

## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD

18 DECEMBER 2007

### CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - PROGRESS REPORT

#### PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To provide members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB) with an update on the work of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel.

#### BACKGROUND

2. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel is continuing its investigation of “early years learning outcomes and Sure Start”. Since the panel’s last update to OSB, the panel has met on 17 October and 5 December 2007. In addition to the scrutiny panel meetings, Members also visited the Abingdon and Thorntree Sure Start schemes.
3. Details of the panel meetings and site visits are as follows:

##### 17 October 2007

4. The panel considered information in respect of the following term of reference:

*“To assess the impact of key plans and strategies and national guidance on early years learning outcomes and service provision.”*

5. Officers from Children, Families and Learning presented information in respect of the main directives, plans and strategies that are driving early years service provision nationally, and also in relation to developments in Middlesbrough. The panel found that there is a large number (over 60) early years projects and schemes that are currently being delivered directly by Sure Start, or in partnership with a wide range of external agencies. Examples were considered of schemes that have been developed specifically in Middlesbrough.
6. In terms of national guidance and initiatives, the panel heard that there have been numerous developments over the last ten years which have resulted in a constantly changing picture in respect of early years service provision.

## **5 December 2007**

7. Officers from Children, Families and Learning, Sure Start and Middlesbrough Children's Trust attended the above meeting to present information on the following aspects of the scrutiny panel's investigation:
  - Take up of Sure Start services
  - Engaging and involving children in service provision
8. In terms of take up of services, the panel heard information on the phased development of Sure Start nationally; Department for Children, Schools and Families targets on the number of children that should be reached; levels of take up in Middlesbrough; and work which is being done to identify and engage with hard to reach families.
9. In regard to engaging and involving children in service provision, Members were informed of work undertaken by Middlesbrough Children's Trust. The trust undertook an audit of young people's involvement and participation in decision making and service provision in January 2007. The audit resulted in the development of an Early Years Action Plan, which has received external funding to promote initiatives aimed at workforce development and training. These are intended to bring the best examples of early years national practice to Middlesbrough. The action plan is being developed and implemented in conjunction with Sure Start.

## **Site Visits**

10. In addition to the formal scrutiny panel meetings, Members visited the Abingdon Sure Start scheme on 31 October. The panel also took the opportunity to visit the linked private day nursery and Abingdon Primary School. On 23 November 2007 the panel visited Thorntree Sure Start.
11. The purpose of the visits, which provided some very useful information for the panel's investigation, was to speak to service users and staff and to see first hand how the services operate and link with other early years provision.
12. The panel's findings will be included in its final report on this topic, which will be submitted to OSB in due course.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

13. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes the updated position in respect of the work of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel.

**COUNCILLOR TONY BISHOP**  
**CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

Contact Officer: Alan Crawford, Scrutiny Support Officer  
Telephone: 01642 729707 (direct line)  
E mail: alan\_crawford@middlesbrough.gov.uk