

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 24 June 2019

PRESENT: Councillors: Cooke, Coupe, Dodds, Garvey, Platt, Saunders, Uddin, J Walker and Wright.

OFFICERS: A Brown, R Brown, J Dixon and H Watson.

PRESENT AS OBSERVERS: Councillor Smith, J Robinson – Assistant to Elected Mayor.

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR PRO-TEM

Nominations for the Chair Pro-tem were sought. Councillor Coupe was nominated and seconded and, following a vote, appointed as Chair Pro-tem of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.

AGREED that Councillor Coupe be appointed as Chair Pro-tem of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair Pro-tem sought nominations for the Chair of the Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Garvey was nominated and seconded and, following a vote, Councillor Garvey was appointed Chair of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.

AGREED that Councillor Garvey be appointed as Chair of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.

APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

The Chair sought nominations for Vice Chair of the Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Coupe was nominated and seconded and, following a vote, Councillor Coupe was appointed Vice Chair of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.

AGREED that Councillor Coupe be appointed as Vice Chair of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – There were no apologies for absence.

**** 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 9 April 2019 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

A query was raised with regard to the update provided to the previous meeting, in relation to recommendation p), which referred to an app that had been developed for young people to use in order to provide their views and wishes. The app 'MOMO' had the same name as a disturbing internet hoax. The Panel was reassured that the app 'Mind of My Own' app (shortened to MOMO) had been rebranded as Mind of My Own.

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

H Watson, Executive Director of Children's Services, A Brown, Director of Children's Care and R Brown, Director of Prevention and Partnerships, were in attendance to provide the Panel with an overview of the wide range of services provided by Children's Services.

It was explained that Children's Services was a single department covering all services for children provided by the Council, comprising:-

- Prevention and Partnerships
- Education
- Children's Care
- Business, Performance and Change (created in February 2019).

Children's Services had a budget of £54 million per annum (excluding schools) and its responsibilities were intensively regulated and inspected by outside bodies.

Three particular challenges for the department as a whole were:-

- Demand
- Budget
- Inspections

Demand

The Panel heard that over the last ten years there had been a significant increase in the numbers of children coming into care, either becoming looked after or through child protection. This was a national trend and data from CAFCASS for the whole of England showed an increase of 10-12% over the last ten years.

Demand pressures in Middlesbrough were stark with rising levels of child poverty and family dysfunction. The current figure for looked after children (including residential, foster care and connected persons care) was 535.

Budget

In terms of budget pressures, many reports over the years, including a more recent report from Newton Europe, provided details of the challenges local authorities faced in responding to rising demand and called for Children's Services to be properly funded. The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) was also outspoken on this point. Nationally there was a deficit of several £ billion in Children's Services going forward.

Inspections

The Panel was advised that there was a Court process around all children coming into care and that this was tightly regulated.

Ofsted rigorously inspected Children's Services and held an 'annual conversation' with the department. Children's Services prepared a self-assessment in relation to its performance against all of its services and the quality of the work it had undertaken with children and families.

The inspection regime changed in January 2018 around Children's Services. During a three-year period, the department could now expect one major inspection and two focussed visits.

Since August 2018, two focussed visits had been undertaken. In August 2018, a focussed visit was undertaken in relation to the 'front door' of Children's Services. Significant changes had taken place since that visit, with the implementation of the South Tees Multi Agency Children's Hub (STMACH) which had recently gone live.

In April 2019, a second focussed visit was carried out in relation to Children in Need and Child Protection. The report from Ofsted largely agreed with the Council's own self-assessment and could be found on the Ofsted website (15 May 2019).

Whilst the new inspection regime was very demanding in terms of the increased focussed visits, it was also helpful to the department's improvement journey. Forthcoming inspections included services for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND); and Early Help Planning and Children's Social Care.

In addition Children's Services carried out multi-agency thematic audits and routinely worked with partners as well as being part of the regional peer review process. A peer review of the Leaving Care Service was carried out in November 2018 and a further peer review was recently undertaken in relation to finance and governance arrangements in Children's Services. Middlesbrough worked closely with Partners in Practice to draw upon knowledge from strongly performing local authorities and vice-versa.

Prevention and Partnerships

The Director of Prevention and Partnerships advised that two key areas sat within the directorate, as follows:-

Stronger Families

Stronger Families provided a wide range of early help services and was made up of four key strands:-

- School Readiness (Children's Centre/Nurseries (PVI Payments))
- Family Partnership Team
- Family Casework Team
- Work Readiness (monitoring and support for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET))

Currently, the vast majority of families who received support from Stronger Families did not re-enter Children's Care. 88% had not been referred following a 12 month period following intervention.

Children's Centre registrations were 83.5% (Ofsted - good) and vulnerable target groups reached 80.7% (Ofsted – outstanding).

The rate of young people that were not in education, employment or training (NEET) was 5.0% - this was lower than the national and regional average.

The priorities for Stronger Families were:-

- To continue to work with partners to deliver the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) project, to prevent the damaging impact of such experiences on children's lives.
- To deliver the key areas of improvement within the early help strategy to manage demand and improve outcomes for children and families.

Partnerships

- South Tees Youth Offending Service (statutory service)
- Troubled Families Programme
- Children's Trust Board
- Safeguarding Children's Board (statutory)
- Risk and Resilience Team – VEMT (Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, Trafficked)

It was highlighted that the South Tees Youth Offending Service was a shared service with Redcar and Cleveland and, in April 2019, was rated 'Good' by HMIP Inspection.

There was currently a significant decrease in First Time Entrants to CJS and the re-offending rate was below the national and regional average.

A key priority for Partnerships was to develop and deliver a new South Tees Local Safeguarding Arrangement with statutory partners.

The Director provided information in relation to each of the services provided by his directorate and invited Members of the Panel to visit the Children's Centre sites and the two schools currently undertaking the ACE Pilot project, should they wished to do so.

Children's Care

The Director of Children's Care informed the Panel that the key areas within her directorate were:-

- Fostering
- Adoption Tees Valley
- Children's Homes
- 'No Wrong Door' trailblazer with North Yorkshire Council

Children's Care provided social care services to children and families in Middlesbrough, including Assessment, Children in Need/Child Protection, Looked After Children, Children with Disabilities and Leaving Care.

The majority of duties were statutory and strictly governed by intensive regulation and inspection.

The national context was of sharply rising demand in this area, causing workforce strains and budgetary pressures. Middlesbrough had the third highest rate of Looked After Children in the country (2.6 times higher than the national average), linked to local deprivation and social issues.

The Council was corporate parent to 535 children in care currently and provided short break, support and associated services to children with disabilities. The department also supported Care Leavers up to the age of 25 with their transition into adulthood.

Children's Care had a budget of £30 million but the cost of providing the services had risen significantly in recent years and identifying more effective ways of spending this money was key to improving services and controlling expenditure.

The 'Believe in Families' Transformation Programme was a key part of the Service's improvement journey.

In response to a query as to whether there was any correlation between the number of children in care and teenage pregnancy rates, the Panel was advised that there was a range of factors as to why a child became looked after, however, teenage pregnancy was not a key driver. It was highlighted that teen parents were one of the target groups worked with by the Children's Centre.

The key challenges for Children's Care were: ensuring the voice of the child was at the heart of everything; the recruitment, retention and stability of the workforce; and improving the quality and consistency of practice.

Fostering brought its own challenges in terms of recruitment and demographics. A new Fostering Marketing Strategy was launched towards the end of 2018 which aimed to raise awareness of the need for foster care placements in Middlesbrough in order to reduce the amount of 'bought in' agency foster placements. The Strategy also aimed to increase the number and range of foster care placements in Middlesbrough, with an emphasis on providing placements for larger sibling groups and mother and child placements.

In relation to adoption, the Panel was advised that Adoption Tees Valley operated regionally between Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Hartlepool and Stockton and was responsible for undertaking all assessments of prospective adopters and training for adopters.

In terms of residential placements (children's homes), the Panel was informed that Middlesbrough currently operated four homes. Gleneagles provided short break care for children with disabilities and had recently been converted to provide placements for children with autism. Each Children's Home was required to provide a 'statement of purpose' and could accommodate up to four children. It was acknowledged that a number of children had to be placed in private residential placements which were costly, therefore, a combination of additional residential placements and additional in-house foster carers was required in order to make financial savings going forward.

Business, Performance and Change

The Executive Director advised that Panel that Business, Performance and Change was a new directorate, created in February 2019, to support transformation in Children's Services, particularly in Children's Care.

It provided support to the service in:-

- Implementing a data driven performance management culture.
- Quality Assurance via a meaningful audit process with effective feedback.
- Developing a workforce strategy to improve recruitment and retention and reduce sickness, providing a strong and stable workforce.
- Directing resources at areas of Early Help and Prevention that would save money by reducing the need for costly intervention later on.
- Commissioning fostering and residential placements in a planned manner to provide the right environment for children whilst ensuring value for money and increasing in-house provision, where appropriate.
- Developing Edge of Care services to reduce the number of children coming into care and support placement stability.
- Facilitating change to enable the service to remain within allocated budgets and, therefore, protect the integrity of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.
- Ensuring that the Service is ready for short notice inspections.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and the information provided.

AGREED that the information provided in relation to Children's Services be noted.