

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 15 January 2019

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

OFFICERS: J Scadden and S Lightwing.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: T Brittain – Senior Strategic Development Officer, Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA)

An APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE was submitted on behalf of Councillor Coupe.

**** 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 11 December 2018 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

Reference was made to the following in relation to the previous minutes:-

- Page 5 – 32 schools had currently signed up to the accredited training to create Headstarter pupil mental health champions as part of the Headstart programme. The Panel expressed an interest in receiving an update, in the future, in relation to which schools had signed up to the programme and whether the number of schools had increased.
- Page 7 – Reference was made to Middlesbrough having a higher proportion of BAME population (11.8%) compared with the north east average of 4.7%. A Panel Member commented that this was a significant difference that could present its own challenges and should be monitored. It was also queried whether figures were available for the numbers of BAME looked after children and also which wards in Middlesbrough had the highest numbers of BAME population.

EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION SERVICES – FURTHER INFORMATION – MIDDLESBROUGH VOLUNTARY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (MVDA)

T Brittain, Senior Strategic Development Officer, MVDA, was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with information in relation to how MVDA supported the early help agenda in Middlesbrough from a Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) perspective.

The Senior Strategic Development Officer had submitted a report to the Panel, "Supporting Middlesbrough's Children and Families: A VCS Contribution" and provided a presentation in relation to a specific piece of work undertaken by MVDA.

The Panel was informed that, as an organisation, MVDA did not deliver any direct services but worked through the voluntary and community sector across Middlesbrough. MVDA worked with around 800 organisations ranging from small church groups to large organisations such as Barnardo's and NSPCC.

MVDA played a strategic role in representing the interests of the VCS as a whole (not necessarily representing the interests of individual organisations) and sat on a range of strategic partnerships such as the Children's Trust Board and the Joint Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Panel was provided with information in relation to a specific piece of work that MVDA was commissioned to do by Middlesbrough Council. The work was undertaken between April 2016 and March 2018 and aimed to explore opportunities for the VCS to support the development of

Middlesbrough's multi-agency Early Help Hub. Since the start of the work, the Early Help Hub was now known as the Family Partnership Team. MVDA looked specifically at where it felt the VCS could add resilience and contribute towards established services at a statutory level.

MVDA agreed to:-

- Increase access to local VCOs (eg debt counselling, direct family-focussed support, youth work, holiday provision).
- Develop VCS pathways.
- Better understand the needs of children and families and how these were currently being met.
- Support VCOs with capacity building.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration and innovative solutions to increase support for children and families.

The Panel heard that the early part of the work had focussed on becoming embedded in the Family Partnership Team by developing relationships with key staff and learning about the day to day work, identifying key agency partners and understanding the pressures within the Team. The Senior Development Officer had spent two years working with the Family Partnership Team practitioners and the wider children's workforce, including schools and health visitors – where the majority of early help referrals came from – to look at the types of referrals being received and understanding the needs of the children and families to try to identify where gaps in support/provision existed.

MVDA also set out to support those individuals and small groups in the community that did not employ staff, for example the work undertaken by individuals in relation to food poverty in conjunction with churches and volunteers. It was important to ensure that professionals within the statutory children's workforce understood the gap between the statutory system and what was happening 'on the ground' and managing expectation. Professionals could not insist that volunteers worked in a structured way and MVDA wanted to identify what was available in the VCS and where there was an appetite to respond to need and to work with community groups to increase capacity.

MVDA increased awareness of the support available in the VCS and what they did using a whole family holistic approach. It introduced a diverse range of more than 200 organisations of varying sizes and structures and asked practitioners within the Early Help Teams to think about how those VCS organisations/groups could provide the support that the whole family needed without necessarily requiring a formal referral for direct intervention. For example, a family could be in crisis with an adult needing access to drug treatment services or domestic abuse support and children within the household may be outside the statutory system but required support for themselves. MVDA was working with Middlesbrough's youth offer to examine opening up low level support – a whole family approach to identify a range of solutions to respond to the needs within the whole family unit rather than one specific area.

It was queried whether there were tensions around the formalities of ensuring that appropriate safeguarding and communication systems were in place with volunteers. The Senior Strategic Development Officer responded that it was MVDA's role to build in support with groups and organisations within the VCS, for example with the Feast of Fun Project, MVDA had assisted in bringing together what many churches were doing informally. MVDA had assisted in developing training, raising understanding and helping to attract resources to Middlesbrough so that such projects were not reliant on local authority funding.

It was acknowledged that sometimes the quality required for vulnerable families was not achieved through some voluntary groups so MVDA would only actively promote organisations/groups that it felt met the minimum criteria. MVDA also worked to ensure that parents were given information in order to make their own decisions and helped to increase understanding of the context in which the organisations operated.

A Panel Member queried whether any support services were being duplicated or whether the VCS was working jointly with the local authority. The Senior Strategic Development Officer stated that part of her role was to undertake a whole system approach and to try and identify gaps in provision and found that there was more of a scarcity in provision than duplication. Identified gaps had been relayed to the Children's Trust Board and other statutory partners, however, those areas required funding and they were not in a position to provide funding at the moment. There had been

discussions in relation to problem solving and finding better ways to work. MVDA had attracted funding into Middlesbrough, one example being funding from an organisation called Street Games. This was to address inactivity and funding was distributed to small local community groups that met the criteria.

MVDA made sure that any formal organisations it worked with had the minimum requirements in place on a range of policy areas, however, it was more difficult with community groups. It was important to ensure that professionals were clear about the status of a group/organisation in the community and the context in which they operated. A professional could not require a VCS group to do certain things as the group was not statutorily obligated. The Senior Strategic Development Officer wanted to reassure the Panel that, from a VCS perspective, it was focussed on raising standards within community groups.

The Panel was informed that MVDA received requests from a wide range of people for 'a directory of available services', however, MVDA found that providing a directory of community resources often led to families going to the wrong services and not getting the help that they needed. MVDA supported the Family Partnership Team to increase their understanding of which services were best placed to support particular needs within families. For example, no further action was taken in around 84% of domestic abuse incidents as they did not meet the prescribed threshold for Police to pursue prosecutions, etc or because of the definition of domestic abuse and the people involved. Obviously where risk existed there was a clear process to be followed. But where an incident was assumed to be domestic abuse there could be a range of other support services that could build a relationship with the people involved and to engage with them in other ways. The arguments could be related to unemployment, debt etc, and to addressing such issues may prove to provide the best support for the family. The Senior Strategic Development Officer had worked closely with the Family Partnership Team Manager, the Early Help Services and range of VCS partners to look at how issues within a family could be unpicked to provide the correct support in a timely fashion, rather than providing a directory of organisations which could lead to delays for the family receiving the most appropriate support.

The Senior Strategic Development Officer considered one of the biggest gaps in support to be around befriending. Many families were resistant to receiving the family interventions that were required due to a wide range of mistrust issues. MVDA was currently working on how the VCS could provide solutions to services that did not exist and establishing a befriending service model. Safe Families for Children did this at an informal level, however, their work had shifted into contracting with local authorities and working with higher risk families which, in turn, removed some of the lower level preventative support that they had previously offered. Middlesbrough Council no longer funded that organisation so there was a gap where that service previously existed. MVDA would look at whether there were any VCS organisations that could pick up that role although funding would be required.

In relation to community intelligence, the Panel was advised that due to the relationships developed between VCOs and the people they worked with, VCOs gathered a significant amount of information about the needs and impact of unmet need on children and families. Much of this information was anecdotal and was not formally recorded or reported but this information was invaluable in helping to understand the needs of families and their motivation and barriers to engagement with a range of services.

MVDA worked with commissioning teams where people decided where money should be spent to address particular needs. Many of those decisions were based on data collected from community organisations. For example, when working with youth providers, young people exchanged a lot of dialogue with youth workers which was not formally recorded (as it was not required to be) but that information could provide reasons as to why the young person needed a particular service or why they did not access particular services. One piece of project work being undertaken by MVDA, in conjunction with the Children's Trust, was to look at what types of information would be meaningful and how it could be translated into practice.

In response to a query, the Senior Strategic Development Officer advised that she attended the Early Help Forum where dialogue was exchanged around community intelligence, however, this was difficult to translate into commissioning and funding as whilst a lot of that information was useful it was not evidence based.

The Chair referred to page six of the submitted report, "What we Learned", and the reference to "...real barriers to integrated approaches which left families being bounced around services/contact with services being delayed due to access criteria not be met at an early enough/serious enough level" and asked whether an example of this could be provided.

The Senior Strategic Development Officer responded that a case study had been undertaken regarding a single mother with a two-year-old child. There had been four safeguarding referrals made in relation to the child and on each occasion the threshold for statutory support was not met as there was no neglect or deliberate harm to the child, however, mum had health issues preventing her from doing certain activities with the child which would eventually lead to a failure to thrive. The Health Visitor had made referrals to various adult services within health as some of the issues, in this case study were around obesity and mental health with mum being unable or resistant to engage in the solutions being offered by Health. Adult Health Services responded that if Mum refused to engage in the offer open to her, there was nothing more they could do. The Health Visitor remained concerned for the child but from the perspective of Children's Social Care, there were no indicators meeting the threshold of need for statutory support. On a system-wide level the message would appear to be that the situation needed to worsen significantly in order to meet the criteria for support. This was a challenge for staff and required a whole system approach. In this case adult and children's services needed to work together in order to find the best solutions for Mum and the child.

The MVDA's recommendations were being examined and the Panel was informed of the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) pilot that had recently commenced bringing together an integrated team to work in a different way. MVDA was discussing the issues with commissioners across the local authority, Health and PCC to come up with a more integrated approach.

In summary, in relation to what had been learned, the MVDA had:-

- Gathered community intelligence
- Undertaken strategic development work with: Kinship arrangements; supported children and young people's wellbeing; food poverty.
- Held VCS engagement events: relationship building for understanding and problem solving; bespoke approaches (refugee and asylum seekers, BAME, kinship, etc).

MVDA provided representation on a range of strategic bodies and carried out safeguarding training with organisations to increase understanding. Bespoke approaches were required to include VCO's supporting the statutory system to achieve improved outcomes.

In response to a query regarding potential cultural differences around certain issues, the Senior Strategic Development Officer advised that there were many reasons why people in communities would not engage with formal systems and that MVDA worked with specific organisations where community intelligence was important in addressing breaking down cultural barriers in a person-centred way.

In terms of the challenges of working together, the Panel heard that a key issue for the early help system was the challenge of multi-agency involvement and working together to better support children and families. Recognising that children and families were a whole unit requiring a range of early help responses from a range of agencies was understood at an individual level, however, in practice the responsibility for co-ordination, leading on assessments and brokering of support from services could be a cause of disagreement between Early Help Practitioners and partner agencies.

Whilst expectations around leading on assessment and co-ordination of support was easier to achieve within statutory and directly funded VCOs, difficulties occurred where agencies disagreed on their role in responding to identified needs. This often resulted in conflicting expectations about who was responsible at agency level with a detrimental impact on the children and families requiring support.

In response to the issues identified, MVDA had provided development support to VCOs and supported collaboration; promoted training and opportunities for growth; identified resources; developed partnership working; supported strategic engagement and planning and identified innovative and bespoke solutions for testing.

Reference was made to 'silo' thinking and practice. In isolation, each individual service was doing a good job but there were issues around integration and how this translated into how the commissioning of services was funded.

In terms of demand versus capacity, the Panel was informed that many of the services that were previously funded by the local authority within the voluntary sector simply no longer existed. There had been a shift towards crisis intervention with little funding available for prevention. In the VCS those organisations that routinely operated in prevention had also shifted towards crisis intervention as this was often the only way to obtain funding. This had generally led to volunteer local community groups and local activists trying to plug the gaps but it was unsustainable. Over the last 10 years the funding climate had shifted into crisis intervention, with increasing public sector cuts leading to the loss of low-level community support.

It was acknowledged that from birth onwards, preventing cultures and attitudes that supported many of the problems being experienced by children and families - often stemming from poverty and deprivation - needed to be addressed, however, it was difficult to make a social change until authentic prevention could be put into practice.

Following the work undertaken with Early Help, MVDA was facilitating a range of ongoing conversations with key VCOs that worked directly with children and families in Middlesbrough. This dialogue included what life was like for Middlesbrough's children and families; what future we want for Middlesbrough's children and families; and what the VCS could do collectively to close the gap between current and improved experiences. A VCS-led project group had been established with a desire to work towards a stronger VCS offer of early help and preventative support for children and families.

The Senior Strategic Development Officer considered that there were preventable delays in identifying need and access to appropriate support. Part of her role was to promote the VCS to develop enterprising models of generating income to be self-sustainable and to work with organisations around attracting resources. Whilst Middlesbrough did attract funding it was a relatively small amount in comparison to other areas of the country.

In terms of development and training support, MVDA identified issues as they arose within the early help system and worked with organisations, often in conjunction with the Family Partnership Team or other external training providers, to upskill the VCS workforce and actively seek areas for collaboration.

MVDA also supported strategic engagement and planning to ensuring that strategic decisions took into account the views of people in the community.

The feedback from the Family Partnership Team, two years on from the consultation work, was that staff had significantly increased their understanding of the VCS and different, bespoke approaches to working with families.

An example of one bespoke solution was provided where an understanding of need had been identified in North Ormesby resulting in a Family Worker being employed by the Church. MVDA had assisted in developing the role in partnership with the Family Partnership Team Manager. The Family Worker would undertake family assessments and encourage engagement with the required support services in situations where families were resistant to engagement with authorities.

From the evidence gathered, a theory of change model was under development and MVDA was in the process of working with key voluntary organisations such as Mind, My Sister's Place and Barnardo's to look at how VCOs could support what statutory services were doing without asking them for funding. This was ongoing work that would lead into the strategic planning and commissioning process.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to information previously provided to the Panel in relation to the appointment of four School Family Practitioners who would work directly in schools and it was queried whether this would assist in alleviating some of the problems. The Family Partnership

Team Manager advised that the posts were recently established and had now started to pick up cases. Funding for the posts was initially for a one-year period and proposals for the posts to continue would be submitted to the Head Teachers Forum in October 2019. It was hoped that the provision could be rolled out to additional schools, particularly as there was a growing number of Middlesbrough children being placed in out of area schools such (eg Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton) where support was also required for those children.

- It was queried whether the Senior Strategic Development Officer had identified gaps within provision. In response, the Officer stated that gaps in relation to funding and 'silo' approaches had already been identified and some of these issues were being looked at. Plans around domestic abuse, substance misuse, and homelessness were being looked at in terms of whether some of those services could be integrated. The key was to work together and move towards understanding each other's perspectives and pressures.
- Reference was made to the Community Connect Service, led by MVDA, funded by the Council, based on the principals of early intervention for adults and it was queried whether a similar model might work in relation to children's services. The Senior Strategic Development Officer advised that a working group had been established with key organisations with a view to developing a theory of change model exploring a similar approach for children and families.
- A Member of the Panel expressed support for such a model which would have the potential to link to the Community Connect Service.
- A Panel Member asked whether the Strategic Development Officer envisaged MVDA's role expanding in future as it would be useful for MVDA to be involved as early as possible in the Council's budget setting processes in terms of addressing funding pressures but potentially being able to continue providing particular services by working in partnership with appropriate VCOs. The Senior Strategic Development Officer responded that MVDA looked at innovative, low-cost solutions and would flag up, at a strategic level, possible solutions. The Chief Executive of the MVDA met with key Chief Executives of other organisations so there was ongoing dialogue at a strategic level. Since the conclusion of the early help focussed work in April 2018, further requests for MVDA to develop specific projects had been received, however, this required funding. As local authorities were only able to fund the most essential services going forward, MVDA was trying to work with the sector to develop business enterprising models that worked to attract resources to Middlesbrough.

The Chair thanked the Senior Strategic Development Officer for her attendance and very informative presentation.

AGREED that the information contained in the submitted report and the information provided at the meeting, be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's current scrutiny topic of Early Help and Prevention Services.

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 8 January 2019, namely:-

- Final Report of the Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel – LGB&T Community and Elderly Care.
- Executive Update.
- 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 12 February 2019 at 1.30pm.