

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL 30 March 2016

Performance Information

1. As of end February 2016:

Current Children Looked After figures are: 379 = 119.18 per 10,000

Current Child Protection figures are: 256 = 80.5 per 10,000

Current Children in Need figures are: 1378 = 433.32 per 10,000

Ofsted Single Inspection Framework

2. Ofsted has judged that Middlesbrough Council has a 'clear commitment' to children and young people and ensures those in its care are safe
3. The findings followed a four week inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, looked after children and care leavers in November and December 2015. The inspection was undertaken by 11 Inspectors.
4. Ofsted judged that the authority 'requirements improvement' in three key areas, two particular areas were deemed to be 'good' and three areas of innovative practice were identified.
5. The 38 page report highlighted the quick and effective response of social workers when children were found to be at immediate risk of significant harm.
6. The report also praises the 'very good practice' of the authority's 'returning children to Middlesbrough' project which aims to return children living in placements outside the borough to their families, or placements much nearer to them.
7. Fostering and adoption were both found to be strong and effective, while the strong support and successful outcomes for those leaving care were singled out for particular praise: "Middlesbrough Council is doing better than many other councils at making sure that care leavers are in education, training or employment".
8. The Youth Offending Service was praised for a significant fall in the number of looked after children entering the criminal justice system, the number receiving a caution or conviction down from 11% to 6%.

9. Senior Leaders were identified as having 'strong commitment' and 'good oversight and knowledge of key issues', while the more 50 social workers interviewed by the inspection team uniformly described Middlesbrough as a brilliant place to work', with 'excellent support' from management.
10. Among the report's 16 recommendations are improved performance management and working with partner agencies, and more detailed care and personal education plans for young people in care.
11. The team also recommended further work to increase the numbers of care leavers going on to education, training and employment.
12. The service is currently preparing a Post Inspection Improvement Plan.

9 day Fortnight Working

13. Over the last year Safeguarding and Children's Care have been looking at recruitment and retention issues within the service. In order to address some of the retention issues it was agreed that the service would explore compressed working hours. A 9 day fortnight working pilot commenced in August 2015 in one of the Assessment and Care Planning teams. The pilot was developed and agreed within the team. It was reviewed and judged to be a success. In January 2015 a report was presented to LMT, who agreed that the scheme should be developed further and delivered across children's services, where appropriate and reflecting the needs of the service. The rota is set to ensure there is always sufficient social work and managerial cover.
14. The impact of the scheme has been that staff report feeling valued and the scheme has raised morale and allowed workers to have some flexibility in their working hours and consequently enhanced their family lives.

Team Restructures

15. Following the safeguarding management review a new structure commenced as of 1 February. The new structure moved from 6 to 8 assessment and care planning teams. Due to the reduction of cases managed by one team manager and fewer social workers to manage, Team Managers are already reporting spending more time in supervision, greater time to focus on case planning for children and more time to plan. The move to the new structure has been very successful and managers are reporting feeling less pressured and the need to work from home on an evening and weekend reducing.
16. The impact upon the children of Middlesbrough will be more effective and swifter planning around their plan and the delivery of the plan.

Rates of FTEs

17. Due to the promotion of four internal staff within the management review and two staff gaining posts in our fostering team, the service have a number of FTE vacancies. An advert has been placed and it is anticipated that positions will be filled by the end of May 2016. It is expected that the vacancies will be replaced by newly qualified staff. The service has some excellent social work students who intend to apply.
18. Since January 2016 the vacancies have been covered by experienced agency social workers to ensure that the impact upon service delivery has not been affected.

Youth Offending Service

19. In September 2015 Charlie Taylor (National College for Teaching and Leadership) was asked to lead a departmental review of the youth justice system for the Ministry of Justice. The review is examining evidence on what works to prevent youth crime and rehabilitate young offenders, and how this is applied in practice; how the youth justice system can most effectively interact with wider services for children and young people; and whether the current delivery models and governance arrangements remain fit for purpose and achieve value for money.
20. This interim report was published in February, the final report will be published in July 2016. The interim report outlines the direction of travel for the secure estate for young people as a secure college with a focus on education and attainment rather than incarceration and punishment. The report recognises the strides made in the community provision through Youth Offending Services and acknowledges the achievements of the partnership arrangements which have shown a significant reduction in first time entrants to the criminal justice system. From 2007 to 2015 there has been a national reduction in first time entrant of 81%, in Middlesbrough this reduction has been 86%. Whilst the interim report does not suggest significant wholesale change to YOS it does indicate an increase in governance freedoms.
21. The National Probation Service have announced their future contributions to Youth Offending Services. The new national formula will impact on South Tees YOS in that although the staffing contribution has increased the financial contribution has reduced. The implementation of the new funding formulae will be introduced mid-year 16/17 with its full effect taking place in 2017/18.

Councillor Michael Carr
Executive Member, Children's Social Care