

# MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM: 5

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

<p>Safeguarding and Looked After Children Interim Report of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel</p>
--

**28 April 2015**

### **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To present the interim findings of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel's work in respect of Safeguarding and Looked After Children. The investigation of this topic will continue in 2015/16.

### **BACKGROUND**

2. Middlesbrough has historically experienced consistently high numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) and children who are subject to Child Protection Plans (CPP).
3. In light of the above, the aim of the scrutiny panel's investigation is to explore the reasons for this and identify measures that could assist in reducing numbers.
4. This interim report has been compiled on the basis of information submitted to the scrutiny panel by the Local Authority's Department of Wellbeing, Care and Learning and Peopletoo.

### **MEMBERSHIP OF THE PANEL**

5. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as detailed below:

Councillors J A Walker (Chair), M B Williams (Vice-Chair), R Brady, H Pearson, G Purvis, B E Taylor, M Thompson and Fr G Holland.

### **THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S INTERIM FINDINGS**

6. The scrutiny panel's interim findings, in respect of Safeguarding and Looked After Children, are set out in this report. The panel's findings are as follows:

#### **Introduction**

7. The Local Authority's Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care explained that since 2009/2010, Middlesbrough has had significantly more LAC and children requiring protection plans than all other North East local authorities and most of its statistical neighbours.

#### **Looked After Children (LAC) – data**

8. Members were advised that as a basis for comparison, the Government publishes the rate of LAC per 10,000 children in the Local Authority area.

9. The scrutiny panel heard that on 5 January 2015, there were 377 LAC in Middlesbrough, which equated to 118.85 per 10,000, compared to:
  - Neighbouring authorities that had an average rate of 81 per 10,000.
  - Statistical neighbours with an average rate of 95.8 per 10,000.
  - The national rate which was 60 per 10,000.
10. It was explained that over the last two to three years, Middlesbrough's numbers of LAC have been relatively stable at around 360, although recently there has been an increase in activity, which led to a peak of 387 and a subsequent drop to 377 (on 9 March 2015 there were 363 LAC, which equates to 114.44 per 10,000).
11. The scrutiny panel heard that whilst Middlesbrough's numbers are undoubtedly high, there is an issue relating to how local authorities record their numbers of LAC. It was advised that Middlesbrough records all children who are placed with relatives and friends (known as connected persons) as LAC, which adds approximately 60 children to the cohort who are not placed with foster carers, in residential homes, or with birth parents. It was conveyed that historically, some local authorities have not recorded this cohort of children and as they have subsequently recognised their legal responsibilities, their numbers of LAC are increasing.

### Regional comparisons

12. The table below demonstrates that all authorities have shown an increase in numbers since 2010; the North East figure showing a 17% increase since 2010.
13. It was explained that Middlesbrough consistently reports the highest rate of LAC across the North East.

#### Looked After Children % change from 2010

Stockton	32.5 %
Sunderland	30.1 %
Hartlepool	27.5 %
Darlington	22.5 %
Durham	18.5 %
Gateshead	18.2 %
North East	17.4 %
Northumberland	15.2 %
Redcar and Cleveland	14.9 %
<b>Middlesbrough</b>	<b>12.0 %</b>
North Tyneside	11.2 %
South Tyneside	10.0 %
National 2013	5.3 %
Newcastle	4.9 %

14. The scrutiny panel was advised that over the past five years, the number of authorities, in the North East, reporting a rate in excess of 100 per 10,000 has increased from one to four.
15. It was explained that in respect of the monitoring of LAC rates - since 2013, 6 local authorities, including Middlesbrough, reported a fall in numbers, with:
  - Darlington seeing the greatest reduction = 15% relating to 22 children.
  - Sunderland seeing the biggest increase = 12% relating to 56 children.

	2013 (per 10,000)	2014 – Provisional (per 10,000)	% change from 2013
Darlington	91	77	-15.2%

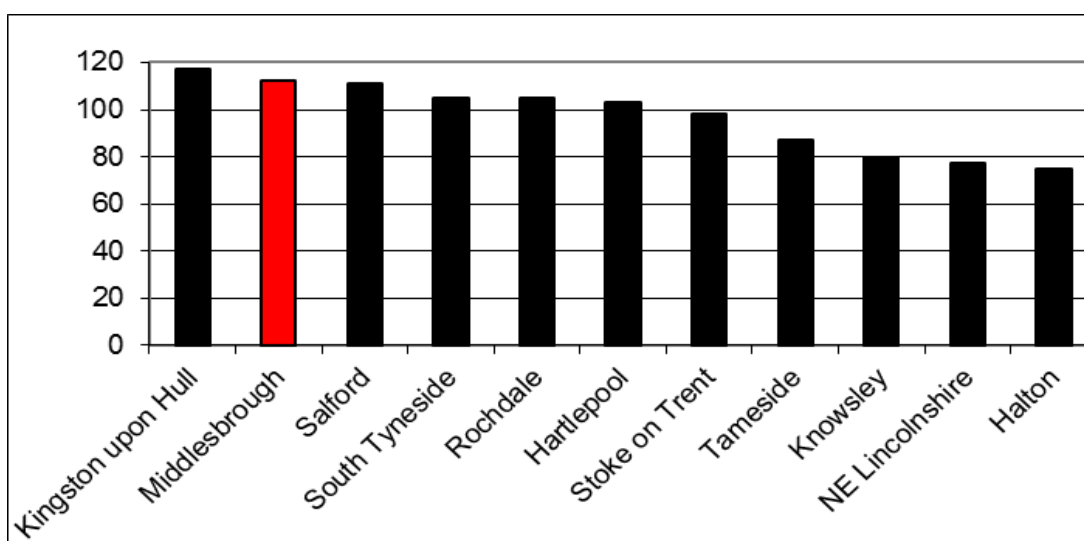
Gateshead	96	89	-7.7%
Durham	62	60	-2.5%
<b>Middlesbrough</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>-0.7%</b>
South Tyneside	107	107	-0.2%
Redcar and Cleveland	63	63	0.3%
Newcastle	101	103	1.8%
Northumberland	52	53	1.9%
North Tyneside	73	76	3.6%
Stockton	86	90	4.8%
Hartlepool	95	102	7.3%
Sunderland	80	90	12.2%

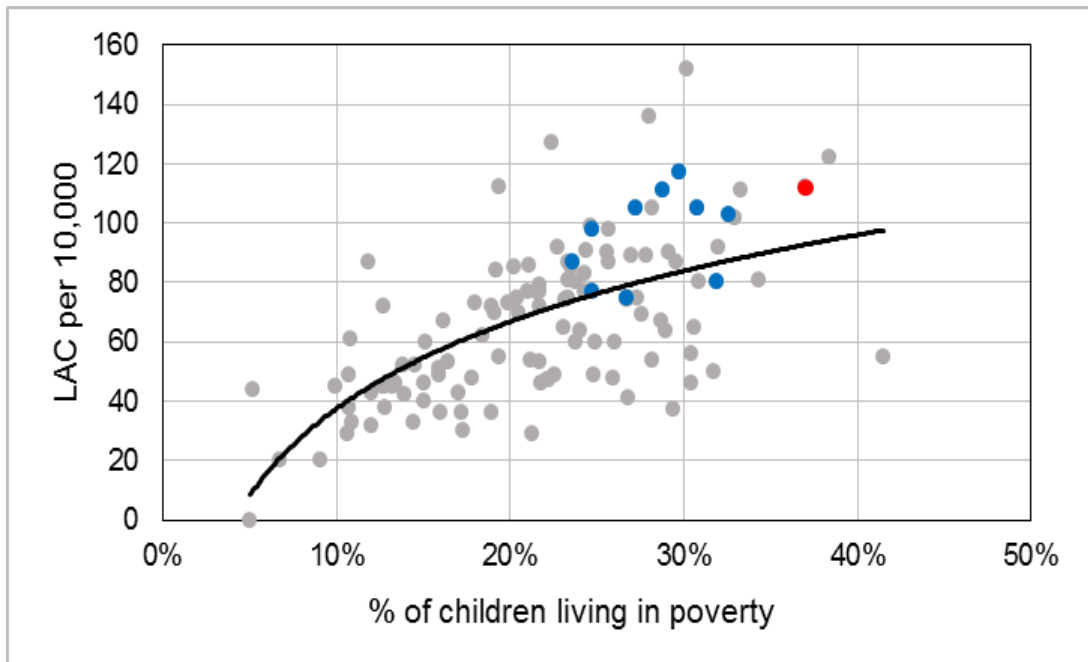
16. The scrutiny panel was advised that there has been a significant increase in numbers of LAC across the country since 2009, following the tragic Baby Peter case. Members heard that the number of LAC in Middlesbrough has been consistently around 360, having experienced a steady rise over the period between 2008/09 (274) and 2011/12 (353).

### Statistical neighbour comparisons

17. Members were informed that the rate of LAC per 10,000 in Middlesbrough in 2013/2014 was:
- 17% above the average of its statistical neighbours.
  - 87% above the national average.
18. It was highlighted that the gap between Middlesbrough and its statistical neighbour average has closed significantly over the last three years.
19. Members heard that in 2013/14 Kingston upon Hull was the only statistical neighbour to report a higher level of LAC. It was explained that Middlesbrough's position regarding the relationship between child poverty rates and LAC levels was broadly in line with statistical neighbours. It was conveyed that over the past five years, the number of authorities in the group reporting a rate in excess of 100 per 10,000 has doubled, from three to six.

### Statistical Neighbour LAC Rate Comparison 2013/14





20. Members heard that with regard to the graph above, the solid line is where you would typically expect a local authority to be, based on the relationship between child poverty levels and LAC levels for all local authorities (grey dots). The scrutiny panel was advised that as poverty rates increase, so does the local LAC rate. It was explained that Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours (blue dots) typically sit well above the line and Middlesbrough (red dot) is not the furthest from the line despite having the highest child poverty rate.

### **Children requiring protection plans (CPP) - Data**

21. As a basis for comparison, Members were informed that the government publishes the rate of CPP per 10,000 children in the Local Authority area.
22. The scrutiny panel heard that the number of children who require a protection plan has reduced significantly from a high of 335 in April 2010 to 207 on 5 January 2015. This equates to 65.26 per 10,000, which compares to:
- Regional neighbours of 59.1 per 10,000.
  - Statistical neighbours of 53.8 per 10,000.
  - National rate of 37.9 per 10,000.

### **Regional comparison**

23. It was conveyed that Middlesbrough's numbers of CPP have reduced significantly over the past 4/5 years. However, it was explained that this has had a knock-on effect for LAC numbers, as children have been made the subject of legal proceedings rather than protection plans. Members were advised that this reflects both the severity of abuse and a change in practice in relation to children no longer becoming the subject of a plan for a second time.
24. It was explained that with regards to the number of CPP, Middlesbrough has one of the highest rates across the North East.

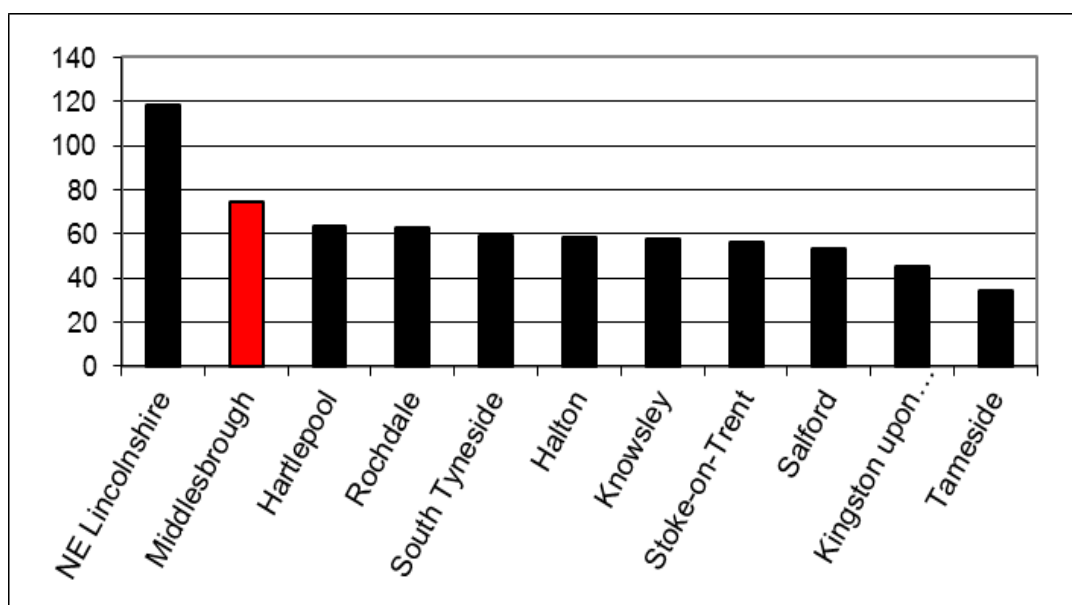
	2013 (per 10,000)	2014 – Provisional (per 10,000)	% change from 2013
Stockton	87.2	70.0	-19.7%
<b>Middlesbrough</b>	<b>86.0</b>	<b>75.2</b>	<b>-12.5%</b>
Hartlepool	67.1	63.1	- 6.0%
Durham	40.7	45.4	11.5%
Sunderland	49.9	55.8	11.8%
Newcastle	57.7	69.0	19.6%
Northumberland	47.3	58.1	22.7%
North Tyneside	31.4	38.9	24%
Redcar and Cleveland	56.1	78.8	40.5%
South Tyneside	37.8	57.9	53.2%
Gateshead	42.1	68.3	62.3%
Darlington	26.1	58.3	123.4%

25. Members were advised that across the region there has been a rise in the number of CPP, in 2012-13 the North East had a rate of 51.1; provisional figures for 2013-14 show a 16% increase.
26. The scrutiny panel heard that although there has been a rise in the number of CPP across the region, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Hartlepool have all recorded a decrease. It was explained that Darlington and Gateshead have had the two biggest increases in CPP, but also the two biggest decreases in LAC rates.

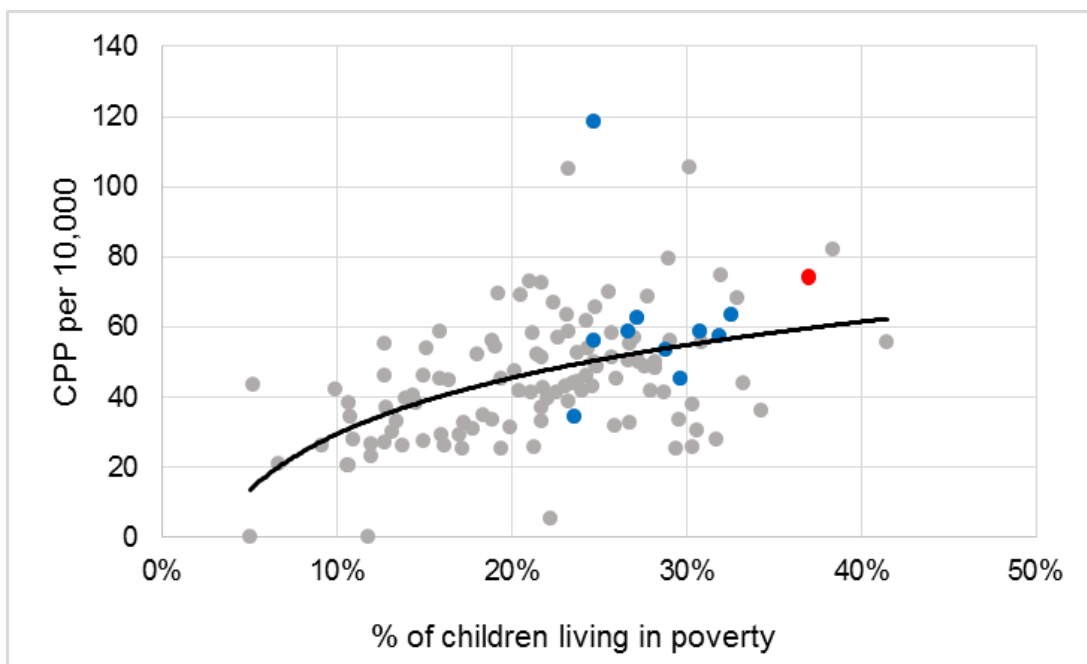
### Statistical Neighbour Comparison

27. It was explained to the scrutiny panel that Middlesbrough typically reports the highest level of CPP amongst its statistical neighbour group. It was conveyed that NE Lincolnshire was added to the group in 2013/14 and reported a doubling of its CPP rate in that year.

### Statistical Neighbour Comparison 2013/14



28. Members were advised that when looking at the relationship between child poverty rates and CPP levels, Middlesbrough's CPP rate is significantly higher than its statistical neighbours.



29. It was explained to the scrutiny panel that the solid line is where you would typically expect a local authority to be, based on the relationship between child poverty levels and CPP levels for all local authorities (grey dots). It was highlighted that as poverty rates increase, so does the rate of CPP. Members heard that Middlesbrough's statistical neighbours (blue dots) typically sit close to the line and Middlesbrough (red dot) is significantly above the line. Looking more widely, there are a large number of authorities with much lower child poverty rates that sit further away from the line.
30. In response to a question, the Assistant Director explained that approximately 60% of LAC or children with a protection plan have suffered significant neglect as well as a host of other problems. It was explained that there is a threshold that Middlesbrough Council, as an organisation, understands and there is ongoing debate about whether everyone is comfortable with the level of that threshold. The Assistant Director stated that the children that are taken into care and put on protection plans are the right children, but work prior to that point is not yet as well developed as it could be in Middlesbrough.
31. Members were advised that child protection plans meet health, social and education needs and a process is in place to ensure those issues are addressed for individuals.

**An outline of how the local authority supports Looked After Children and children requiring protection plans**

**Looked After Children**

32. The scrutiny panel heard that when a child becomes looked after by the Local Authority, there are systems and processes in place to ensure the child is regularly independently reviewed. There are also measures in place to ensure that plans are being followed and monitored in order to achieve good outcomes across all areas of each child's life. It was explained that this type of support applies to children placed

in foster care, children's homes, with family and friends and within youth justice placements.

33. Members were advised that where children are the subject of Care Orders, the initial plans for their care are agreed by the Courts and the plan is then monitored and developed through the LAC review process. The scrutiny panel was advised that the child, carers and parents are all involved in this process and the plan is reviewed on at least a six monthly basis.
34. It was highlighted that children are also accommodated on a voluntary basis under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989. Members heard that at the start of the period of a child being accommodated, a plan is agreed by all the key individuals to identify fundamental outcomes. It was conveyed that the plan is reviewed and monitored through the LAC Review Process.

### **Children requiring protection plans**

35. It was explained to the scrutiny panel that a child becomes the subject of a child protection plan when an Initial Child Protection Conference (ICPC) determines that the child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.
36. Members were advised that at the ICPC, the Chair identifies the key areas of concern and develops a plan to reflect those areas. It was highlighted that all agency staff attending the ICPC, and the family, will contribute to the plan. It was conveyed that the plan is then independently reviewed at least six monthly. The scrutiny panel heard that meetings consider the progress made against the plan, the work of the core group of professionals who are actively involved with the family, and determine whether the plan should continue or whether all of its objectives have been achieved.

### **Measures in place to reduce the number of LAC and children requiring protection plans.**

37. Members were informed that a number of measures are currently in place to reduce the number of LAC and CPP.

### **Early help and intervention strategy**

38. The Local Authority is currently developing an early help/early intervention strategy. It was conveyed to the scrutiny panel that the success of this strategy is likely to have the most significant impact on reducing the number of children in both systems.

### **Increase the number of in-house foster carers and adopters**

39. The scrutiny panel heard that the Local Authority is actively increasing the number of in-house foster carers and adopters through a creative and imaginative recruitment strategy. It was highlighted that this has a major contribution to savings overall, as using independent foster agencies (IFAs) is significantly more costly than using in-house carers. It was explained that the number of in-house carers has increased from 80 to 109 and no children under the age of 10 have been placed with IFAs since April 2014.
40. Members were advised that as part of the recruitment strategy, the Local Authority used television advertising for the first time. It was explained that the advertisement had been very effective and sixty new enquiries were received as a result.

41. It was highlighted to Members that the recruitment process is a rigorous three-stage process and information about potential carers' interests, motivation, circumstances and attitudes to children are assessed. In addition, references are obtained and Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) checks and health assessments are completed.
42. It was conveyed that no individual can become a foster carer or adoptive parent without undergoing comprehensive training.
43. The scrutiny panel heard that when it becomes apparent that an applicant is not suitable, efforts are made to counsel them to take their own decision not to continue with their application - in order to minimise any distress. It was indicated that from approximately every eight applications, usually one will be successful.
44. It was confirmed that applications are accepted from single carers, married or unmarried couples, same sex couples and all ethnicities. It was also noted that whilst in some cases it is appropriate for children to share bedrooms, in others it might not be. However, the Local Authority tries to be flexible in relation to the physical space that prospective carers might have available in their homes.

#### **Increase the number of adopters**

45. Increasing the number of adopters will reduce the number of LAC, as children are adopted from care. It was conveyed that moving children into permanent homes reduces costs as well as numbers. Approximately 30 children have been adopted since 1 April 2014.
46. The Assistant Director explained that the approval to place a child for adoption was a legal decision made by the Court, following a formal decision-making process by the Local Authority for an application for a Care Order.
47. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that there are a whole host of factors that need to be considered when matching children with carers or adopters. It was explained that sibling groups are often difficult to place and sometimes with a large group they will have to be placed separately. Members heard that younger children are more likely to be adopted than older ones and social workers will take advice from the Court, and other experts, in order to make sure children are given the best life chances.
48. It was noted that sibling groups, boys over the age of five and children from ethnic minorities are more difficult to place. The scrutiny panel heard that the average age for adoption is between 8 and 18 months. It was explained that once an Adoption Order is made, parental responsibility transfers to the adoptive parents and the Local Authority no longer has responsibility, in law, for decisions for that child. However, as part of the Adoption Plan, the Local Authority continues to provide post-adoption support.

#### **Review staffing, function and purpose of the Middlesbrough homes previously managed by Five Rivers**

49. The scrutiny panel was advised that three units, previously managed by an independent agency, have returned to Local Authority control. Members heard that the units are now more responsive to the Local Authority's needs and an option to open a further children's home is under consideration, as this would reduce reliance on external providers.



50. It was explained that when a child is accommodated in a unit, there are a number of safeguarding checks in place - including regular social worker visits, independent visitors, an advocacy scheme and regular inspections and monitoring by OFSTED.
51. Members heard that whilst it is the Local Authority's preference to place children with in-house carers, it is not always possible due to an individual's needs. Members were advised that in some cases children need to be placed in specialist or secure units, which are not currently available in Middlesbrough. This is most often the case with teenage children and children with disabilities and complex needs. However, it was conveyed that work is ongoing to ensure as many Middlesbrough children, as possible, are accommodated locally.
52. Currently there are 11 in-house residential beds in Middlesbrough and 4 beds in Middlesbrough with an independent foster agency (IFA). The cost of the IFA beds has been negotiated and agreed at the same cost as the in-house beds. It was conveyed that there are also a number of specialist units in Cumbria and throughout the North East region.

#### **Explore the possibility of a Tees-wide adoption service.**

53. Members were advised that the possibility of developing a Tees-wide adoption service was originally seen as a positive opportunity to work together across 4 of the 5 Tees Boroughs. However, it was explained that there is some resistance to developing this initiative, which would increase the numbers of available adopters.

#### **Development of short break services.**

54. The scrutiny panel heard that the Local Authority are looking to provide a wider range of options for families, as an alternative to residential Short Break provision.

#### **Development of local residential support for disabled children.**

55. Members heard that the Local Authority is looking to identify, purchase and secure a property that will be used as a residential children's home for children with disabilities - reducing the number of expensive out of area placements.

#### **Returning children to Middlesbrough pilot – Pilot to continue until March 2015.**

56. It was explained that work will be undertaken to identify children who are placed out of area who could be brought back to Middlesbrough, to re-join their family or move into accommodation in one of the children's homes.

#### **Emergency Support Service**

57. It was conveyed that the Local Authority is hoping to re-introduce an Emergency Support Service that tries to keep young people in their family home; for example by resolving relationship issues. This service had previously been piloted for six months and it had been very effective.
58. The Assistant Director reassured the scrutiny panel that managers are robust in their decision-making and do not accommodate children unnecessarily and will consider all other options, including family and friends' placements. However, there will always be those children where there is no alternative.

**Details of the measures in place to ensure there is adequate budget provision to support looked after children and those children requiring protection plans, without resorting to contingencies.**

59. It was explained to the scrutiny panel that the Chief Finance Officer prepares the revenue budget each year, which is agreed by the Mayor, Executive and Council - a number of assumptions are applied, one being demand led pressures for children. It was highlighted that although the Local Authority is receiving a significant reduction in government support, investment of £9 million has been allocated in the Medium Term Financial Plan for the three periods until 2016/17.

**Peopletoo study**

60. The Executive Director for Wellbeing, Care and Learning advised that, over the past six years, two academic studies had attempted to understand why Middlesbrough has a significantly higher rate of LAC than its regional, national and statistical neighbour comparators.
61. It was conveyed to the scrutiny panel that more recently Peopletoo had been commissioned, by the Local Authority, to undertake work to explore the reasons for this. It was explained that as part of this work, Peopletoo undertook an analysis of local, regional and national data, met with performance and operational managers, attended a service provision meeting and reviewed a number of cases. This enabled Peopletoo to set out an assessment of:
- Why the rates of LAC are high and what is likely to happen in the future to these rates.
  - Current trends in Middlesbrough's LAC population.
  - The weaknesses in the current children's care system which may prevent or hinder a reduction in the rates of LAC.

**Key findings**

62. The scrutiny panel was informed that the key findings of the review indicate:
- Middlesbrough has had a consistently higher rate of LAC than its regional, national and statistical neighbours since 2007.
  - There is a consistent pattern of higher rates of entry into care amongst the 1-4 age group.
  - Between year ending 2011 to 2013 there were a significantly higher proportion of children entering care under the category of "Family Dysfunction" in comparison with regional and national comparators.
  - Rates of Children in Need (CiN) and children subject to a CPP are significantly higher than those of regional, national and statistical neighbour authorities.
  - Rates of referrals to Children's Social Care are consistent with statistical neighbours but significantly higher than regional or national comparators.
  - Rates of re-referrals are lower than those of regional, national and statistical neighbour authorities.
  - Middlesbrough appears to have a higher percentage of step down rates from the Looked After system. However, their rates of stepping down cases at CiN and CPP levels are poorer.
  - The percentage of cases closed within the first 3 months is significantly lower than comparators, along with the percentage closed within the first year.

## Analysis of numbers of Looked After Children

63. It was advised that Middlesbrough is in the top 10 authorities in England for the rate of LAC per 10,000 children under the age of 18.

### Poverty and deprivation

64. The two earlier studies had concluded that poverty and social deprivation were significant contributory factors for the high numbers of LAC.
65. It was explained that 2010 Indices of Multiple Deprivation ranked Middlesbrough as the eight most deprived local authority area in England. Members were advised that the reasons why individual authorities have high numbers of LAC is not always clear. It was explained that although there is some correlation between authorities with high rates of poverty, the association is not exact, as many authorities with high levels of poverty, do not have high rates of LAC. Therefore, Peopletoo highlighted that high rates of poverty should therefore be seen as one of a number of risk factors rather than a direct association.
66. Members were advised that there may be a stronger link between the concentration of areas of extreme poverty and higher LAC populations but again this is an implied association rather than a direct proven causal link.

### Reasons for high rates

67. It was explained that given the socio economic factors, it would be expected that an authority, like Middlesbrough, could have relatively high rates of LAC. Following an analysis of statistical neighbours, Peopletoo estimate a figure of 90-100 per 10,000 could be expected as the rate for Middlesbrough, if it had similar patterns to its statistical neighbours.
68. The scrutiny panel heard that since 2007, when Middlesbrough's figures were similar to its statistical neighbours, a significant gap has opened up. Peopletoo suggested 4 reasons for this:
- Service change - a lot of experience was lost from the Senior Management Team. The Team is now experienced again, which should impact positively on the rate of LAC.
  - Lack of economic resilience – Middlesbrough has been identified as the Authority having the lowest level of resilience in the country and more referrals are made as a result of this.

A Member asked what was the difference between economic resilience and poverty. The Executive Director said that the former is a broader approach, which includes people not in poverty, but who may be struggling/on the edge of poverty.

- The very high number of problematic drug users and the low numbers of these in treatment – professionals may have been surprised by the change in drug use from heroin to cocaine, as the nature of addiction is not the same.
- The high number of returning offenders into the community – in 2010 Middlesbrough, proportionately, had the highest numbers of any authority as a proportion of the population.

## **Future pressures**

69. The scrutiny panel was informed that Peopletoo undertook an analysis of the age profile of children that are looked after and the age at which children become looked after. It was explained that these profiles indicate that Middlesbrough's age profile for LAC is roughly similar to national and regional profiles. However, it was highlighted that the profile of children coming into the care system at aged 4 or below indicates a long-term demand pressure that requires significant structural mitigation.
70. It was acknowledged that, in the short to medium term, the Local Authority was limited in what it could do to reduce LAC rates as:
- The legislative and moral framework in which children and young people are taken and kept under the protection of the local authority requires authorities to ensure the wellbeing of children is maintained over their childhood, and
  - Securing adoption for children becomes significantly more difficult the older they become or when there are other issues to consider such as large family groups, disability or gender.
71. Peopletoo explained that these issues are often overlooked, but are key in looking at how past demand impacts on future pressures. On this basis, it was conveyed that it is unlikely that Middlesbrough will see a significant reduction in LAC in the short to medium term, but some reduction is possible.
72. The scrutiny panel heard that high numbers of LAC are a long-term threat to the financial stability of children's services and the Local Authority. Demand will remain high as current demand is already high and it will take a number of years for a significant reduction in numbers. The Executive Director illustrated the potential duration of this demand by confirming that, when in education or training, the Local Authority maintains responsibility for LAC up to the age of 25.
73. It was conveyed that Peopletoo found that the thresholds for a child becoming looked after are "applied robustly" by staff and are "guarded tenaciously by managers". Peopletoo also found that children in need and child protection thresholds are appropriate. The Executive Director said that, crucially, this means that children are not being taken into care inappropriately by the Local Authority and this view is echoed from peer review, Ofsted Inspection and Thematic Review.

## **Assessment of children currently looked after**

74. Although Peopletoo explained that current thresholds are generally appropriate, three areas were highlighted as needing further consideration from the Local Authority:
- Learning disabled parents – Peopletoo noted that the definition of learning disability used in a case was unclear.
  - Concerns about the use and sale of drugs – the Local Authority may wish to reflect on the use of intelligence provided by other agencies with regard to the risks of drug use/drug dealing by parents and family members.
  - Lack of confidence and knowledge about specific drugs and their effects – the Local Authority may wish to consider the development of specialisms, within

some social worker roles, to increase knowledge relating to offender management and drug use.

## **The current system**

### Early intervention and prevention

75. Members heard that Peopletoo also found that prevention and early intervention at all levels from Common Assessment Framework to LAC are not sufficient or sufficiently co-ordinated to prevent movement through the key thresholds.
76. It was explained that there is a need for a broader range of early intervention and prevention and it was noted that, currently, there is no commissioning strategy for the service to support co-ordination or planning of preventative services. Peopletoo identified that a “perceived gap in preventative services is one of the reasons why the referral rates of other agencies to Social Care is high”. Peopletoo conveyed that issues are not always being picked up early enough. It was highlighted that the key issue is scalability – being able to cope with the demand. A broader range of early help/intervention and prevention is required and one aspect that will assist, is that every school in Middlesbrough now has a Link Social Worker

## **Strategic Recommendations**

77. Members heard that Peopletoo set out clear recommendations that will reduce the numbers of LAC:

### Set up a programme to safely reduce the rates of Looked After Children.

78. Members were informed that the a Transformational Programme Board has now been established.
79. The scrutiny panel asked the Executive Director several questions about the Transformation Board. In response to these, she advised that:-
  - She will Chair the Board, which will also comprise of: Neil Pocklington (Assistant Director Safeguarding and Children’s Care), Erik Scollay (Assistant Director, Social Care), Edward Kunonga (Director of Public Health), Richard Horniman (Assistant Director, Supporting Communities) and Paul Stephens (Change Programme Manager).
  - The Board would also include a representative from Strategic Resources and a representative from Human Resources.
  - Project Groups are being established with Terms of Reference. These groups will report to the Board and will cover workstreams for children’s services; adult services and issues that affect both areas.
  - A Project Plan, with targets and milestones to enable success to be judged, is being produced.
  - She is confident that the right people are involved.
  - It will be key to maintain the level of change, whilst maintaining staff morale.
  - She envisaged meetings of the Board being held monthly initially, perhaps moving to bi-monthly, as the work of the Project Groups develops.
  - The Board’s role will be to co-ordinate work; deal with issues causing blockages to progress and ensure that workloads are realistic, yet challenging.
  - The Board will inform the work of the Council’s Change Programme and link into it.

- Some Project Management Support will be required. Peopletoo has been commissioned to provide this.
- There are a range of resources available to the Department including the voluntary sector. The key is to organise these in the most effective way.

Develop a clear narrative why the rates of Looked After Children have to reduce.

80. It was explained that there is a need to develop a narrative that says there is a moral duty to ensure that children are safe and have a happy life. This means identifying any issues at the earliest opportunity and stressing the collective responsibility on partners. All stakeholders, both internal and external, must understand why reducing rates is important and why it will take time.

Develop a programme of cooperation with regional, academic and third sector partners with Middlesbrough at its core.

81. It was conveyed that there is requirement for the Local Authority to encourage learning to influence its own practice. It was recommended that regional, academic and third sector partners should be invited to sit on the Transformational Programme Board.

Use evidence based planning to develop effective preventative and early intervention services.

82. Members heard that all agencies delivering preventative and early intervention services need to be involved in developing services that work for Middlesbrough and these should be evidence-based.

Invest in specialist operational support that reflects the nature of Middlesbrough's challenges.

83. It was conveyed that the Local Authority should invest in support that addresses Middlesbrough's challenges and consider therapeutic models, such as attachment.

**Additional strategic recommendations**

84. The scrutiny panel was advised that Peopletoo also stated that the Local Authority should consider the following:
- Facilitating Social Impact Bonds – to develop new models of keeping children safely within their families. In reply to a question from a Member, the Executive Director said that these bonds are a way of linking up with social enterprises who can draw in investment to facilitate particular ways of working.
  - Remodelling the whole of prevention and early intervention services into an integrated family support service, managed by a third sector organisation or an arm's length publicly owned vehicle.

**Operational recommendations**

85. Peopletoo had not found any major issues in the management of cases, but the following two recommendations were made regarding operational practice.

- Review cases across CiN; those subject to a CPP and LAC, to close cases where appropriate. Members heard that this is a systemic issue with no quick fix and is being addressed.
- Restructure so there is a single case review meeting. The scrutiny panel was advised that this was being addressed.

86. In response to a question from a Member, the Executive Director stated that, whilst the aim is to reduce the number of LAC, it would be unrealistic to aim for the England average, given Middlesbrough's particular circumstances and the difficulty that any local authority would face in achieving a significant reduction in the short and medium term.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

87. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board:

- Notes the information received, to date, by the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel.
- Acknowledges that the topic will be revisited in 2015/16 to gather further information and evidence, prior to submitting a final report to The Executive, which will include conclusions and recommendations.

### **ACRONYMS**

88. A-Z listing of common acronyms used in the report:

CPP	Child Protection Plans
CiN	Children in Need
IFA	Independent Foster Agency
LAC	Looked After Children

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

89. The scrutiny panel would like to thank the following people for their help with this review: -

Richenda Broad	Executive Director for Wellbeing, Care and Learning
Neil Pocklington	Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care
Peopletoo	

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

90. The following Council sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Agenda papers and minutes of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 4 February and 25 February 2015.

**COUNCILLOR JEANETTE WALKER  
CHAIR OF CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL**

Contact:  
Georgina Brown  
Scrutiny Support Officer, Legal & Democratic Services  
Telephone: 01642 729711 (direct line)  
March 2015