

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on 17 February 2020.

**PRESENT:** Councillors J Platt (Chair), C Dodds, L Garvey, A Hellaoui, T Higgins, S Hill, M Nugent, P Storey and G Wilson

**PRESENT AS OBSERVERS:** J Cain

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** T Brittain, D McGlenn, S Mirsalehi and A Wynn

**OFFICERS:** G Moore

**DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

19/33 **WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

19/34 **MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 20 JANUARY 2020**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel, held on 20 January 2020, were submitted and approved as a correct record.

19/35 **ADDRESSING POVERTY ISSUES AND THE IMPACT ON LEARNING - EVIDENCE FROM THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR**

Several representatives from the voluntary sector were in attendance to provide evidence on positive impacts and evidence-based practice in respect of tackling poverty, removing barriers to learning and raising the educational attainment of disadvantaged children.

**Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA)**

The Senior Strategic Development Officer from the Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA) advised that the MVDA existed to provide infrastructure support to Middlesbrough's voluntary and community sector (VCS). Members heard that the MVDA's role did not focus on the detail of the services that the VCOs were delivering, it focussed on providing support to VCOs to enable them to deliver those services.

It was explained that the MVDA currently supported over 800 voluntary and community sector organisations and grassroots community groups (VCOs), 104 VCOs were listed on the children and young people's VCS forum. However, it was advised that there were numerous VCOs directly responding to the issue of poverty in Middlesbrough's communities that were supporting families but were not listed as a children and young people's support organisation, for example Harbour and My Sister's Place. Those particular organisations primarily specialised in supporting those having experienced domestic abuse. However, it was explained that the nature of a family fleeing domestic abuse highlighted significant poverty issues and the physical and emotional impact upon learning and development. Therefore, the number of VCOs responding to the issue of poverty in families was significant.

The Senior Strategic Development Officer explained that the MVDA had previously managed several projects, for example work had been undertaken to identify how the VCS support early help, the issues around kinship carers and the youth offer.

It was explained due to capacity and time constraints, the MVDA had not been able to collate any detailed information or evidence-based practice from the VCS. However, it was explained that if the scrutiny panel wished, the MVDA could work with the sector to provide that for the

panel at a later date.

With so many VCOs being registered with the MVDA, a Member queried whether the MVDA was aware of what support was being offered by VCOs and whether there was a mechanism to identify areas of duplication. The Senior Strategic Development Officer advised that VCOs would be repeating similar activities but would be providing services in different localities. A Member added that sharing best practice amongst organisations was important. The Senior Strategic Development Officer advised that the VCS was a complex set of organisations, for instance, registered charities operated as businesses and in a way that was completely different to local community groups. The MVDA worked with local community groups to ensure they were operating safely and professionally.

The scrutiny panel was advised that over the past 10 years, the MVDA had become increasingly aware of the escalating impact of poverty on children and families. It was added that, most notably, austerity, public sector cuts and increasing levels of poverty within working households had impacted significantly upon children, young people and families with consequential impacts upon children and young people's capacity for learning and educational achievement. It was explained that, in response, the MVDA had seen a stark rise in the emergence of grass-roots community level groups and community activists responding to poverty.

Members heard that the VCOs operated in ways to meet the requirements associated with funding, whereby funding was received for a particular purpose or project. It was advised that the MVDA worked with funders and commissioners to ensure that the VCS worked in a co-ordinated and collaborative way. Members heard that one example of coordinated work was the Feast of Fun programme. It was explained that the Feast of Fun programme provided children and families with new learning opportunities and experiences, which was largely facilitated by partnerships with local businesses and organisations.

The scrutiny panel was advised that there was a range of VCOs supporting children and young people experiencing poverty and removing barriers to learning. It was explained that the scope of work undertaken by VCOs was wide-ranging. The primary focus of many VCOs was not to respond to poverty directly rather, they had found themselves doing so in response to the current socio-economic climate in which they operate.

### **Linx Youth Service**

The Operational Manager from Linx Youth Service explained that in 2019, the organisation had worked with the MVDA and other VCOs to deliver the Youth Conference. The aim of the conference was to determine what support was being delivered across the town and to bring services together to identify gaps in provision. It was explained that around 80 partner agencies had been involved in the conference, covering the VCS and the public sector. As a result of the conference, conversations were currently ongoing with a view to working more collaboratively and setting up a joint youth offer/partnership across Middlesbrough.

In terms of funding, it was explained that, in 2017, £40 million had been available nationally from the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF). The funding had been provided to facilitate delivery of open access to youth work. Nationally, six areas had been successful in securing funding, including Sunderland and the Tees Valley. 12 organisations across Sunderland and the Tees Valley had secured funding, two of which were based in Middlesbrough, those were Linx Youth Service and Youth Focus North East (Tees Valley wide). The two organisations had been awarded £1.2 million to deliver, expand and create high-quality provision.

Members heard that the Linx Youth Service was established in 1993 by Hemlington Residents' Association. Linx Youth Service was a not for profit organisation, which aimed to help young people achieve their full potential and become active citizens within their communities.

As part of the youth offer, the range of services offered by Links Youth Service included:

- Open access youth clubs. The youth clubs were delivered seven evenings per week and provided a safe environment for young people to socialise and gain access to help and support from Linx workers.
- Detached session. The sessions involved qualified youth workers undertaking outreach work to meet young people in their communities/neighbourhoods.
- 1-2-1 family support. Family support involved youth workers meeting the family in their home environment to offer help and support and provide signposting and referrals to other specialist services, if appropriate.
- School delivery. Linx Youth Service currently offered support in three schools. It was explained that it was sometimes difficult for the service to gain access to schools, as many schools operated as academies and offered support services in-house.
- Holiday activities. The activities were offered during school holidays and included trips out.
- The key fund and Social Action Projects. Last year 500 young people had developed and designed a winter wonderland and Christmas event at Unity City Academy.
- Events and partnership.

In terms of open access youth clubs, the following sessions were delivered:

- Monday - Whinney Banks session, delivered in the Trinity Church;
- Tuesday - Grove Hill session, delivered in the Grove Hill Community Hub and Hemlington session, delivered in the Dartford Centre;
- Wednesday - Breckon Hill session, delivered in Breckon Hill Community Centre;
- Thursday - Newport session, delivered in Newport Community Hub; and
- Friday - Coulby Newham session, delivered in Coulby Manor.

Following receipt of the funding in 2017, an interim 18 month external evaluation was conducted of the open access youth work offered by Linx. The evaluation identified:

- 978 individual young people had engaged and attended youth clubs;
- 6085 young people attendances were reported at open access sessions; and
- 350 sessions had been delivered in localities across Middlesbrough.

Members were advised that a further final evaluation would be completed in April 2020, which planned to provide a full analysis of the work undertaken by Linx over the three year period of delivery.

In terms of providing support in schools, Linx delivered sessions in Lingfield Academy, Unity City Academy and Trinity Catholic College.

The detached sessions were offered as part of the early intervention offer by the Police and Crime Commissioner. The team of qualified youth workers operated in Grove Hill, Hemlington, Netherfields and Whinney Banks. It was explained to the scrutiny panel that the work of the team was demand led, for example - the team could be working in one location and then be reassigned to another location due to an increase in hotspots of antisocial behaviour. However, it was highlighted that as the work of the team was demand-led, that sometimes meant that being reassigned to another location could impact negatively on relationships that had been developed between the team and young people in the initial location.

In terms of detached sessions:

- 175 individual young people had engaged;
- 1276 individual engagements had occurred; and
- 144 detached youth work sessions had been delivered in Middlesbrough

In terms of 1 to 1 family support:

- 63 individual young people had received 1 to 1 support;
- 290 hours of support had been provided to young people in a 1 to 1 setting; and
- 94 sessions had been delivered in Middlesbrough.

It was explained that Linx usually provided support to families over a period of six weeks, however a holistic family centred approach was taken to determine the level of support required. It was commented that the work undertaken by Linx helped enable children and young people to continue with their education.

In terms of holiday and partnership activities, young people were consulted and involved in designing packages of activities.

- 1280 attendances were recorded at 72 separate summer holiday activities (2018 and 2019)
- 332 attendances were recorded at 30 Mischief Night (The Night in High Demand) sessions (Oct/Nov 2017, 2018, 2019). In response to a Member's query, the Operational Manager advised that Mischief Night had now been renamed as The Night in High Demand.
- 760 young people and families attended the Feel Good Boro event 2018 and Linx Talent Show 2019.

The scrutiny panel was showed two videos, which demonstrated the positive impact of Linx support on young people. The first video provided information on how members of Linx Youth Club took part in End Hunger UK week and delivered food bags to local agencies, families and young people in hardship. The second video provided an insight into the issues that the young people were facing in Middlesbrough and how accessing the project made them feel safe, enabled them to make positive changes and empowered them to succeed. The scrutiny panel was advised that apprenticeships had been offered by Linx, enabling young people to achieve a Level 3 in youth work.

In response to a Member's query regarding staffing, the Operational Manager advised that Linx currently employed seven members of staff, four of which were qualified youth workers and three were apprentices. It was explained that the apprentices would be qualified at Level 3 (Advanced) in youth work by the end of the project. However, it was advised that the funding received from the DCMS and TNLCF ended in April 2020.

In response to a Member's query regarding dealing with socially challenging situations, the Operational Manager acknowledged the importance of community cohesion and explained that Linx youth workers were fully qualified and experienced in engaging with young people and encouraging greater social inclusion. It was also commented that different activities and events were planned to improve community cohesion, such as talent shows.

Members commented on the good work undertaken by Linx in providing high-quality services and opportunities that enable children and young people to achieve their full potential, develop a sense of belonging and improve their life chances.

With current funding ending in April 2020, a discussion ensued regarding the impact that a reduction of funding would have on the support offered to young people. The Operational Manager advised that a briefing discussion paper had been prepared for the Local Authority, which identified the short-term and long-term impact. If it was unable to secure further funding, it was hoped that Linx would still be in a position to deliver its core work of evening open access youth clubs. Future funding options were being explored.

The Operational Manager commented that Linx worked with partner agencies such as Youth Focus North East and Safe in Tees Valley and faith groups to improve the lives of young people through high-quality youth work.

### **Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation**

The Education Manager from Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation explained that Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation was a self-sustained charity and was not financially supported by Middlesbrough Football Club. From an education perspective, the charity had a couple of approaches aimed at addressing poverty in education and learning, namely the blanket, diversionary and targeted approaches. It was advised that the blanket approach involved activities that were available to all young people, regardless of their socio-economic

backgrounds. The diversionary approach involved activities such as Kicks, which used the power of football to engage young people who may have otherwise been difficult to reach in some of the most disadvantaged areas. Those activities enabled the charity to engage with some of the most hard to reach people in the community by delivering programmes which inspire and upskill young people and adults. And finally, the targeted approach involved working with those young people who had social, emotional and mental health needs; those who had been permanently excluded or those who were not accessing mainstream education provision.

Members heard that, recently, the foundation had moved away from using football as the primary vehicle for creating social change and had begun employing educational professionals and mental health professionals to support young people.

The Education Manager informed the scrutiny panel that the foundation had engaged successfully with academies. It was explained that the charity had aligned its work to each academy's mission, ethos and also Ofsted requirements. It was added that the foundation offered educational courses and workshops to provide qualifications and increase the skills, knowledge and aspirations of young people and adults.

The foundation delivered 52 core programmes in schools, those programmes spanned across a period of 10 weeks to the full academic year. When taking into account shorter periods of engagement, that number of programmes increased to around 65.

The Education Manager provided the scrutiny panel with two case studies examples:

- A young person from Stockton was on the verge of being permanently excluded from school at the beginning of the academic year. The pupil had already been excluded for a fixed period of 6 days and the pupil had a low attendance rate. The pupil's mother suffered from a severe mental health disorder and the pupil was classified as a young carer. The pupil took part in a 12 week intervention, the I Will youth social action programme, which had been delivered by the foundation. Following the intervention, the foundation requested feedback from the school. The feedback demonstrated the positive impacts of the intervention, which included a 10% increase in attendance, predicted grades in Geography and Mathematics were higher and Science increased by two grades and increased confidence. The intervention had also improved the school's engagement with the pupil's mother by facilitating meetings. The scrutiny panel was asked to note, however, that following delivery of the intervention, the levels of improvement had not been sustained by the student. Therefore, the foundation undertook a further piece of work to develop a re-integration plan for the student. It was explained that the foundation wished to undertake further work with academies on re-integration and phased return into the mainstream environment, in order to ensure positive impacts were sustained.
- A young person, who had engaged with a programme last year, had decided to withdraw due to experiencing the loss of a loved one, which had impacted greatly. The foundation managed to get the pupil back into school and provided support to enable the pupil to reintegrate with his class. As a result, the pupil led 25 volunteers across two schools, one in a rural area (Freebrough Academy) and one in a town (Trinity Catholic College). That work involved two sets of students teaming up to arrange school swaps and organise pen pals. The group met on several occasions to organise delivery of a memorial football tournament, which raised £850 for the foundation.

The Education Manager explained that the foundation had recently started working with Education Plus North East, an alternative education provider. It was explained that the foundation experienced a high level of demand from the Pupil Referrals Units (PRUs).

The scrutiny panel heard that the foundation had arranged a literacy programme with the Central Library, 500 children and young people accessed the programme across Middlesbrough's schools. Following delivery of the programme, over a week period, a large proportion of those pupils then joined the library.

In response to a Member's query regarding identifying pupils in need of support, the

Education Manager advised that the foundation delivered whole class approaches or whole school approaches. For example, the Education Manager explained that in terms of physical activity, that would be a blanket approach, whereby standardised PE would be delivered to ensure all pupils received the same support. In respect of the diversionary approach, programmes would be delivered that were responsive to local needs in areas where levels of antisocial behaviour were particularly high. In terms of the targeted approach, the foundation did not receive referrals as such but worked in partnership with schools to identify those pupils in most need of support. The foundation delivered educational courses and workshops to provide qualifications and increase the skills, knowledge and aspirations of young people.

In response to a Member's query regarding funding, the Education Manager advised that many people had a preconception that the foundation was financially supported by Middlesbrough Football Club, which was not the case. The club did, however, provide the foundation with access to player appearances and complimentary tickets. It was commented that the foundation did receive parachute funding from the Premier League and the English Football League.

It was explained that where possible, the foundation worked with other VCOs to provide a multi-agency response. It was highlighted that in the past, the foundation had worked with Linx and Grandparents Plus.

### **Grandparents Plus**

The Project Worker for Teesside advised that Grandparents Plus was a national kinship care charity, which aimed to ensure that kinship carers were recognised, valued and supported.

The scrutiny panel viewed a video entitled Jane's Story, which demonstrated the challenges that kinship carers encounter. Jane was from the Middlesbrough area and had set up a kinship carers support group. Jane took in her two granddaughters when she had a phone call from social services telling her to be at the hospital for 9:30 a.m. If she wasn't there the girls would have gone into care. She was there at 9:00 a.m.

Members heard that there was approximately three times as many children being raised by relatives or friends, than foster carers, because their parents could no longer look after them. However, foster carers were entitled to support from the Local Authority. It was explained that there was very little service provision in existence for kinship carers. Grandparents Plus was the only national charity (England and Wales) dedicated to supporting kinship carers.

Family and friends became kinship carers for many reasons, the most common reasons were substance misuse by birth parents, neglect, domestic violence, and mental health issues.

The scrutiny panel was advised that the State of the Nation Survey was one of the largest surveys of kinship carers in the UK. The survey ensured that information on kinship carers remained up to date, as other sources reflected results of the 2011 Census. The results of the survey highlighted the chaos and confusion that were often experienced by new kinship carers at the time they had taken on the responsibility for children. That was compounded by a lack of support and independent advice, which meant many kinship carers were under a great deal of pressure and were at risk of being penalised for stepping in to keep their families together. As in previous years, the survey demonstrated that many carers were not getting the support they needed for children to thrive.

The scrutiny panel was advised that the key findings of the survey included:

- 75% of carers were asked to look after the children - of those 79% by a social worker, 18% by a parent, 6% by police. Often, when grandparents, siblings, relatives or friends had been asked by the parent to care for the child that had been a result of social workers advising the parent that the children would be taken into care. It was highlighted that support would only be provided to kinship carers when a child had been in the care of the Local Authority for more than 24 hours.
- In 83% of cases, children's services had been involved with the child's family, 30% of the children were previously in foster or residential care. For the 30% of children, a

Special Guardianship Order (SGO) could have been made to secure financial support, however, it was explained that the funding was means-tested and was only available for a limited period of 2-3 years.

- 50% felt under pressure when making the decision. Despite children's services involvement, many kinship carers stepped in quickly in a climate of crisis and fear, with little time or access to independent information and advice, or support to consider their options.
- 84% said they hadn't gotten the advice and information they needed when the child moved in.
- 95% said they hadn't had any form of training to help prepare them for their kinship care role.
- 90% said they hadn't been told by their local authority where to access peer support. It was highlighted that, in Middlesbrough, there were 5 kinship care support groups.

Members heard that a lot of children in kinship care had attachment disorders caused by adverse childhood experiences. Attachment disorder was a broad term intended to describe disorders of mood, behaviour, and social relationships arising from a failure to form normal attachments in early childhood. It was also explained that some children, in kinship care, also had Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs). It was commented that kinship carers sometimes struggled to get a diagnosis for the children they cared for.

A discussion ensued regarding the significant sacrifices that kinship carers found they had to make to care for vulnerable children who could not live with their parents.

In response to a Member's query regarding training support being offered to foster carers but not being offered to kinship carers, the Project Worker explained that there was no national policy that stated that the Local Authority was required to provide training to kinship carers.

A Member commented that a review had been undertaken previously of family and friends care (kinship care). The Member highlighted that the review involved receiving evidence from that Leeds City Council, Leeds City Council demonstrated good practice in respect having clear policies and systems in place to ensure family and friends care arrangements were appropriately assessed and supported. The Member commented that a number of recommendations had been proposed by the scrutiny panel in an attempt to ensure that the Local Authority was being proactive in promoting and supporting family and friends carers.

With the majority of kinship carers being grandparents, sometimes that could result in barriers to learning - as the education system had changed significantly over the years with the introduction of I.T. A Member commented that it was concerning that kinship carers may not have the knowledge to use parental controls in order to safeguard children from the internet. The Project Worker advised the scrutiny panel that Grandparents Plus provided training to kinship carers on topics, such as internet safety.

A discussion ensued and Members acknowledged the difficult circumstances encountered by families. It was commented that, in terms of identifying health issues, children in kinship care may experience delays in receiving a diagnosis, which could impact significantly on a child's education and learning experiences. It was highlighted that grandparents would not necessarily be aware that certain behaviours could be an indication that a child was suffering from a mental health condition. Therefore, it was highly important that kinship carers received support from professionals to enable them to identify health issues.

Further findings from the State of the Nation Survey were conveyed to Members:

- 84% of kinship carers did not get the emotional support they needed now.
- 61% of kinship carers did not get the financial support they needed now.
- 76% of kinship carers had not been told about peer support groups.

The scrutiny panel was advised of a quote from a kinship carer, which highlighted the current gaps in provision:

'I wish I had gone into the process with more knowledge and understanding of the whole

process as the stress massively impacted on my marriage and my other children/grandchildren'.

In response to a Member's query regarding the percentage of kinship carers who were grandparents, the Project Worker advised that around 50% of kinship carers were grandparents. It was explained that Grandparents Plus was currently considering changing its name, to ensure that all kinship carers were aware that they could access the support provided by the charity.

It was explained to the scrutiny panel that Redcar and Cleveland Council had previously commissioned Grandparents Plus to undertake an evaluation of the support offered by the local authority to kinship carers. Members heard that the Project Worker had worked closely with the Assistant Director and kinship carers in Redcar and Cleveland to identify improvements. As a result of that work, Redcar and Cleveland Council:

- developed an information pack/resource for all family and friends carers, which provided signposting to the support (practical, financial and legal) available from local and national organisations;
- arranged activities; and
- employed a dedicated SGO worker.

The Project Worker explained that there had been a lot of criticism received from kinship carers in respect of the lack of engagement and communication from Middlesbrough's social workers.

A Member commented that there was a need for current legislation to be revised and for kinship care to be recognised in law.

Members heard that Kinship Active was a project run by Grandparents Plus in partnership with Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation and Teesside University. The project worked with kinship care families to increase activity in children and carers through intergenerational family activities, which had been shown to have a positive impact on physical, cognitive and social health.

The Project Worker highlighted there was a need for the Local Authority to work in partnership with Grandparents Plus to ensure that kinship carers received the information, advice and support they required. It was commented that there was currently a lack of engagement and kinship carers did not feel supported by the Local Authority. Members heard that Grandparents Plus could be commissioned to enable the Local Authority to develop good kinship care practice.

Members were informed that funding for the Project Worker post, based in Teesside, was due to end in April 2020. It was commented that if the Project Worker post did not receive further funding, that would undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on the kinship carers in Middlesbrough. It was commented that Middlesbrough and Teesside Philanthropic Foundation had provided the current funding for the post. A Member commented that future funding, for the post, could be discussed with the Mayor.

A discussion ensued and a Member commented that there was a need for support for kinship carers to become a statutory service.

The Democratic Services Officer explained that a full review of Family and Friends Care (Kinship Care) had been undertaken by the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel in 2016/17. It was advised that it would be beneficial for an update to be received on the progress made with the implementation of the report's recommendations. It was explained that, as the topic now fell within the remit of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel, arrangements would be made for that panel to receive an update. Once the update had been arranged, the Democratic Services Officer would inform panel members. A copy of the final report on the topic, would also be circulated. Members were advised that the Project Worker had experienced a lack of engagement from the Local Authority over the past few years.



Following receipt of the update, if it was identified that further action was required, the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel would determine a way forward.

In terms of engagement with schools, the Project Worker advised that schools were not necessarily aware of the issues and difficulties encountered by children in kinship care and that resulted in those children being suspended and/or excluded as a result of their behaviour. There was a need for engagement between kinship carers and schools to enable schools to better understand each family's circumstances and provide effective support.

#### **AGREED**

**That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the scrutiny panel's investigation.**

19/36

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

#### **School Place Planning**

A Member commented that it would be beneficial for the scrutiny panel to receive information on school place planning and whether there were sufficient school places to meet demand in the 2020/21 academic year.

#### **School Uniform Costs**

A Member had received information from Middlesbrough's residents on school uniform costs and testimonies reflecting how uniform costs were impacting on their child's education. It was commented that the information would be circulated to the scrutiny panel.

#### **NOTED**