

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL 16 September 2015

Performance Information

1. As of end August 2015:

Current Children Looked After figures are: 368

Current Child Protection figures are: 214

Current Children in Need figures are: 1377

Workforce Development

2. Safeguarding workforce development have signed up to a number of government initiatives in relation to recruiting social workers and supporting students through social work courses. One of the schemes is due to commence in October 2015.

Staffing

3. Social Workers are due to commence in the next few weeks to fill vacancies meaning that all posts are filled up to the end of September when two Social Workers are due to leave. Social Worker interviews for these posts are set for September.

Youth Offending Service

4. The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales have advised Youth Offending Services across the country of a possible 14% in year cut to the 2015/16 Youth Justices Grant. This potential cut is a result of savings required by the Ministry of Justice. In May this year, HM Treasury asked all government departments to find in year savings of 5% against their resource budgets. Since that time the Youth Justice Board has been in discussion with Ministry of Justice officials and ministers to emphasise that the Youth Justice Board budget has already been reduced by more than 50% since 2010, which is proportionately greater than other parts of the justice system.
5. This level of reduction has largely been possible because of the success the youth justice system has achieved in reducing both first time entrants and numbers in custody. South Tees Youth Offending Service is heavily dependent on central government funding and a significant cut will impact on the ability to maintain current staffing and service levels in the longer term. In the short term savings achieved this year in the remand placement budget could be used to mitigate immediate financial loss and allow for a planned service reduction if necessary.

Foster Care Event

6. On 23 August, Middlesbrough hosted a Tees Valley fun sports event at the LA's state of the art Sports Village and was attended by around 400 people. The purpose of the day was to raise awareness of the need for more Foster Carers for local children, especially those for larger groups of brothers and sisters so they can remain together and for older young people, who often have to be placed away from their home town. The event also valued the crucial role of foster carers in providing stability, love and security for children who cannot live with their family.
7. The event was attended by fostering families, looked after children and young people, elected members and officers of the five local authorities.

High Achievers

8. Eleven young care leavers are studying for their degrees (and some for their Masters) at a variety of Universities across the country, showing the world that they are every bit as capable as their non- care leaver peers of achieving their dreams and making a positive mark in the world. This is the highest number of care leavers Middlesbrough has seen into University, and is testament to the aspirational approach of the Pathways Leaving Care Team and its partners in encouraging talent and tenacity in those young people who are often fighting negative images.

Corporate Parenting Visits

9. Three elected members (in their role as Corporate Parents) and seven Care Leavers (some of whom are Children in Care Council members) met in July to agree how they would go about visiting the Local Authority's Children's Homes, to check that they are a great place for other young people to live. The members and young people shared their ideas about what they would be looking for, what they could ask, what they should share and what they would do with the information they gather. There is a little more organising to be done, with the aim of visits commencing in Autumn 2015.

Tees Valley Joint Adoption Service

10. The current Government has shone a light, consistently, on the area of practice around adoption, introducing guidance to Local Authorities which aims to speed up the process for placing children with adoptive parents. At the forefront of their current thinking is the idea that LAs join together (preferably with Voluntary Adoption Agencies) to create a wider service which pools resources and skills (and reduces inter authority competition to recruit) to achieve that goal. The DfE is clear that this will be the way forward and is encouraging and incentivising LAs to work out a way, for themselves, to achieve this or, in effect, for the Government to do it for them.

11. In April 2015, Middlesbrough, Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar & Cleveland commissioned Mott MacDonald to produce an independent piece of work to explore the options for a shared Adoption Service. The LAs have agreed in principle to pursue this, and are currently submitting a bid to the DfE for resources to work on how a joint service can be established.

Children with Disabilities

12. We are now recruiting, inducting and training Resource Workers. This will enable us to provide a full range of support to children and families in order to be sure that the concerns and issues identified by Social Workers are addressed and we can support children remaining in their homes where this is safe.
13. Support to children with disabilities and their families continued during the busy summer holiday period – this included trips and outings, fun days and events. Feedback from families has been good and has included:
 - “Provides a chance to meet with others with the same difficulties and swap views”
 - “A family get together with no stress and staff to help if I need them to”
 - “We can all be together without my son’s siblings worrying about people staring at us”
 - “My children experience things that they wouldn’t normally”
 - “My son can be who and what he wants to be, without prejudice”
 - “They make us have lots of fun and memories” Aaron aged 9

Pathways Team

14. An event took place on 5 August to re-launch the Care Leaver’s Charter – corporate parents, elected members, senior managers were present to support the event, to:
 - Look at the New Charter and celebrate this work
 - Highlight Middlesbrough’s commitment to our Looked After Children and Care Leavers
 - Raise awareness for both staff and young people regarding the Charter and Pledge.

Operation Encompass

15. Operation Encompass is the implementation of key partnership working between Cleveland Police, Local Authorities and nominated ‘Key Adults’ in schools.
16. Background Information taken from Cleveland Police website:
Domestic abuse affects children because it impacts on parenting capacity. Exposure to physical, psychological and emotional abuse has profound negative effects on mental health resulting in a loss of confidence, depression, feelings of degradation, problems with sleep, isolation and increased use of medication and alcohol. These are factors that can restrict the parent’s capacity to meet the developmental needs of the child.

17. In Cleveland, between 1 November 2013 and 31 October 2014, 11,148 domestic abuse incidents were risk assessed by the police.
18. The aim of sharing information with local schools is to allow 'Key Adults' the opportunity of engaging with the child and to provide access to support that allows them to remain in a safe but secure familiar learning environment.
19. Each school day, domestic abuse incidents from the previous 24-hours (or in the case of incidents which occurred over the weekend, every Monday) will be reviewed and where it is identified that a child between the age of two and eighteen years was present, witnessed, or was involved in such abuse, the police will contact the 'Key Adult' in the school that child attends.
20. Each school will be responsible for identifying 'Key Adults', with whom domestic abuse information can be shared, and for providing up to date contact details for that person. Where the nominated 'Key Adult' is absent, for whatever reason, the schools will ensure a deputy is identified and they will inform the Operation Encompass Officer of that person and their contact details.
21. A dedicated Police Domestic Abuse Advisor is to work between Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Local Authorities from September 2015.
22. In Middlesbrough server lines are being installed to allow the Advisor access to the police data bases, whilst being based part time within the Multi Agency Children's First Contact Hub. Police are in the process of sending letters explaining the process to all schools which, in turn, will send them to all parents.
23. Training of the designated school safeguarding leads and First Contact staff is being delivered during September with the expectation that the project will be fully implemented by October 2015.

Councillor Michael Carr
Executive Member
Children's Social Care