a 'Youth Cabinet' was also highlighted in discussion and may be developed in future.
- 4.15 A major aim was for the Big Committee to have a much greater profile amongst local children and young people as a means to become involved and influence the debate on matters important to them, as compared to the SYA.
- 4.16 In discussion with the Select Committee, key issues that the young people in attendance would want to discuss included developing the awareness of and amount of the activities in the Borough for young people, and how the Borough can retain its young people as they complete their local education or return from university.
- 4.17 Some members of the current BMBF were children in our care, but it was recognised there was more work to do in engaging young people with SEND.
- 4.18 In addition, HealthWatch Stockton-on-Tees have sought to increase their youth engagement, and potentially developed a 'Youth Watch'. Following the review, Healthwatch was to make contact with BMBF and the Young Inspectors (see below) to develop joint approaches.

## **Service Level Involvement**

**How do we seek out the views of children and young people about specific services, and whether we could be doing more to support, engage and develop the roll of young people as not simple receivers of a service, but as co-designers and commissioners of services?**

- 4.19 The Committee examined a number of individual service areas to test this, namely the Let's Take Action Group / Young Inspectors, Education Improvement Service, and the Peer Researchers project managed by the Clinical Commissioning Group.

4.20 Stockton's Children in Care Council enables young people in our care to have the opportunity to shape and influence the services provided to them. There are two groups:

- Positive Activities for 8-12 year olds
- Let's Take Action (LTA) for those aged 12 +

4.21 Young People from **Let's Take Action (LTA)** presented an overview of their work. LTA members are often consulted by services whose work impacts upon children in care. The group confirmed that they believe the opportunity to have their say can, and has, led to improved services. LTA members presented a range of examples in the form of 'we said, you did' in order to demonstrate an overview of their impact:

'We want our voices heard, so you attend our sessions and take our views forward.

We wanted a central location for our group, you organised the Cultures Café for our sessions.

We wanted support with transport, you are working on reduced tickets with Arriva and Stagecoach

We wanted apprenticeship opportunities, you have created these roles.

We wanted an improved space to meet our families, you have supported us with this which is currently happening.

We want support with our finances, you have brought in a course to help with this.

We wanted to be involved in training those who work with us, you got us involved in training foster carers and social workers.'

4.22 The Committee noted that LTA members have worked on the recruitment and training of social work teams and foster carers, and felt that they had been listened to as part of the process:

'Over the past year we have been involved in the recruitment of new Social Workers. This process was a separate interview and was designed to show how the candidates respond to young people they may end up supporting. For this we came up with all the questions and our views had a direct impact on the candidate employed.

We have also been involved in a 3 day recruitment drive for the new Outreach Family Support Workers.

Recently we also sat on the interview panel for new Residential Workers.

Currently we are involved in the making of a video which will be used for training foster carers in Stockton Borough. The video included our advice for new carers and how to look after and help settle in new foster children.'

- 4.23 LTA members engage with external agencies. This includes the ARC and the More Stuff Like This project which is a two year project to promote access to a range of cultural opportunities. The project in turn enables training for artists to work better with children and young people. Young people in LTA have also provided their views to the Department for Education' call for evidence on Sex and Relationship education, and Newcastle University's study on the effects of alcohol on care leavers.
- 4.24 Requests for support with independent living has included skills such as cooking, but also led to the Virtual School arranging qualifications on budgeting with the London Institute of Banking and Finance. This is an innovative project, the first time the Institute has delivered a qualification in a setting that is not a school.
- 4.25 The **Young Inspectors** enables young people in care to inspect Children's Residential Homes and it is proposed to expand their role to enable them to test for themselves how a range of services are delivering for children in care.
- 4.26 With the support of a Young Inspectors Apprentice, the inspectors will be trained, able to inspect other council services and commissioned voluntary sector provision to ensure they are meeting the standards necessary, and also whether they are meeting The Pledge to children in our care and care leavers. The group is also setting up the Inspiring Voices meeting that will enable service managers to attend and discuss how their service can improve the lives of Children in Care.
- 4.27 Young people involved in LTA highlighted to the Committee that they felt they were listened to and had been able to suggest improvements. They also recognised that some suggestions would take time and they would need to keep advocating for their needs.
- 4.28 The feeling of being listened to was supported by the results of a survey of care leavers, 95% of whom felt that they had been listened to.
- 4.29 New developments include proposals to create a group led by young people from the Big Committee with the aim to give children and young people who are or have been subject of a Child protection or Child in need plan a greater voice in shaping the services they receive.
- 4.30 As part of this work it is planned that a number of Young People will also lead on work to explore 'what is it like for children and Young People to have a Social Worker' and Young people's understanding of children's social work involvement with their families.
- 4.31 The **Education Improvement Service** (EIS) highlighted several ways in which it ensures the pupil voice is at the heart of improving services. To inform the service's school evaluation work, pupil voice is embedded in its practice and is sought as part of:
- School Senior Leadership Team monitoring;
  - Local authority reviews;
  - Local authority pupil premium reviews;
  - Excellence in Inclusion.
- 4.32 The Service reports that children enjoy the opportunity to have their say on feeling safe and behaviour through these processes.



4.33 The Committee were pleased to note that another area of focus is mental health in schools. The Service regards this as important because:

- safeguarding the mental health of young people is a major challenge for society;
- supporting children's emotional wellbeing alongside academic progress improves classroom management and the overall effectiveness of teaching, allowing more children to reach their full potential.

4.34 The Services works within the Future in Mind Programme which is a major national policy to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

4.35 The Mental Health needs of young people has also been examined by the People Select Committee as part of its review of mental health and wellbeing which focussed on those aged between 14 and 25. This included how schools could highlight their efforts in promoting wellbeing and happiness, as well as academic success. For the purposes of this review of the Child's Journey, the Committee examined some of the tools used to seek views and what actions were taken.

4.36 To assess how safe and happy young people were feeling, EIS was able to use Future in Mind funding to undertake surveys at both the Primary and Secondary level:

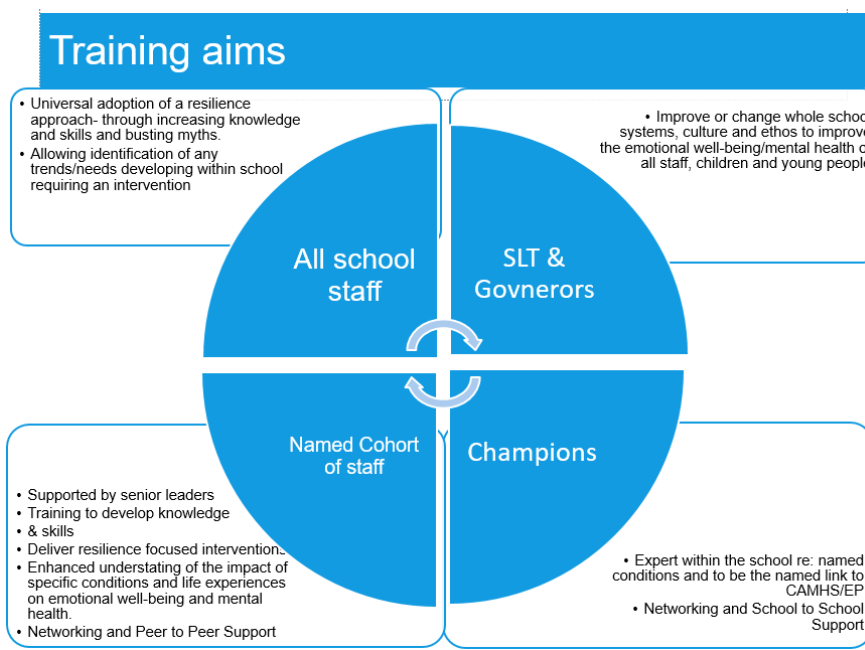
**Growing Up in Stockton** - This was commissioned from Schools Health Unit Exeter and delivered to Year 8 and Year 10 pupils at fourteen schools, with 2621 pupils participating from across the Borough. Two surveys have been commissioned and the first one took place in 2015-16.

The results indicated a range of positive responses (inc. feeling safe, provision of advice, having adults they can trust) and more concerning issues (inc. self-image, resilience, online safety, bullying, school ethos).

Each school was supported to produce individual action plans to act on their own results, an expertly designed training programme has been developed, and access to support services made clearer.

All Academies had engaged with EIS to develop action plans following the survey.

4.37 The training programme is intended to ensure a sustainable impact and build capacity within schools:



4.38 The second survey for secondary pupils took place in 2018 and the results were being analysed at the time of the Committee’s review. Informal feedback suggests that the training programme has had an effect in increasing capacity in schools.

4.39 The Committee highlighted that school leadership teams should consider the impact of behaviour policies on emotional mental health.

4.40 A **Primary School survey** has been undertaken as part of the primary level Future in Mind programme that initiated in Summer 2018. Thirty-seven schools joined the project leading to the identification of school champions and a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme from May to February 2019.

4.41 To inform this work, a survey using Kidscreen- 52 (an internationally recognised approach) was carried out with pupils aged 8, 9 and 10. Thirty-one schools returned data with 1173 of pupils aged 8, 9 and 10 completing the survey (52% girls & 48% boys). The results showed that:

- children at primary school age are comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings around their own health & well-being;
- 24% of children stated they had a physical health condition at the time the survey was completed;
- 8.9% of children stated they had an emotional/mental health condition at the time the survey was completed;
- when asked if you have felt sad, 10.4% of children replied always or very often;
- when asked if you have felt under pressure, 14.8% of the children replied always or very often.;

- when asked if you would you like to change something about your body, 13.5% of children replied always or very often.

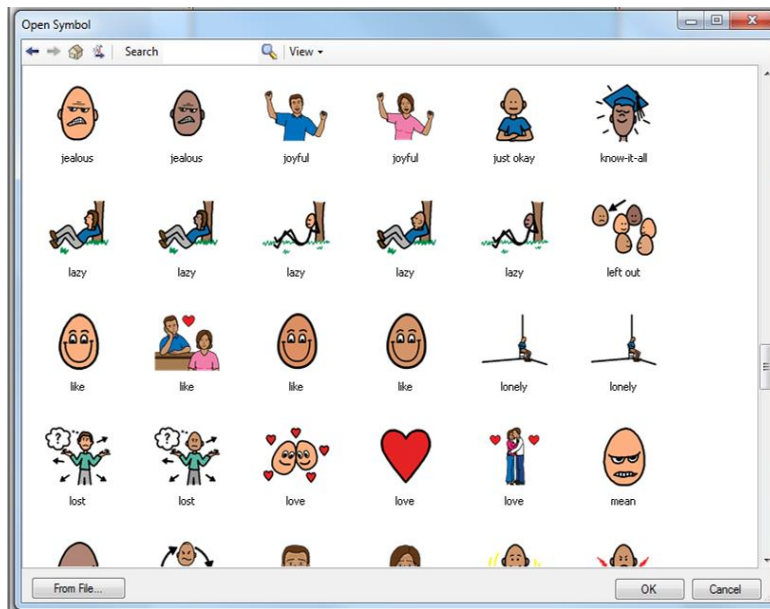
- 4.42 The percentage of children replying 'always or very often' to the last three questions tended to increase with the age of the child.
- 4.43 Further data collection is planned for early 2019, and each school will develop plans for a whole school approach to wellbeing. The EIS team would ideally like to ensure there was an ongoing mechanism for seeking the views of pupils at both Primary and Secondary levels.
- 4.44 As part of the wider Future in Mind approach, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has asked young people in Stockton and Hartlepool to act as **Peer Researchers** to look into the use of digital technology. This would be aimed at young people the age of 12 and 15 in order to seek feedback on mental health and emotional wellbeing.
- 4.45 A questionnaire was created to seek views on development of a digital app to support mental health and wellbeing including exam stress. The majority of those surveyed had not used an app for this purpose, but children and young people had highlighted that they would want to see both face to face and app-based support (in contrast to schools who initially thought that an app would be most wanted).
- 4.46 It was identified schools were best placed to make young people aware how to access advice on the internet, that young people wanted to be involved in the development of any apps, that the peer researchers felt pleased to be involved, and that schools and parents needed more support in this area.
- 4.47 Since this work, a Building Resilience in Schools Programme has being developed, and the Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust Recovery College online resource for adults was being adopted for use by children and young people.

### **Effective involvement at the individual level**

#### **How we involve children and young people in decisions and processes which impact on them – do we seek their views; how effective we are at this; and how effectively we use views as part of assessments planning and decision making?**

- 4.48 The Committee considered three case studies demonstrating a range of tools used in individual involvement, and the importance of listening to the child:
- 4.49 The **Disabled Children Social Work Team** presented an anonymised case study about "Alfie". Alfie has a diagnosis of Downs Syndrome with associated Learning Disability. He also has a hearing impairment. Alfie attended a school outside of the Borough as there was no specialist local provision available when he started primary school. The initial referral for an assessment was made by his Mother as she felt that she required assistance and thought that Alfie needed support to help him socialise.

4.50 The case study illustrated how Alfie was introduced to the social worker, how he was involved, and how his views were sought, and then taken into account in planning. A tool called Boardmaker was used to help with this; this is a computer programme used to create visual resources to use with children and young people with communication difficulties. This approach helped children articulate views that they would not otherwise be able to express.



Symbols to demonstrate a range of feelings

4.51 Some children and young people are only able to communicate on a one symbol level, others are able to select from a number of symbols. These choice boards can be used and personalised with things that social workers know the child likes, so they can point to their preference. They can also be used as a 'conversation starter' for a child who is able to communicate verbally.

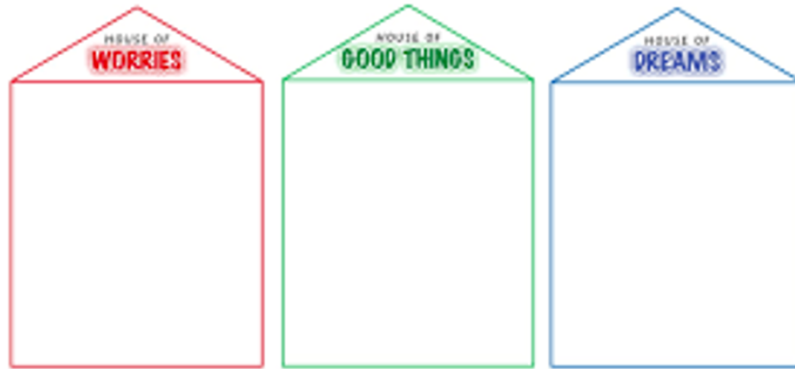
4.52 Some children and young people do not associate symbols with the actual intended object, and so photographs can be used instead. Sequence templates are useful to help children to remember all of the steps for an activity, eg. brushing teeth, showering, washing hair, getting ready for school, etc.

4.53 Over time and with practice these tools can support children to develop these skills, increasing independence, and reduce the strain on parents.

4.54 The Three Houses is another technique to gather views and was adapted for Alfie by decorating a board with Three Houses surrounded by images from his favourite film.

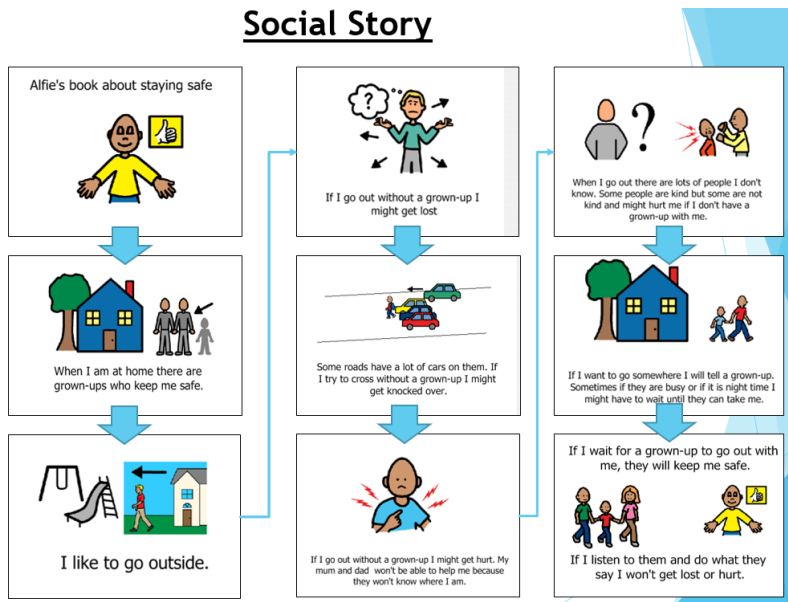
## The Three Houses

One of the ways of gathering children’s views is by using the “Three Houses”, where children draw or write in each “house”. This is not always accessible or attractive to children with communication and/or learning difficulties.



- 4.55 During the assessment process an incident occurred when Alfie left the house at 12.30 am and was found in a local park. A social story was created to help Alfie understand the dangers of going out alone and outcomes were identified based on Alfie’s views and wishes.

### Social Story



- 4.56 Boardmaker is currently only used in the Disabled Children’s Team but could be used more widely and lends itself to communicating with younger children.
- 4.57 Using these techniques the team was able to understand that Alfie wanted to play with friends and this is why he went to the park, wanted to play with the friends he had at school, and that he liked horses.

4.58 Taking his views and wishes into account, the assessment led to a range of outcomes:

- a Short Breaks Grant enabled Alfie to attend a play centre near his school;
- horse riding lessons;
- access to Short Break Provisions at Oasis and Hartburn Lodge (to enable Alfie's mother and sister to spend some quality time together);
- a referral to Eastern Ravens Trust for Alfie's sister to help prevent her becoming isolated.

4.59 These resources were used at Hartburn Lodge and Oasis and also in Stockton schools, and social workers use the tools when attending out of area placements. Even where families felt they fully understand the needs of a child, the Committee noted they were still encouraged to use Boardmaker as this can help the child to communicate in settings other than the home.

4.60 There was a potential to make wider use of Boardmaker. Bradford Council makes it available in libraries, and the Team would also like to work towards using the tool as part of an app.

4.61 The **Early Help** Manager presented details of a case study based around a young carer, 'Sarah' who lived at home with a family with several needs. An Early Help referral had led to support being provided by the Family Solutions Team, and a range of interventions were made with the consent of the family, leading to successful outcomes.

4.62 The case study illustrated the need to carefully listen to the voices of the child without making assumptions or jumping to premature conclusions. Examples were given as to how listening to the voice of Sarah had reduced the concerns of adults.

4.63 The third example was provided by the **Youth Directions Preventions** Team. Support had been provided to a family through Early Help, and subsequently a child protection plan. 'Lisa' was one of three siblings in the family and had received support from Youth Direction.

4.64 Lisa had become steadily aware during the process that her voice was the most important in the process. The example highlighted the importance of: talking to the young person before a review meeting to let them know what would be discussed at the meeting, ensuring Lisa was present at meetings meaning her voice was heard which clarified 'grey areas', being able to describe risks in a meaningful way, and ensuring that terminology is made easily understandable, including for adults.

4.65 Lisa and her siblings had always attended review meetings, but it was made clear to them that they did not have to attend, or could provide their views in alternative ways. Staff made clear that they were mindful it was a challenging process but one that benefitted from being able to hear the views of young people.

4.66 Other examples of tools used included 'Mind of My Own', and 'This is me'. **Mind Of My Own (MOMO)** is a secure app-based system enabling young people in care to provide their views to their social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer. It improves two-way

communication and makes it easier for young people to have their say, make disclosures, and raise problems.

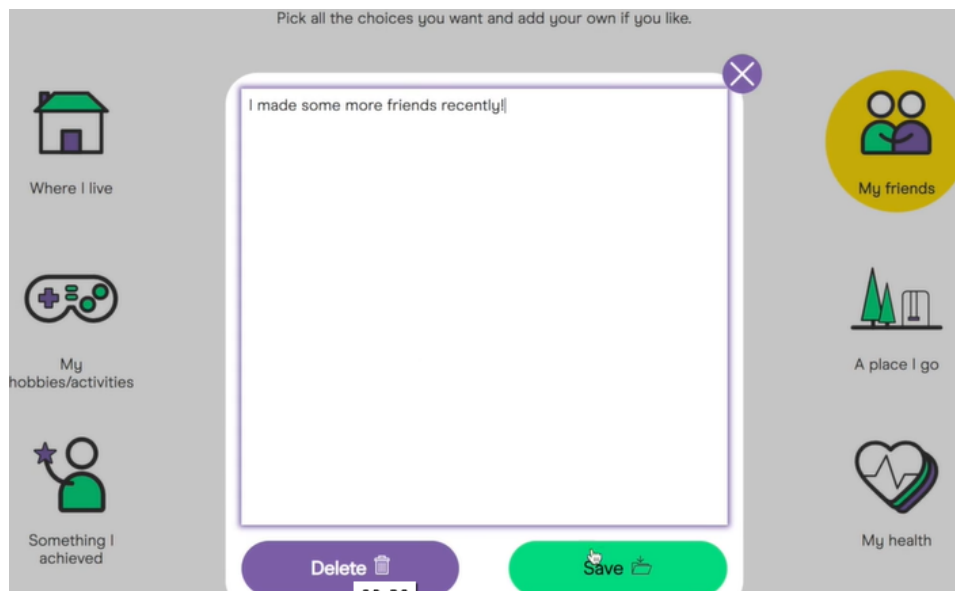
4.67 Being a child in care can mean a lot of meetings, including:

- with social workers;
- with their Independent Reviewing Officer;
- with an advocate;
- Child In Care Reviews;
- Personal Education Plan meetings.

4.68 This may mean that children feel overwhelmed and struggle to provide their views in such settings. MOMO allows children to use the app to provide their views at a time to suit them, clearly and constructively. A 'Prepare for a Meeting' options enables them to provide their views for professionals to review before the meeting.

4.69 Statements can be generated under a number of headings such as 'Problem', 'Worker Visit', 'Preparation', 'Foster Carer Review', 'Change', and 'Share Good News'. Views can be expressed using pre-set selections, and a young person's own words:





Screenshots from the app

4.70 Anonymised feedback was provided to the Committee showing how MOMO had been used to get feedback on foster carers, and examples of ‘Good News’ that had been shared with professionals included:

- ‘I got star of the week and I took the gorilla home!’
- ‘Today we went swimming and the waves were on and I was swimming a full length’
- ‘I am on holiday [...] and I am having an incredible spectacular time.’
- ‘I stopped someone getting bullied at school.’
- ‘Yesterday at contact we went ice skating which was fun’.

4.71 Benefits for the young person can include increased participation in formal and informal meetings, and the decisions that flow from these, and improved confidence and feelings of empowerment by creating a professional looking statement of their views. Importantly, a stated benefit is the reduced stress and anxiety which the app facilitates by allowing them to get things off their chest.






4.72 Professionals benefit from having a tool that facilitates:

- easier 1:1 conversations;
- fulfils statutory requirements to evidence child’s views;
- improved relationships and engagement – both ways;
- more expression of children’s views which leads to better worker understanding, and in turn greater trust.

4.73 MOMO provides a structure for the child, and provides workers with an accurate summary of their views at a moment in time. Positive feedback from professionals was provided which highlighted how the app was seen as easy to use, had informed a discussion about a placement at an IRO meeting, and enabled a young person to express his views which in turn led to improved verbal communication.



- 4.74 MOMO was launched in Stockton in September 2016. Since the launch training for staff and awareness raising for foster carers took place, and the Let's Take Action Group was seen as pivotal in promoting its introduction.
- 4.75 At the time of the Committee's review, 234 young people were signed up and 193 workers. 667 statements had been produced by young people, sometimes with support, and MOMO representatives stated that Stockton-on-Tees was one of the best performing user Authorities.
- 4.76 Youth Direction use '**This is me**' at the beginning of their engagement with young people. This uses a number of statements with young people encouraged to choose the one that matches their feelings.

|   |  |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|
| <b>Influences</b><br>      | Sometimes I will do things that I shouldn't do | I often do things I shouldn't do                  | I will do things if my friends ask me to         | I always make my own decisions                      | I always do things I shouldn't do                              |
| <b>Friendship</b><br>      | I have friends who are much older than me      | I don't have any friends                          | I find it hard to make friends                   | I have good friends who are supportive              | I have friends who are both good and bad, but still my friends |
| <b>Healthy Eating</b><br> | I always eat healthily                         | I am encouraged to eat healthily but don't always | I sometimes choose the healthy option            | I don't eat healthily                               | I want to eat healthily but can't always make the choice       |
| <b>Stress</b><br>        | I suffer from stress sometimes                 | I have hurt myself because of being stressed      | I cope well with stressful situations            | I am always stressed and can't cope with it anymore | I am not stressed  |
| <b>Use of Time</b><br>   | I have hobbies and interests                   | I sometimes attend youth clubs or do an activity  | I never have anything to do and I'm always bored | I am encouraged to do activities                    | I spend most of my time hanging out with friends on the street |

'This is me' extract

- 4.77 A score is produced which indicates whether the young person should access open services or receive a more targeted intervention.
- 4.78 As noted above, Children in our care are provided with the opportunity to complete **Experience in Care** surveys, and **Care Leaver** surveys. 95% of care leavers recently surveyed stated felt that they had been listened to.

## Conclusion

- 5.1 The review has showcased a number of methods of involvement at all levels of the Council's interaction with children and young people, and suggestions to improve these further. Members have been particularly pleased to see the initiatives that are being led and developed by children and young people, including the work of Bright Minds Big Futures and children in our care.
- 5.2 The Committee is keen to see how these developments progress over time and looks forward to receiving future updates.