

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 20 July 2020.

PRESENT: Councillor Garvey (Chair), Councillor Dodds (Vice Chair); Councillors: Bell (substitute for Councillor Hill), Cooke, Saunders, P Storey (substitute for Councillor Uddin), J Walker, Wilson and Wright.

OFFICERS: C Breheny, R Brown, S Butcher, J Dixon and J McNally.

APOLOGIES for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Hill 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 9 March 2020 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

OVERVIEW AND STRUCTURE OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

S Butcher, Executive Director of Children's Services and R Brown, Director of Education and Partnerships, were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with an overview of the structure/key services within the remit of Children's Services. The Panel had been provided with a high-level departmental structure chart to assist.

There had been a number of changes recently and it was explained that there had previously been three directors within the department, one of which had now moved on to become the Director of Finance. Rather than the post being replaced, it was decided to introduce a Practice Improvement Hub to help drive the improvement journey within Children's Services. The Practice Improvement Hub sat alongside the remaining two Directors – Director of Education and Partnerships and Director of Children's Care.

The Panel was provided with details of the management structure across the department - a summary of which is given below:-

Practice Improvement Hub

- Lead for Transformation – examining the changes that are required across Children's Services. (Currently a vacant post with work being covered by a part-time member of staff).
- Head of Strategic Support Services – leading on performance and governance; responsible for interpreting data and compiling performance reports, in conjunction with other Heads of Service, for presentation to the Improvement Board and various Committees.
- Service Quality/Audit Manager - crucial in understanding the work being undertaken by Children's Services; examined work by all Social Workers' in order to develop team plans; small group of auditors undertaking audits at all levels of the structure in order to improve practice.
- Includes business support and project management to drive the improvement journey.
- The three Managers report directly to the Executive Director of Children's Services as Lead for the Improvement journey within Children's Services.

Children's Care

- The post of Director of Children's Care was currently being covered on an interim basis, with an advertisement for a permanent Director due to go out soon.

- Head of Early Help and Prevention – this service area had recently moved from 'Prevention and Partnerships' as it was felt that prevention and the early help offer sat better within Children's Care. The service worked with children and young people who did not yet meet the statutory level for Social Worker involvement. It supported families in a preventative way so that statutory intervention would not be required. When a referral was received into the MACH (Multi Agency Children's Hub), a decision was made as to where it should be directed – early help, statutory social care or no further action. There was a strong early help offer in Middlesbrough and it had performed well in the Ofsted inspection.
- Head of Safeguarding and Care Planning – the post-holder had recently left the authority and an experienced safeguarding manager would take up the post on 1 August.
- Head of Residential, Fostering and Futures for Families – The post-holder was responsible for Middlesbrough's children's residential homes and, as the Registered Manager, had responsibility for the mix of young people who went into those homes in terms of dynamics, gender, ethnicity, behaviour, etc, and as such, reported directly to Ofsted and also had oversight of the Residential Home Managers. The post-holder was also Head of Service for Fostering as some looked after children were placed in residential accommodation and some were looked after in fostering, therefore, the two fitted together. In addition, the post-holder was Head of Service for Future for Families – or the No Wrong Door Programme. This project was part of the national Strengthening Families Programme and Middlesbrough was being supported by North Yorkshire Council in delivering this new edge of care model, bringing together foster carers, resource workers, supported lodgings and more. The programme was set to go live within the next few weeks. All staff for the hub had been recruited and trained and it was expected that the hub building would open soon.
- Head of MACH and Assessment – The Children's Commissioner had recommended that Middlesbrough disaggregate from the South Tees MACH in order to make the required improvements at pace. This had now happened and Middlesbrough's own MACH was based in Middlesbrough House. This was a multi-agency team with involvement from Education, Health and Police. When Social Work intervention was required, the referral was received by the assessment team and a single assessment was undertaken.
- Head of Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting – The post-holder had three CLA Teams working to support CLA and ensuring they achieved permanence – this was a crucial area for improvement identified in the Ofsted inspection, therefore, development of a good pathway and permanence strategy was vital. Oversight of work undertaken with Care Leavers up to the age of 25.
- Head of RAD Unit (Review & Development) – The service was responsible for planning child protection conferences and looked after children reviews. Whilst the staff were employed by the local authority, they were independent and sought to influence, challenge and have oversight of the work undertaken by children's care. Independent Reviewing Officers should challenge Social Workers to make sure that they were doing particular things as part of a child's plan. The challenge should be escalated to Team Manager, Head of Service and finally the Executive Director where necessary.
- Principal Social Worker – This was a mandatory post and lead for practice development. More recently, there had been excellent training delivered around clarity and confidence for Social Workers.

Director of Education and Partnerships

- Head of Achievement and Learning – Responsible for School Advisers, Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMAT), Children's Centres and nurseries.
- Head of Community Learning and Employability – Responsible for adult learning. This was recently inspected by Ofsted and rated 'Good'.
- Strategic Lead for Inclusion and Specialist Support Services – Responsible for SEND and children with disabilities. The Head of Prevention previously had responsibility for SEND but it

was felt this area sat best with Inclusion and Specialist Support Services, particularly as 'Prevention' had now moved to Children's Care. In 2017 an Ofsted inspection of SEND resulted in a written statement of outcome, however, a more recent re-inspection had proved much more positive.

- Head of Access to Education – Children missing from education, admissions and the new school. The virtual school also fell within the remit of this area.
- Head of Partnerships and Youth Offending Service – This service was subject to a separate inspection regime by HM Inspectors of Probation and was rated as 'Good' at its most recent inspection in 2019.

The Executive Director acknowledged that there was some cross-over between the service areas, for example, 'prevention' fell within the remit of Children's Care and Education and Partnerships as did the virtual school. Independent Reviewing Officers took account of Education within all review and education colleagues fed into such reviews. Future for Families had the potential to support children across the board. This supported the importance of ensuring that Children's Services was seen as a single service department.

The Panel was informed that whilst some areas were currently not as strong as others, predominantly due to temporary gaps in staffing, robust cover arrangements were in place.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- A Panel Member queried whether Children's Services was now operating with a full complement of Social Workers, how their caseload levels were and whether there was an issue with more experienced Social Workers having to manage a higher number of caseloads. The Executive Director explained that ASYE (assessed & supported year in employment), was a programme that gave newly qualified social workers extra support during their first year of practice. ASYEs would usually hold around five cases at the start of their first year, increasing to 15-17 cases by the end of their first year. It had been difficult to keep the number of cases so low. Caseloads were currently higher than desired across the service, particularly in safeguarding and care planning. The Ofsted inspection found that Middlesbrough's thresholds were too high and this resulted in an increase in cases in January when the thresholds were subsequently lowered. The assessment team had been under considerable pressure for some time which had now eased slightly, with this raft of work now progressing to safeguarding and care planning. It was further explained that there were several reasons for high caseloads - 1) more work coming in; 2) changes of workers; 3) work not progressing as well as it should have been. Ultimately, it was crucial to ensure children were found permanent homes as quickly as possible. In order to avoid unallocated cases, some experienced Social Workers currently held up to 30 cases and to try to mitigate, extra Resource Workers were being utilised to support Social Workers in that team by undertaking some of their tasks. A Business Support Worker was also being allocated to each team within Safeguarding and Planning Service to undertake admin-type tasks. It was crucial to improve practice by supporting and supervising Social Workers to get through their casework as swiftly as possible.
- In terms of having a full complement of Social Workers, it was considered that this was the case. Some sick leave had been covered and Business Support Staff had been allocated. In addition, a Social Work team had been provided by 'Innovate' to examine external residential placements and children whose work had not been progressed as well as it should have. Many out of area external residential placements were costly and the team would look at whether any alternative placements would be more suitable, for example, where it was not safe for a child to return home, could they return to their own communities? The team would also support fragile placements at risk of breaking down and explore the option of foster carers becoming special guardians to provide a more secure, permanent placement. Special Guardians had parental responsibility whereas Foster Carers did not. Whilst there had been an increase in the numbers of agency staff, this had brought more experience. It was acknowledged that this was a crucial point in the three-year improvement journey and commitment from staff was needed whilst they were supported to improve practice.

- It was queried whether the Innovate team was funded from existing budgets or whether this was an additional cost. The Executive Director advised that it was an 'invest to save' initiative. The Panel heard that the cost of an external placement was around £5,000 per week on average, therefore, a relatively small number of children would need to be moved to more appropriate placements in order to cover the cost of the team.

SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

The Democratic Services Officer submitted a report inviting the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel to consider its work programme for 2020/21.

A list of potential topics, which were anticipated to be of particular interest to the Scrutiny Panel, and the suggestions received in respect of the Scrutiny Panel's remit were contained in the report.

Members were advised that the topical issues and suggestions outlined in the report were merely proposals and the content of the work programme was entirely a decision for the Panel to make.

The Panel was encouraged to select two topics where scrutiny could make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development.

The Panel was reminded that it could also identify shorter 'one-off' topics and receive any relevant updates throughout the year as it considered necessary.

The Panel held a discussion in relation to the suggested topics within the report and selected the following topics for the inclusion in the Panel's Work Programme:-

1. Sufficiency and Permanency (Perceptions of Children in Care)
2. 'No Wrong Door' Programme
3. Youth Services
4. PACE Bed Provision

It was acknowledged that any topics selected by the Panel should align with the Improvement Plan. Members also expressed interest in gaining a better insight into Social Worker's caseloads (diary of a Social Worker).

AGREED that the topics, as listed above, be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval and inclusion in the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel's work programme for 2020/2021.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES – 2020/21 MUNICIPAL YEAR

A provisional schedule of meeting dates, for the 2020/21 Municipal Year, was submitted for the Panel's consideration.

AGREED that the proposed meeting dates for 2020/21, as set out in the report, be approved.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

A verbal update was provided to the Panel in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 21 May, 11 June and 2 July 2020, namely:-

21 May 2020

- Middlesbrough Council draft Covid recovery plan.
- Children's Services Update.

11 June 2020

- Covid Response and Recovery Plan.
- Executive Member for Environment.

2 July 2020

- Mayor's Update
- Covid Response, Recovery & Local Area Outbreak Plans
- Covid Update on Health, Adult Social Care and Public Health

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, 14 September 2020 at 4.00pm.