

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 13 November 2018.

PRESENT: Councillor Higgins (Chair); Councillor Storey (Vice Chair); Councillors Coupe, Hellaoui, McGee, McGloin and Walters.

OFFICERS: R Brown, H Clark, J Dixon and G Earl.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Lewis and Uddin.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

**** MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 16 October 2018 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION SERVICES – FURTHER INFORMATION – WORK READINESS TEAM

H Clark, Work Readiness Team Manager, was in attendance at the meeting accompanied by G Earl, Head of Prevention and R Brown, Director of Prevention and Partnerships, to provide the Panel with further information in relation to the Work Readiness Team in Middlesbrough.

The Work Readiness Team Manager had circulated a report, prior to the meeting, which provided details in relation to the team's structure, remit, work and impact data.

The Panel heard that the Work Readiness Team was established in November 2016 following a review of the Service. The current Team consisted of a Work Readiness Team Manager and two Assistant Team Managers, managing the Work Readiness Practitioners and Work Readiness Support Workers. The Team also had an administrator and an apprentice. The Panel was informed that despite being a small team, it had impacted greatly on helping young people in Middlesbrough into education, training or employment. The Team was based at Easterside Hub and this had proven to work better than the previous arrangements were the team was split across several locations within the town.

The aims of the Work Readiness Team were to:-

- Ensure all year 11 and year 12 young people had an appropriate offer of learning (known as the September Guarantee).
- Support young people leaving year 11 to ensure they began and sustained a learning destination.
- To track and follow up all those in the cohort and to ensure that young people were supported into education, employment or training and, therefore, reducing the number of NEET (not in education, employment or training) young people in Middlesbrough.

The Team offered impartial careers information, advice and guidance for year 12 and year 13 young people and for year 11s excluded from school and it was highlighted that all Practitioners were qualified to either level 4 or 6, equivalent to graduate level.

The Work Readiness Team provided a statutory function for Middlesbrough Council as the Department for Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance for local authorities stated that whilst the DfE provided the framework to increase participation and reduce the proportion of young people who were NEET, the responsibility and accountability rested with local authorities.

The Work Readiness model used in Middlesbrough was based on various good practice from across the country, in addition to what had worked well previously in Middlesbrough. Other local

authorities were beginning to approach Middlesbrough to find out how its Work Readiness model operated and the reasons for its achievements.

It was explained that the Work Readiness Team worked with a wide range of agencies and organisations including schools, colleges, training providers, Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), Job Centre and the National Careers Service. It also worked closely with other Teams within the Council including the Middlesbrough Achievement Partnership and the School Readiness Team (supporting teenage parents), Youth Offending Service, Pathways Team, Virtual School, Ethnic Minority Achievement Team, SEND Team and Elective Home Education. The Team also worked with other local authorities in the region and the NCCIS system allowed tracking of young people moving from one local authority to another. The Work Readiness Team relied on gaining and sharing information with partners in order to identify those young people that needed support and where resources needed to be targeted, therefore, appropriate data sharing agreements were in place to allow this to happen.

In terms of identifying young people, it was explained to the Panel that, from Year 10, all young people who attended schools in Middlesbrough were entered on to the Capita One IYSS database. This was the database the Work Readiness Team used to complete the statutory returns required by the DfE. The DfE monitored the performance of local authorities in delivering their duties, specifically in tracking and supporting of 16 and 17 year olds.

Once a young person commenced in Year 11, the Work Readiness Team collected data from schools to identify those young people that did not have an offer of learning – enabling the team to target support to young people making the transition from Year 11 to Year 12. Once a young person had left Year 11, the Work Readiness Team was responsible for tracking the destinations of young people residing in Middlesbrough, regardless of where they learned.

The Panel was advised that the Team was currently working with the following numbers of young people:-

- 10 – Pre-16 permanently excluded and elective home educated.
- 3,026 – Year 12-13 all Post-16.
- 146 – Year 14 Vulnerable SEN Support.
- 38 – Year 14 vulnerable Teenage Parents/Pregnant Teenagers.
- 188 – Year 14 – Year 20 Vulnerable Education Health Care Plan 25 year olds.
- 167 – Year 14 – Year 20 Vulnerable Looked After Children/Care Leavers.

All young people who were 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEET) were allocated a Work Readiness Practitioner or Support Worker. The Team had a designated Practitioner who supported young people that were care leavers and practitioners supporting teen parents. All Practitioners and Support Workers were allocated specific themes including a Practitioner that had direct links with the Youth Offending Service; two Practitioners supporting young people with SEND and a named practitioner that linked to post-16 providers. This allowed close monitoring and follow up of young people in vulnerable groups.

The minimum statutory contact period for each young person who was NEET was once every three months but the majority of young people were contacted more frequently depending on need, for example, they may require transporting to interviews or visits. They could be seen as often as twice a week.

It was explained that caseload supervision was monitored by Assistant Team Managers and data was monitored on a weekly basis through the Work Readiness Dashboard. This database also alerted staff in relation to when a young person's destination was due to expire as part of the follow up process.

It was acknowledged that tracking young people could be difficult due to the transient population in Middlesbrough. When a young person no longer lived at the address recorded for them, the Work Readiness Team would examine data from other sources available to them to try and locate the young person. Working with partners such as the Council's SEND Team and Middlesbrough Community Learning was key to sharing and refining data in order to track and follow up young people. Telephone calls would be made at different times of the day and evening in an attempt to

speak to the young person or appropriate family member. If this was not successful, staff would carry out home visits at different times of day and evening to maximise potential contact.

It was explained to the Panel that the September Guarantee entitled all 16 and 17 year olds to an offer of a suitable place in education or training, eg apprenticeship, college course or employment with training. Since the introduction of the September Guarantee, the Council had worked with partner agencies to improve performance year on year, by tracking and engaging with more young people to maximise the numbers of young people receiving an appropriate offer of learning. Middlesbrough performed better than regional, national and statistical neighbours in ensuring the September Guarantee. A table contained within the report showed Middlesbrough's performance had increased from 93.3% in 2013 to 96.8% in 2016, with a provisional figure of 97.1% for 2017.

Data was provided in relation to the number of young people who successfully entered further education, employment or training and those who remained NEET. 91.5% of 16-17 year olds were in learning in Middlesbrough in 2016. This was in line with the national figure and marginally below North East and Statistical neighbours. The provisional figure for 2017, however, was 93.6%.

Middlesbrough had made good progress over the last five years and the proportional NEET figures for 16-17 year olds had reduced from 12.3% in 2013 to 5.4% in 2016. The provisional figure for 2017 was 4.2%. Middlesbrough was performing better than regional, national and statistical neighbours. It was explained that the figures were based over a 'stretch period'. This was a combination of the number of NEET young people added to the number of young people who were 'Not Known' and the average performance was taken over the months of December, January and February.

In terms of NEET figures for young people in vulnerable groups such as care leavers and special educational needs, the Panel was informed that the latest figures, as of March 2018, for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) NEET was 9.6% in Middlesbrough, compared with 10.2% nationally. The SEND proportional NEET figure (where NEET and Not Known figures were added together) was 8.5% in Middlesbrough, compared with 35.2% nationally.

The figures for NEET Care Leavers (taken from the 903 birthday return which was for 18-21 year olds) in 2017 was 44% in Middlesbrough compared with 40% nationally. This figure could not be compared with NEET figures for young people in Middlesbrough as the returns provided to the DfE by the Work Readiness Team were different to those required from the Pathways (Care Leavers) Team. The Pathways Team was required to provide data in relation to young people leaving care, up to the age of 25 and also for those living 'out of area'. It was, however, recognised that the NEET figures for Care Leavers was below the national figure and, therefore, work was being undertaken currently to improve outcomes for these young people. A member of staff from the Pathways Team worked within the Work Readiness Team and the teams were looking at ways to reduce the numbers of Care Leavers that were NEET. A targeted event had been hosted recently at Teesside University where 48 young people had attended. The event showcased a number of learning providers and employers to provide information, advice and taster sessions for the young people. The Work Readiness Team was also involved in preparing the Personal Education Plans (PEPs) for year 11 young people through the virtual school and offered earlier careers guidance to enhance support already being offered by the school to the young person to assist in the post-16 transition. The Work Readiness Team also supported the SEND Team and was involved in the Preparation for Adulthood Plan.

In terms of processes and initiatives that worked well, the Panel was informed that all of the Team's work and initiatives were based on good practice from other high performing local authorities. Over the past three years the Team had worked positively with Middlesbrough College and other providers to offer joint NEET events.

It was highlighted that the Youth Employment Initiative had helped support young people back into education, employment and training and had been extended until July 2022.

The Panel also heard that since the Work Readiness Team was formed in 2016 and located at one base, it had allowed an improved and increased focus, with dedicated staff, on Work Readiness which was a key outcome of the service restructure within Prevention and Partnerships.

In terms of the referral process, it was confirmed that the Work Readiness Team accepted referrals from First Contact where the main barrier to the young person or family was a NEET issue. Practitioners carried cases and completed My Family Plans when working with the whole family. They also co-worked on cases where the family was open to Children's Social Care and had a Social Worker or were open to the Stronger Families Casework Team.

In addition, schools identified young people they considered to be at risk of becoming NEET when leaving year 11 so that the Team could provide additional NEET prevention support. College and training providers also notified the Team when a young person was at risk of disengaging from provision so that Practitioners could respond quickly with careers guidance and explore alternatives.

When asked by the Panel what the main pressures and challenges were for the Work Readiness Team, it was stated Middlesbrough had a very transient population. Once a young person was locked into the cohort, the Team had full responsibility for tracking, following up and supporting them as required. It was becoming increasingly challenging to track and fulfil statutory returns as a number of young people had moved out of the area and some had returned to other countries.

Another issue was data provided by schools. Addresses for young people were often out of date which caused challenges in tracking and locating young people to check destinations. In addition, data collection from schools could be challenging and sometimes arrive late which placed additional pressure on the Work Readiness Team. Home visits were also very time consuming but this was essential in order to engage with the young person. Staff were also required to undertake home visits in pairs and planned appropriate routes in order to make visits as cost effective as possible and in order to comply with health and safety requirements.

Following service reviews to achieve savings, the Work Readiness Team was a very small Team and needed to be extremely focussed to ensure it met the targets and returns set by the DfE. The team relied on support from the Strategy, Information and Governance Team to prepare data and cohorts.

The Panel was informed that Middlesbrough was part of an ESF (European Social Fund) Tees Valley wide bid, led by Stockton Council. Should the bid be successful, Middlesbrough would receive additional funding to support pre-16s at risk of becoming NEET.

During the course of discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- A Panel Member referred to the home visits undertaken by the Work Readiness Team and queried how receptive young people and families were to this. The Work Readiness Manager explained that their home visits were different to the Casework Team, who planned the visit with the family in advance. The Work Readiness Team's visits were unplanned and were often met with resistance. However, this year, letters had been sent to all parents/carers within the year 11 cohort which had helped when making the visits to explain that they were there to support and help the young person and parents were better informed.
- In response to a query regarding whether targeted support for specific groups was undertaken by the Team, the Panel was advised that analysis of the cohort could be undertaken in relation to gender, ethnicity, teen parents, those not available due to health issues, etc. Middlesbrough had a small NEET population but the Team looked at the reasons why the young people were NEET. This analysis helped inform Work Readiness partners, for example, a proportion of the NEET cohort were teen parents and the Work Readiness Team worked closely with the School Readiness Team and NACRO on specific programmes.
- A Member of the Panel provided information in relation to a Community Advisory Body which was part of the UCA Governing Body and the potential community projects, in conjunction with the Advisory Body and the Health Service which could look at ways of getting young people into secure learning.
- In response to a query it was acknowledged that whilst the Work Readiness Team was doing an excellent job in reducing the numbers of 16-17 year olds that were NEET, post-18

unemployment began to rise. This was an area where potential links with appropriate partners may be required in the longer term.

- Reference was made to the Council's apprenticeship scheme and it was confirmed that there had been several successful apprenticeships within Stronger Families. Of the six apprentices that had worked in Stronger Families, four had gained employment within the local authority, one had gained employment in a school and one with a youth provider. The apprenticeship model worked very well within the service and was encouraged.

The Chair requested that the Panel's thanks be conveyed to the Work Readiness Team for their hard work, resulting in improved performance across all targets. The Work Readiness Manager invited the Panel Members to visit staff, at the Hub, and also extended an invitation to any Panel Members who wished to accompany a Practitioner on a home visit.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the content of the submitted report, and information provided at the meeting, be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's current scrutiny investigation into Early Help and Prevention Services.
2. That the Democratic Services Officer liaise with the Work Readiness Team Manager to arrange for Panel Members to visit the Work Readiness Team at Easterside Hub and to arrange for interested Panel Members to accompany Practitioners on work readiness home visits.
3. That appropriate representatives of Early Help partner organisations be invited to the next meeting of the Panel.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update to the Panel in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 30 October 2018, namely:-

- Outline of the Budget Consultation Process.
- Update on Children's Services Pressures.
- Final Report of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel – Council Tax Processes in Middlesbrough.
- Executive Forward Work Programme.
- Scrutiny Panel Progress Updates.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled for 11 December 2018 at 1.30pm.