

## 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 9 September 2019**

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Garvey (Chair), Coupe (Vice Chair); Cooke, Dodds, Purvis (substitute for Councillor J Walker), P Storey (substitute for Councillor Wright) and Uddin.

**OFFICERS:** A Brown, J Dixon and I Wright.

### \*\* 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 22 July 2019 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

### MANAGING DEMAND IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES – INTRODUCTION TO NEW SCRUTINY TOPIC

A Brown, Director of Children's Care, and I Wright, Director of Business, Performance and Change, Children's Services, were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with a presentation to 'set the scene' for its new scrutiny topic of 'Managing Demand in Children's Social Care Services'.

The Panel was informed that Children's Social Care's statutory responsibilities comprised of:-

- Children in Need (CiN), Child Protection (CP), and Looked After Children (LAC) Services – in accordance with 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' 2018. The guidance was underpinned by the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
- Support to Care Leavers – in accordance with the Children and Young Persons Act 2008.
- Multi Agency Co-operation on Safeguarding and Promoting the Welfare of Children – in accordance with the Children Act 2004.

A breakdown of the Service's budgetary responsibility in 2019/20 (revenue and capital) was provided as follows:-

Budget Heading	Budget in 2019/20
Management and Administration	£ 1,451,680
Assessments and Care Planning	£ 2,005,320
Safeguarding (CiN and CP)	£ 4,027,600
LAC and Corporate Parenting	£ 5,545,700
Residential and Resources	£ 18,015,190
Children's Care	£ 31,045,470

It was highlighted that the Children's Social Care budget was £31 million for 2019/20, this accounted for approximately 28% of the Council's total net budget of £111 million. The greatest proportion of the Children's Social Care budget - £18,015,190 - was spent on residential homes and fostering arrangements.

The Service's priorities for the current financial year were outlined as follows:-

- To deliver Middlesbrough's Parenting Strategy, to ensure parents were well-supported and that children and young people make good progress.
- To embed strength based practice across Children's Services to enable families to care for children safely and support them to achieve.

- c) To deliver edge of care, increased residential and in-house fostering provision in Middlesbrough to meet the needs of children and families.
- d) To deliver and evaluate a workforce strategy for the department to enable a stable and high-performing workforce who demonstrate the Council's values and deliver the Service's priorities.
- e) To improve the quality of social work practice, to improve outcomes for children and families.
- f) To strengthen the department's performance management culture, to drive continuous improvement in outcomes for children and young people and value for money within Children's Services.
- g) To create a Youth Parliament to give young people a greater say in the development of services and outcomes.

During the course of discussion in relation to the priorities and the Service budget, the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query, the Panel was informed that the Parenting Strategy was a priority across the whole of Children's Services.
- In relation to strength-based practice, the Panel was informed that Children's Care had adopted a method of working called 'Signs of Safety'. This approach was based on professionals working together with families to identify any worries and concerns, what was working well and issues where improvement was required. Signs of Safety used a scaling system from 1-10 for problems allowing all parties to have a joint understanding of the issues.
- In terms of the workforce strategy, it was noted that good progress was being made which included addressing issues with the recruitment and retention of Social Workers which had been problematic in recent years. It was highlighted that difficulties with recruitment and retention was influenced by a range of factors such as demanding workloads, workplace environment, parking, salary, etc.
- In response to a query regarding incentives to retain Social Workers, the Panel was advised that a scheme had been introduced offering 15% salary up front to Team Managers and Social Workers with a certain level of experience. In return the member of staff was required to sign an undertaking to remain with Middlesbrough Council for a minimum of three years.
- In terms of the Workforce Strategy, as part of the improvement plan, it was highlighted that there were currently no Team Manager vacancies within Children's Care which was a key issue. Reference was made to a young, inexperienced Social Worker workforce where the right training and strong management was essential to improve confidence in assessing risk in the best interests of the children.
- A Panel Member queried whether it was common for children to have multiple Social Workers. In response the Panel was advised that it was more common than desired and that agency workers had been commissioned in the past to plug gaps. The vision was for a child to have one Social Worker in order to build up trust and a good relationship and this did happen in some teams such as the Pathways (Leaving Care) Team and Fostering Team. However, the workforce strategy and the new arrangements in relation to recruitment and retention of Social Workers had initiated a significant improvement.
- In response to a question, the Panel was informed that there were currently three agency social workers working within Children's Care out of 180 FTE. In comparison, some local authorities operated with 40-50% agency social work staff.
- In a discussion around the use of agency social workers, it was highlighted that there was a North East agreement to pay around 25% more than an employed Social Worker's salary. The reason for using agency workers was due to difficulties with recruitment, however, significant progress had been made in this area.

- In terms of strengthening the department's performance management, it was highlighted that this needed to focus on increasing awareness of spending, particularly for Social Workers who were required to make decisions, in the best interests of children, in a timely fashion and perhaps looking at ways of providing support to Social Workers making decisions with significant financial implications.
- Reference was made to the £18 million spent on residential and resources and it was queried whether this included external fostering placements. It was confirmed that this figure did include the cost of providing external foster placements and that approximately £8 million of that figure accounted for external residential placements. The Panel was advised that external residential children's homes were operated by a third party. Around 60 (of the current 550 looked after children) were placed in external residential placements. Eleven children were currently placed in Middlesbrough's own residential homes, at a cost of approximately £2 million. £6.5 million was spent on placing children with Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) carers. Around 150 children were currently placed with IFA carers and around 140 were placed with Middlesbrough in-house foster carers. This number of in-house carers had increased through the utilisation of Connected Persons (Kinship) carers.
- A query was raised in relation to the cost of emergency placements and the Panel was informed that the cost of placing a child in external residential provision was an average of £160,000 per year, per child. The Service was aiming to increase in-house capacity in order to provide a better quality of care for children, to reduce costs and also to reduce the numbers of looked after children placed in residential homes as outcomes were less favourable than for those placed with families.
- In response to a query, the Panel was informed that Middlesbrough worked jointly with Redcar on Cleveland in a number of areas within Children's Services, such as the recently established South Tees Multi Agency Hub (the front door of the Service); South Tees Safeguarding Children's Board and a joint Youth Offending Service. In terms of residential home placements, Middlesbrough was able to provide other local authorities with places within its own children's homes should it have a vacancy. In comparison with neighbouring authorities it was noted that Redcar and Cleveland currently had no residential provision of its own whereas Stockton had developed its provision over recent years.
- With regard to potentially expanding residential home provision, the Panel was advised that great care needed to be exercised to ensure that provision would be cost effective. It would require careful planning and matching of the children placed. For example, a residential home may be able to place three children, at a cost of £3,000 per week per child, however, if one of the children placed had complex needs and no other children were able to be placed with them, the cost of providing that child with a residential placement would rise to £9,000 per week as no other children could be placed there. Expanding provision may require considering a mix of homes in order to provide places for a few children or a single child with complex/behavioural needs.

In relation to the national context of Children's Social Care, the Panel was informed that there was a predicted £2 billion funding shortfall by 2020. There was also a massive variation in spend per child in local authority areas. This varied between £299 and £805 per child. Middlesbrough was at the higher end of this spend.

The 2017/18 Revenue Outturn Figures from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government showed that nationally there was a £8.85 billion overspend against a budget of £8.03 billion.

The Panel was notified that Newton Europe was commissioned to look at 'What drives variation in spend on Children's Services between authorities?' It found five factors largely outside of councils' control that accounted for half of all variation in spend. These were:-

- 1 Deprivation.
- 2 Population size 0-25
- 3 Disposable household income
- 4 Unemployment

## 5 Crime

The national picture of children's services showed:-

- Record numbers of children in care.
- Child protection enquiries increased by more than 150%.
- Looked after children accounted for approximately 70% of the total spend on children's services nationally.
- Nationally, evidence of successful reduction in spend:-
  - Avoid care episodes and invest to save.
  - Prevent drift in case work
  - Ensure the best setting for the child – exploring family placements/ special guardianship orders/ in-house foster care.
  - Base plans on sound assessments using thresholds.

The local picture for Children's Services in Middlesbrough showed:-

- Children's Care budget for 2017/18 - £29.827 million.
- £1.55 million overspend in 2017/18. Middlesbrough's 2017/18 overspend was 5%, half the national overspend of 10%, albeit from a better funded budget position.
- Children' Care budget for 2018/19 - £30.783 million (including identified savings). Children's Services required to make savings of £2.156 million for 2018/19 via:-
  - £656,000 savings
  - Additional demand funding of £1.5 million has been removed.
- 2018/19 year end position – overspend of £3.318 million.
- Savings profile: £2.131 million for 2019/20; £2.099 million for 2020/21 and £1.792 million for 2021/22.

The Panel was provided with a breakdown of the savings required in order to balance the budget and it was highlighted that there was a total of £5.7 million savings planned over the next three years.

A range of information from Middlesbrough's Children's Trust was provided to the Panel including the following key points:-

- As at August 2018, the rate per 10,000 of looked after children in Middlesbrough was 156.5 compared to 60.0 nationally.
- For every Child in Need (tier 4), Middlesbrough had 1.2 cases in Early Help.
- 84% of Early Help cases held in the Family Casework Team did not escalate to Children's Social Care within 12 months of closure and 79% of cases closed with the original need being met.
- Just 5.3% of cases stepped up to Children's Social Care from Early Help resulted in a child becoming looked after.
- Middlesbrough was the sixth most deprived local authority in the country.
- Middlesbrough had a high population of 0-25 age group and demand for Children's Social Care continued to rise quickly in the North East, growing more quickly in the Tees Valley, with fastest growing demand in Middlesbrough.
- 37% of children in Middlesbrough lived in child poverty.
- 63% of children lived in the top 20% most deprived areas in the country.
- Cleveland had the second highest rate of domestic violence incidents in the country, with Middlesbrough having the highest rate of domestic violence incidents in the Cleveland area.

- The 2011 census identified 11% of the population in Middlesbrough a BME, with 50% of the BME population under the age of 25.
- The majority of children and families worked with by Children's Social Care lived in North and East Middlesbrough.

In relation to demand, Middlesbrough received 860 referrals (per 10,000 of children under 18) in 2017/18. This compared locally with 586.8 in Stockton; 613.5 in Hartlepool and 490.6 in Redcar and Cleveland. Referrals were received from various sources including members of the public, Police and schools. A good deal of work had been done in helping schools to make appropriate referrals and this had resulted in fewer referrals with an improvement in the quality of the referral.

Middlesbrough completed 2,989 assessments during 2017/18, compared with 2,660 in Stockton; 1,369 in Hartlepool and 1,734 in Redcar and Cleveland.

The Panel was interested to note that Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland shared many of the same partners who used the same referral thresholds, however, Middlesbrough's referral rates were significantly higher than those in Redcar and Cleveland.

Children's Services was looking at ways of mitigating pressures on the Service and had developed the following key Transformation Themes:-

Build in-house capacity in residential and fostering services to improve the unit cost of placing those children looked after by the Council

- Daniel Court – In June 2019 the Council's Executive approved leasing arrangements from Thirteen, in respect of the expansion of the Council's edge of care provision for children aged 16+ at Daniel Court, for a ten year period. Once refurbished, the property would provide places for nine 16-17 year olds working towards independent living. These young people currently lived in unregistered private properties with a support package in place. The new edge of care provision at Daniel Court offered the Council potential savings of £1 million per year.
- Potential extra residential home – A change of use planning application had been submitted and relevant Ward Councillors informed. The property would have a general registration to accommodate children aged 3-17, although, the young people placed in residential homes tended to be aged 14 and over. The registration category would allow use for emergency placements of younger children if necessary.
- Fostering campaign and specialist fostering provision – The launch of the fostering campaign at the end of 2018 had generated a great deal of interest, however, there had been a struggle to follow up all interest due to staffing capacity issues. It was planned to re-launch the fostering campaign in the near future.
- In-house provision of services for Children with Disabilities – Many services for children with disabilities were provided by a third party and the Council was exploring ways in which those services could be delivered in a more effective way potentially in-house.

Edge of Care and Early Intervention Services to reduce the number of children who need to become looked after

- 'No Wrong Door' Trailblazer with North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) – Central Government had selected Middlesbrough to be the Trailblazer authority for No Wrong Door, supported by North Yorkshire County Council. NYCC had established two hubs which provided residential and outreach services to address the young person's needs in a single team. The model was very successful in North Yorkshire. Middlesbrough would receive £1.6 million over the next two and a half years to deliver the project.
- Family Group Conferencing – Collective planning that aimed to keep the child at home if safe to do so. A bid for additional funding from the Department for Education had been made in order to expand this offer to families.

- Effective and intensive intervention with families who had children at the edge of care.
- Strong and robust panels to assess risk, monitor care planning and ensure thresholds were applied consistently and appropriately.

#### One Council approach and partnership working to strengthen families in Middlesbrough and mitigate demand

- Improvement journey to achieve social work practice of a high quality to support families.
- Work effectively with partners to ensure families can access the support they need in a timely and effective manner to prevent escalation.
- Ensure a co-ordinated approach across the Council and with other agencies to the 'Toxic Trio' of substance misuse, domestic abuse and parental mental health that were key factors in putting children at risk.

The Panel was advised that external scrutiny of Children's Services included:-  
Ofsted:-

- Annual self-evaluation of Social Work practice.
- Annual conversation regarding progress and plans.
- Focused visits on a potential area of improvement or strength.
- Standard inspection, one every three-year period.

CQC:-

- Home Support Inspection
- Peer review

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and informative presentation.

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's current scrutiny topic.

#### **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 2 April 2019, namely:-

- The Executive Member for Finance and Governance and the Strategic Director for Finance, Governance and Support - overview of the work within Finance, Governance and Support.
- Scrutiny Panel Work Programmes for 2019/20.
- Executive Forward Work Programme.
- Role of the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel.
- Scrutiny Panel progress reports.

**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 7 October 2019 at 4.00pm.