

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL 7 September 2016

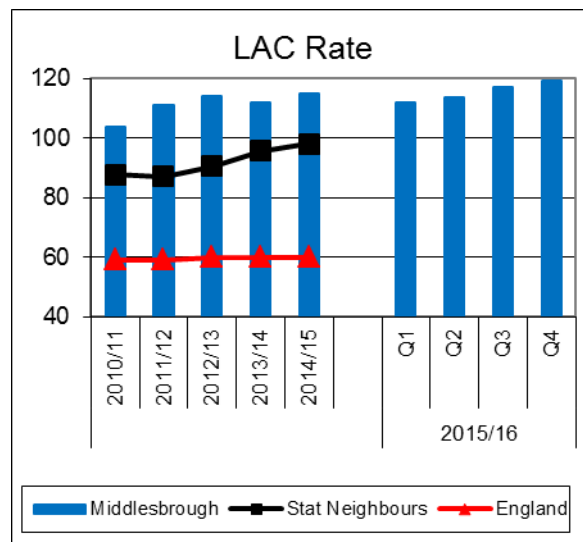
Performance Information

1. As of August 2016:-

Current Children Looked After (LAC) figures are: 417 - 130.45 per 10,000

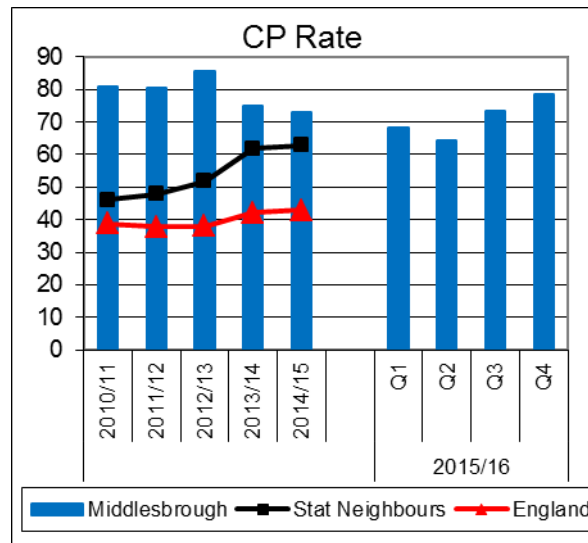
Current Child Protection (CP) figures are: 279 - 87.28 per 10,000

Current Children in Need (CiN) figures are: 1272 - 398.00 per 10,000

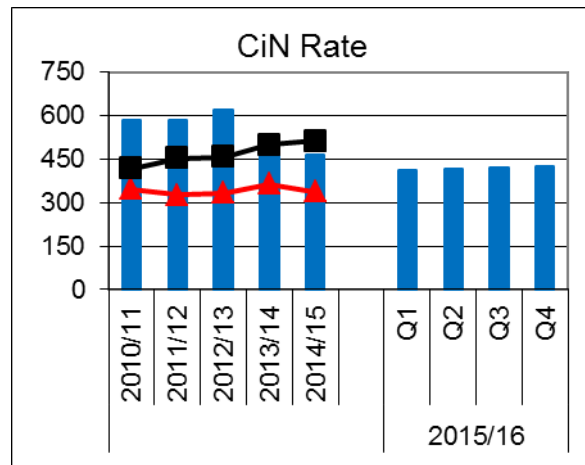


2. There is a significant increase in the LAC numbers. Whilst this is reflected in statutory neighbour trends, Middlesbrough is an outlier in terms of the numbers of Looked After Children. One reason for this is because of changes in decision making at Teesside Court. We have seen a significant increase in the number of Care Orders being made (classifying children as 'Looked After') where children are in fact living at home with parents or with extended family (connected persons)
3. A recent snapshot of 20 children who became Looked After showed that 15 were actually placed with connected persons. This is positive in that children have been able to remain with someone they know, supported by Social Workers to ensure that the placement is safe. However, it does inflate the LAC figures.
4. Our challenge is to work with our legal and operational social work teams to provide confidence to the courts that we can provide support and the necessary intervention

to families under different legal arrangements, which would mean that the children do not become Looked After.



- There is a significant increase in the Child Protection figures. This is reflected in statutory neighbour and national trends. Further work is being undertaken to investigate this rise, although dual planning (children being subject to CP and LAC processes simultaneously) and a possible escalation of cases which could be managed as Children in Need, are two identified issues.



- Middlesbrough continues to report below statutory neighbour numbers of Children in Need. A recent diagnostic has revealed that Middlesbrough also has a smaller percentage of referrals to Children's Services being directed to Early Help. This escalation of more children and families into Child Protection and Looked After categories (rather than being supported through Early Help) is likely to have a number of causes, including decision making at initial enquiry stage, the appetite for risk, and confidence in Early Help. More detailed work is currently being undertaken to better understand and tackle these issues.

Assessment & Care Planning

7. Seventeen experienced Social Workers have recently successfully completed an 'Achieving Best Evidence' training course which qualifies them to work alongside the Police to interview children and young people on video in such a way that evidence can be presented in criminal and civil courts.

Fostering

8. The number of Approved Foster Carers has risen to 117, therefore coming closer to our target of 130. There is a reduction in the use of external providers with an almost 50/50 split of children being placed between Independent Fostering Agencies and 'in house' carers.
9. Recruitment activity continues, and exploration of other marketing opportunities is underway.
10. On 24 July the second Fostering Family Fun Day took place at Middlesbrough Sports Village where teams of foster carers, teachers and staff took part in a range of sporting events. The fun day was jointly hosted by Tees Valley Fostering which covers the Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool, Redcar and Darlington local authorities. The overall winners were Hartlepool, who with their combined points were crowned Tees Valley Family Fun Day Champions for the second time.
11. As well as raising the awareness of Foster Carers, it was also an opportunity to appeal for others to step forward and make the commitment as Foster Carers.

Adoption

12. More children were placed with adopters in the first quarter of 2016 than the whole of 2015, predominantly with adopters approved by Middlesbrough. Those placed externally were placed to be with siblings or they had specific health requiring a national search.

South Tees Youth Offending Service

13. Members were previously informed that the Taylor Review of Youth Justice was due to be published in July 2016. An interim report was published in February 2016 which indicated significant changes to the landscape of youth justice in the future. However, we have been informed that the report will not be published until after the Parliamentary recess, so we will not see it until September at the earliest.
14. South Tees Youth Offending Service went 'live' with a new assessment tool, 'Assetplus'. Thus far, the implementation of this practice change has gone well despite some initial technical difficulties. The tool is more comprehensive than its predecessor with a stronger focus upon desistance.

15. The service has recently began work with the Speech and Language Service to aid better communication with our young people and increase the voice of the child within assessments and plans. This work is in the early development stages although initial recommendations have already been welcomed by the service, and practice changes are underway.
16. South Tees Youth Offending Service has been invited along with all community safety partners to attend a meeting with the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) later this month where he will set out his manifesto for the next four years following his re-election in June.

Children with Disabilities

17. A programme of support and activities for children and young people with disabilities took place over the summer - this included the "Fun Club" holiday club and family events and activities.

Children's Homes

18. We continue to make good progress in relation to the development and improvement of our Resources and Children's Homes. The major refurbishment of Fir Tree is now in progress - staff and young people have moved to a "Holiday Home" while work takes place.
19. Three areas of this service - Gleneagles, Holly Lodge and Rosecroft were nominated for Awards as part of the Council Awards programme, and I am delighted to report that Gleneagles was announced as "Team of the Year" – well done to everyone.

Member Training

20. Two training sessions on aspects of children's social care have been arranged for Councillors:
 - i. to brief members on the Council's role in supporting family and friends who care for other people's children ("Connected Persons") – Thursday, 29 September at 1.00 pm in the Mandela Room.
 - ii. to brief members on the role and functions of the Corporate Parent; and to support members to champion the needs and interests of children in care – Wednesday, 30 November at 5.45 pm in the Mandela Room.
21. I hope as many members as possible are able to attend these important training events.

Councillor Michael Carr
Executive Member, Children's Social Care