

## 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 16 December 2019.**

**PRESENT:** Councillors: Garvey (Chair); Councillors: Dodds, Hill, Saunders, J Walker, Wilson and Wright

**OFFICERS:** R Brown, J Dixon and G Earl.

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor J Thompson – Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Board.

**APOLOGIES** for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cooke and Uddin.

### **\*\* DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

### **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 Dodds was nominated and seconded and appointed Vice Chair of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel.

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

### **MINUTES**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 7 October 2019 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

### **MANAGING DEMAND IN CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE SERVICES – FURTHER INFORMATION**

At its previous meeting on 7 October 2019, the Scrutiny Panel was provided with detailed information in relation to the 'No Wrong Door' Transformation Theme. The Panel requested information in relation to the remaining Transformation Themes within Children's Services.

R Brown, Director of Partnerships and Prevention, and G Earl, Head of Prevention, were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with a presentation in relation to the 'One Council Approach and Partnership Working' Transformation Theme in Children's Services.

The Director informed the Panel that the Early Help and Prevention Service, known as 'Stronger Families' worked with families by offering direct work and evidence based interventions from universal level through to level three interventions. Level four interventions were statutory services provided under the Children's Act and included Children in Need, Child Protection and Children Looked After.

The Stronger Families Team consisted of: Children's Centres (School Readiness); Family Partnership Team; Family Casework Team; Work Readiness (NEET) and Trauma Informed Practice Team.

It was highlighted that schools, Police and other partners worked with early help services which comprised a skilled workforce including a range of specialist workers such as Adult Substance Misuse Social Worker, Psychotherapist, Clinical Psychologist, Health Visitors and School Nurses.

The Trauma Informed Practice Team had been recently established to focus on 'revolving door' cases in Children's Services.

In terms of managing demand into Children's Social Care, the Panel was informed that there was a high demand for Early Help services and that there had been an increase in the number of referrals

to Early Help. There were currently 990 children open to Early Help in Middlesbrough – this was the number of children being supported across all of the Stronger Families Teams on a caseload approach, therefore, included all children within each family being supported. The figure was higher than at the same time last year and demand was being mapped so that the increase could be studied. The number of cases handled by the Family Partnership Team alone had trebled, with 588 cases currently held by partners. The outcomes for families receiving Early Help support were good, with 77% internal cases closing with the families' needs being met and positive outcomes achieved.

In response to a comment from a Panel Member in relation to the high numbers of children open to Early Help, the Director advised that Early Help services were provided to families who were starting to experience problems before they escalated. Therefore, it was better to have higher numbers of cases open to Early Help, followed by lower numbers of Children in Need, Child Protection and children in care.

It was acknowledged that some children entered the system directly at statutory social care level (level four), however, they could be stepped down to level three (Casework Team) if appropriate. In November 2019, 58 children were stepped down from Children's Social Care to level three Early Help. The Panel was advised that there had been an increase in step downs and step ups.

The majority of families who had received support from Stronger Families did not re-enter Children's Social Care, and 90% of cases were not re-referred to Children's Social Care in the 12 month period following the case being closed.

Stronger families also supported vulnerable adolescents through the Work Readiness Team. The rate of young people Not in Education Employment or Training (NEET) in Middlesbrough had reduced year on year with the latest data (2018) showing that Middlesbrough's rate was lower than the regional and national levels:-

- Middlesbrough – 5%
- Regional – 6.5%
- National – 5.5%

It was noted that the achievements in the low NEET rate had led to Manchester Local Authority conducting a good practice visit. Panel Members wished to congratulate the Work Readiness Team on its success.

In terms of the partnership approach to Early Help, there was an increase in the number of early help cases led by partners. There were currently 588 cases open to partners including 33 schools and other partners such as health visitors.

Support was provided to partners who took on the Lead Practitioner role and this was co-ordinated through the multi-agency Early Help Forum.

During the last 12 month period, 364 partners had been trained in safeguarding thresholds and 132 partners had attended training in the My Family Plan (Early Help Assessment).

The Panel was provided with information regarding the co-ordination of repeat missing children and young people, CSE and VEMT. A dedicated post had been established to co-ordinate responses to children vulnerable to sexual exploitation or being trafficked, exploited, missing from home/care/education.

The small team of staff dealing with the above had been brought in-house around five months ago and the numbers of repeat missing young people was at its lowest for some time.

It was highlighted that the performance on the service response to children who go missing had improved. 94% of Return Home Interviews had been offered and 974 interviews were undertaken (74.7%).

The Panel was advised that the Children Missing from Education Manager chaired regular multi-agency meetings, analysed school data and attended the Vulnerable Persons Group to provide

data and a link between children missing from education and the information regarding those missing from home, missing from care and/or those at risk of CSE or being trafficked.

A Panel Member queried the current number of VEMT young people in Middlesbrough. The Director stated that he would obtain the information and circulate to the Panel.

The work of the Early Help Service was co-ordinated through the following strategic partnerships:-

- South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership (STSCP)
- Children's Trust
- Prevention and Partnership Sub Group
- Early Help Forum
- VEMT

The Early Help service was recognised as best practise in the following areas:-

- Early Help family casework was good. Through audit of cases, 68% of early help case audits were judged as outstanding or good; 27% required improvement and 5% were inadequate.
- Low NEET rates had led to Manchester Local Authority conducting a good practice visit.
- Public Health England had identified work in the Children's Centres as a national good practice model.

In terms of the next steps for the Early Help service, focus would be on:-

- Embedding Trauma Informed Practice within early help to improve outcomes for 'revolving door' children, young people and families to prevent referrals to Children's Care.
- Increasing the number of Early Help Assessments completed (My Family Plans) by partners and to ensure consistency in the quality of external early help work through regular multi-agency early help audit activity.
- Developing a young person's participation group with children and young people who had accessed early help to tell us how we could improve services.
- Reviewing the step-up/step-down process to ensure effective joint working between early help and children's care through joint handover visits and clear transitions for families.
- Implementing learning and improvements from monthly audits and challenge clinics within the early help workforce.
- Integration of Public Health prevention services with Prevention and Partnerships directorate to deliver more streamlined and fully integrated prevention services. Pilot locality working and demand modelling within Newport and North Ormesby targeting early help resources in the wards with high levels of demand on Children's Care.

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.

#### **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR SCRUTINY TOPIC**

The Panel considered its draft terms of reference for its current scrutiny topic of Managing Demand in Children's Social Care Services.

**AGREED** that the Scrutiny Panel agree its terms of reference for the current scrutiny topic of Managing Demand in Children's Social Care Services, as follows:-

1. To investigate the current position with regard to demand for Children's Social Care Services in Middlesbrough and how this compares locally and nationally.
2. To gain an understanding of the main drivers for demand and areas of highest expenditure within Children's Social Care Services in Middlesbrough.
3. To consider the work being undertaken by the local authority to mitigate demand for, and reduce the cost of, Children's Social Care in Middlesbrough.
4. To identify good practice and evidence-based approaches that aim to reduce demand for Children's Social Care.

#### **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 14 November 2019, namely:-

- Update from Children's Services
- Final Report of the Health Scrutiny Panel - Vulnerable and Fragile Services
- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Scrutiny Panels 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 6 January 2020 at 4.00pm.