> The Objective Connect way of working is **quick, smart**, and ensures that all appropriate professionals can **respond quickly** when needed.
>
> **Robert Hamer**
> Service Manager, Children's Services,
> Middlesbrough Council

Middlesbrough Council

Protecting by connecting: Improving collaboration across an entire social care network for rapid child welfare response

Despite the best efforts of child protection authorities, a number of children go missing in the Middlesbrough area every year. Their absence triggers a local search that may take hours and involve dozens of people across the council, police and other organisations.

After previous phone and email-based processes proved too inefficient or insecure, the adoption of Objective Connect provided an effective and secure alternative which has delivered results for both the agencies involved, and those deemed at risk.

BENEFITS AT A GLANCE

- **Rapid, secure communications** between child resource workers, police and other stakeholders of sensitive personal data

- **Better security, version control and auditing** than conventional email-based solutions

- **Faster, smoother communication** with police and all local social care services for faster, more effective responses

- **Pre-populated forms** for minimised manual processing and delays

- **Third parties** quickly brought into workspaces as and when they're needed

Managing children's welfare is a critical local government service, but its day-to-day administration can be complex and inefficient, requiring the coordination of a broad range of stakeholders. When a youth goes missing or fails to present for their curfew, child welfare officers from Middlesbrough Council's Children's Social Care Services department must lodge a missing person report. A previous lack of integrated processes generally, forced these stakeholders to coordinate search efforts over the phone which delayed response times.

By the time the police could attend the scene, gather facts of the situation, details about the missing youth and begin coordinating a response, hours would often have passed. Liaising with other relevant bodies, such as child-welfare charity Barnardo's, added even more complexity and delays.

Removing data risk without a glitch

When the local police force requested Council staff help manage police workload by emailing details of missing children, staff sought to find an alternative to secure email add-ons, deemed inadequate.

"The email add-ons were clunky and difficult to use – we would potentially be sending personal data and information openly through email attachments to the police," said Robert Hamer, Service Manager, Children's Services at the Council. This approach raised data security issues and risked stalling time-sensitive, missing children investigations if communications were left unread in the police inbox. It became clear that it was time for a better alternative.

Enquiries led the team to Objective Connect, which would allow the Council to offer Cleveland Police a more efficient, resource-effective way to collaborate on missing children's cases. They set up a centralised Objective Connect workspace where documents related to each missing youth could be stored and accessed by Cleveland Police or any relevant person who was invited.

Pre-populated forms saved time in conveying family contact details to police, and templates allowed the rapid creation of formal missing plans to guide the location process. Versioning controls ensured that all relevant project staff have access to the latest updated information throughout the course of an investigation.

> Now, staff don't have to make calls to different people in multiple agencies.
>
> You just drop the information into Objective Connect and **everybody knows about it immediately,** thanks to the live notifications. Live information is shared so much more quickly, and people can respond quickly as well.
>
> **There's more time looking for children rather than just trying to put reports through.**

Robert Hamer
Service Manager, Children's Services,
Middlesbrough Council

Building an online community of action

360°
view of **the child**

Completely auditable collaboration with external agencies like hospitals, schools and police

THOUSANDS
of safety plans for children created during the rapid Covid-19 Response

96
participants from mulitple agencies working together **through Objective Connect**

Moving the process online was a major improvement for both Middlesbrough Council and Cleveland Police, who now receive notifications as soon as new documents, reports and cases are added to the shared workspace. This enables them to react immediately to new reports of missing children and allow other parties to mobilise available resources much more quickly than before.

Throughout the whole process, the application of document controls and tight access restrictions ensures confidentiality and data security. There are around 96 people currently working together using Objective Connect, utilising the online and scalable architecture to monitor the workspace for updated details from their desks – or from mobile devices as they work in the field, looking for the child in question.

Middlesbrough Council staff have complete visibility over the activities of invited project team members, ensuring that they can coordinate the various bodies involved until the youth is located.

Cleveland Police quickly warmed to the Objective Connect solution, and began contributing information, as well as using the data provided by Council staff. Middlesbrough Council was also able to delegate administrator rights to allow certain Cleveland Police supervisors to invite additional people into a workspace where appropriate.

"With more comprehensive information in the workspace than over the phone, Objective Connect has given us a 360-degree view of the child," said Robert Hamer. "This has had a massive impact on our care planning for that child. We can continue working together online, collaborating efficiently until we get the email about that young person's return."

"We started using Objective Connect as a regular secure way of transferring information securely and safely to the police when young people go missing. However, we quickly understood that the benefits of this system far outweigh that it is secure."

"We work with the most complex young people in the 'brough' and at times have to report young people missing during the day, etc. What this system enables us to do is invite every professional involved with that young person to join, which means all professionals around the child across the community are told the same information live at the same time. This can support safety planning and care planning for the social worker and independent reviewing officer who would review the plan for the child. Health colleagues, missing teams and schools can also see when a young person goes missing and understand the context in real time should this be appropriate."

Connecting for the future

The successful adoption of Objective Connect by Middlesbrough Council has paved the way for new applications in other Council departments and public-interest programmes. For example, the Middlesbrough Stop Smoking Service involves coordination between general practitioners, medical clinics, local councils and other agencies. Referrals used to be processed manually by fax, but the introduction of Objective Connect is speeding up and simplifying the process whilst maintaining the security and confidentiality required.

The Council also relied on Objective Connect in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. While social workers were not able to visit homes, the system supported the coordination of thousands of Safety Plans for children involved in social care and allowed them to be updated online – a government requirement.

Leanne Hamer, Principal Information and Compliance Officer, noted: "Objective Connect's success is based on the relationships we already have with external partners and the success of this project has made it easier for them to trust us."

> **Objective Connect's success** is based on the relationships we already have with external partners, and the success of this project has **made it easier for them to trust us.**

Leanne Hamer
Principle Information and Compliance Officer,
Middlesbrough Council

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