

## 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 10 February 2020.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Garvey (Chair), Councillor Dodds (Vice Chair); Councillors: Cooke, Hill, Rathmell (substitute for Councillor Saunders), J Walker, Wilson and Wright.

**OFFICERS:** S Butcher, J Dixon and T Parkinson.

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Members of the Corporate Parenting Board:-  
Councillors: Hellaoui, Higgins, Platt, Nugent, Thompson, Cooper and High.  
A Preston – Elected Mayor of Middlesbrough.

**PRESENT AS OBSERVERS:** Councillor Coope – Stainton & Thornton Ward Councillor.  
D Johnson – Labour Group Political Assistant.  
A Hoy – Principal Media Relations Officer.  
S Bonner; S Reynolds – Democratic Services.  
J Cain – Local Democracy Reporter.

**APOLOGIES** for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Saunders 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 6 January 2020 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

### **CHILDREN'S SERVICES – IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

T Parkinson, Chief Executive and S Butcher, Interim Director of Children's Care were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Scrutiny Panel with information on Children's Service's 12-week improvement plan and governance arrangements following the findings of the Ofsted inspection on Children's Services, published on 24 January 2020.

The Chair of the Scrutiny Panel had extended an invitation to Members of the Corporate Parenting Board in order to avoid duplication of the same information being provided to an additional meeting of the Board.

A copy of the Ofsted Inspection Report had been circulated to all Members of the Scrutiny Panel and the Corporate Parenting Board, for information, prior to the meeting.

Members were provided with a copy of the Immediate Assurance Plan. It was explained that the document was compiled to provide immediate assurance to the Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services regarding the safety of Middlesbrough's vulnerable children and young people, whilst complying with legislation.

The plan had been discussed with, and approved by, corporate colleagues and senior officers in partner agencies in a meeting of Middlesbrough's existing Improvement Board on 13 January 2020.

A more in-depth, longer term plan was currently under development with the aim of addressing Ofsted's recommendations and the reasons behind them, as set out in its inspection report. It was highlighted that development of the longer term plan would include consultation with partner agencies and the views, wishes and feelings of children and young people represented throughout. The remaining actions from the immediate plan would be incorporated into the longer term plan to provide continuity of approach and response.

The Immediate Assurance Plan correlated with the three areas contained within the Ofsted inspection report and for each of the judgement areas, the plan provided details of:-

- Key actions
- Activity
- Outcome
- What this means for children
- Lead Officer
- Target date
- Rag rating
- Update

In addition to the information detailed in the document, the Director of Children's Care provided the following verbal information:-

It was explained that the South Tees Multi Agency Children's Hub (STMACH) was a multi-agency team working across Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland local authorities incorporating Early Help and Safeguarding Services.

Quality audits were required within the South Tees Multi Agency Hub (STMACH) that aimed to move from compliance to quality. Themes from audits would inform training that could be embedded into practice.

It had been identified that thresholds for early help and social care were not set at the correct level and work was being undertaken within the STMACH and with Early Help to review the levels of need thresholds.

Some documents were not always signed off in the way that they should be, for example, the operating procedures for the STMACH were currently in draft format. This was now being revised and finalised.

In terms of reviewing the thresholds per se, it was recognised that Middlesbrough needed to work with all stakeholders to review the South Tees Threshold Document. Middlesbrough was clear on what was required to achieve this.

It was identified that the voice of the child needed to be more predominant within the plan for the child and the wider improvement plan would involve consulting with children and young people to obtain their views and find out what was important to them. As part of the revised governance arrangements, a children's reference group would be established, supported by the Youth Participation Officers, and outcomes would be fed into the wider improvement plan.

The current housing protocol was being reviewed in relation to young people presenting as homeless and progress was being made. A series of three-hour workshops had been arranged for relevant staff to ensure they had an understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and those of partners (particularly housing), in relation to young people presenting as homeless. To date, 143 staff had attended the workshops.

A delivery plan was currently in progress to address Ofsted's concerns that the local authority was not aware of the number of children held overnight in Police custody and needed to strengthen systems and processes with the Police to manage this.

A Clarity and Confidence Programme had been developed which included workshops for Social Workers to provide clarity on improving the quality of responses to child protection enquiries and to instil confidence across the workforce.

In relation to improving responses to children who experience significant harm through neglect, Members were advised that there were currently 186 children subject to Child Protection Plans under the category of neglect. Initially it was considered that a sample audit should be undertaken, however, it was concluded that an audit of all these children should be carried out and in order to do this an additional resource was required.

In response to ensuring that children with disabilities who received short breaks were appropriately assessed and reviewed by suitably qualified staff, it was explained that the short break co-ordinators had not been reviewing short break arrangements. Arrangements had now been put in place for Social Workers to carry out assessment and review as appropriate.

The inspection report identified that children were not being taken into care quickly enough, although the numbers of children coming into care in Middlesbrough compared well with other local authorities. The children in care in Middlesbrough were spending too long in care with delays in moving them on to permanence. The permanency policy was being reviewed and a permanency mapping process was under development in order to map where each child was in their permanency journey.

The Permanency Monitoring Group was to be re-launched in the near future and would be chaired by an independent chair.

In relation to care leavers, Ofsted identified that caseloads were too high for Personal Advisors and that they were not working with young people in enough depth. Resources for additional capacity had been identified, however, no-one had been recruited as yet.

Reference was made to unregulated placements and it was explained that an unregulated placement was where a young person over the age of 16 was placed in a setting not inspected by Ofsted. It was essential that all young people were properly assessed to determine whether they required care or support. All young people in this position were being reassessed and progress would be monitored on a weekly basis.

In addition, the approach regarding vulnerable adolescents (those at risk to themselves and/or others) was being reviewed.

Strategic leadership was crucial to drive the improvement of services for children in Middlesbrough. A Communication Strategy had been developed and audit activity was being widened to partners although an audit plan was not yet in place. An additional resource was required to ensure the audit plan was in place and to drive audit activity.

A Strategic Children's Improvement Board had been established. This was a multi-agency Board, with an independent Chair, made up of senior officers from Children's Social Care, Police, the Mayor and Member representation. The Board would be a strategic, high-level view of the progress being made.

An Operational Children's Improvement Board was also being established and, again, would be a multi-agency Board. A Staff Improvement Group would also be established to take a 360 degree view of what was being undertaken. Clear terms of reference needed to be prepared and frameworks put in place.

The performance framework would be redesigned to drive quality of practice and support senior leaders in understanding the quality of practice. The first Quality and Performance Workshop was held on 8 January and further workshops were planned to take place every two weeks.

Finally, Members were provided with a copy of the new governance arrangements with the Strategic Children's Improvement Board at the centre of the arrangements.

A discussion took place and the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a question, Members were advised that the Assurance Plan had been in place since January and this was the earliest opportunity to share it with the Scrutiny Panel.
- With regard to ensuring appropriate safeguarding of children if held in police custody overnight, it was queried how much progress had been made. The Director advised that discussions needed to take place with colleagues in the Police and Emergency Duty Team (EDT) within Social Care to establish a working protocol. This was something that still needed to happen.

- A Panel Member made reference to the Ofsted report which stated that improvement was required in relation to “the availability of sufficient, suitable local homes to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers” and queried where this was addressed in the plan. The Director advised that the 12-week improvement plan before Members was an immediate assurance plan and, as such, did not address every single recommendation made by Ofsted. The immediate assurance plan focussed on the most critical actions, however, all other actions required would be included in the wider improvement plan. An Ofsted planning summit was scheduled for mid-April and it was a mandatory requirement for the wider improvement plan to be available from that point.
- It was queried whether Ofsted had had sight of the Immediate Assurance Plan. It was confirmed that DfE had seen the plan but it would be shared with Ofsted at the planning summit when the wider improvement plan would also be shared with them.
- A Member asked what assurances could be provided to Members that identified actions were being completed in a timely fashion. In response Members were informed that several things were in place to look at Children's Services independently to drive and monitor progress. This included the Strategic Children's Improvement Board and the appointment of a Children's Commissioner due to commence on 2 March 2020. A multi-agency Performance Board, including DfE representation, would carry out its own review every six months and there would be three-monthly monitoring by Ofsted to ensure plans were being reflected in practice. Audits would provide further assurances. Staff would be asked for their views and feelings on working for Middlesbrough and, most importantly, assurances would be sought from children and young people as to whether they felt safe with the services around them to provide support.
- Reference was made to the Member representation on the Strategic Children's Improvement Board and it was queried what the selection process for this was. It was confirmed that representation would be the Executive Member for Children's Services at this stage.
- It was queried whether children were supported by mental health mentors. It was acknowledged that the local authority needed to improve on its relationship with CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) provided by Tees Esk and Wear Valley (TEWV) NHS Foundation Trust. TEWV had representation on both the Strategic Children's Improvement Board and the Operational Children's Improvement Board. Ofsted had identified that TEWV needed to invest in the CAMHS service.
- A Member asked how confident senior managers were in delivering the required changes with current staffing levels and facilities. The Director responded that she considered there to be a sufficient number of Social Worker posts but there were vacancies that were proving challenging to fill - this was a national issue and not exclusive to Middlesbrough. A Resource Plan had been compiled, identifying additional resources to support the improvement journey, to be submitted to the Executive on 18 February 2020. It was acknowledged that it would be a tough challenge to turn things around and that it would be a two to three year journey.
- It was queried whether the STMACH was fit for purpose and what impact Middlesbrough's Ofsted judgement would have on Redcar and Cleveland. Members were informed that there had been significant discussions with Redcar and Cleveland as it was also a judgement of them in terms of the STMACH as it Redcar was the lead authority for the STMACH. Work was ongoing in relation to reviewing the thresholds of need and additional management capacity would be placed within the STMACH. It was highlighted that the STMACH was still relatively new and a MACH Operational Group had been established to look at operational decision-making which was also monitored by the Head of Service.
- In response to a question as to whether School Governors would be invited to be representatives on the improvement boards, it was confirmed that there would be primary, secondary and special needs schools representation on the boards and that the response from schools had been very positive in terms of wanting to be part of the solution.
- The Director of Children's Care and the Director of Education, Partnerships and Prevention planned to brief school governors.

- It was queried how many unregulated placements were used by Middlesbrough Council and where they were located. It was confirmed that all placements were based in Middlesbrough and commissioned through Sunningdale and Indigo Support. Both organisations were working closely with the local authority to resolve the issue.
- A Member thanked the Director for the work that had been undertaken to produce and action the immediate assurance plan and commented that it was important that everyone worked together to ensure the plan came to fruition for the benefit of the children of Middlesbrough.

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

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted.

#### **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 9 January 2020, namely:-

- Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board – Annual Report and Strategic Business Plan.
- Strategic Plan Update at Quarter 2 (2019/20).
- Final Report of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel – Foodbanks.
- Executive Forward Work Programme.
- Scrutiny Panel Chairs' 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 Monday, 9 March 2020 at 4.00pm.