

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

AGENDA ITEM: 10(a)

CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS REPORT

2 February 2016

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

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

BACKGROUND

Safeguarding and Children in Care

2. The scrutiny panel continues to gather evidence in respect of its current review of Safeguarding and Children in Care.
3. At the last meeting, held on 13 January 2016, the scrutiny panel considered evidence in respect of:
 - The quality and standard of residential care provided/used by the Local Authority.
 - The range of support that the Local Authority provides to assist young people leaving care with the transition to independent living.
4. At the meeting, the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care and the Service Manager for Support and Development were in attendance to provide information on residential placements.
5. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that it is essential for the Local Authority to ensure that residential placements, for children and young people, deliver high-quality care at reasonable cost. However, it was explained that there are significant challenges related to this. Members heard that the Local Authority would hope to place all children and young people in homes that are rated as "Good", but there are significantly fewer residential placements available. It was conveyed that some homes are taking action to retain a "Good" or better rating by reducing the level of needs and risk of young people placed.
6. It was conveyed that the Local Authority is currently working with Darlington, Stockton, Hartlepool and Redcar in developing a Tees Valley Residential Framework Contract, which will commence from 1 April 2016. The scrutiny panel heard that this will enable the authorities to control price, and improve quality, with all providers that successfully apply for the framework. Members were also informed that £400,000 has been identified to purchase and secure a property that will be used as a residential home for children with disabilities.

7. In respect of the support provided to care leavers - the Pathways Manager and a Personal Adviser for Stronger Families were also in attendance.
8. Members received information on the support that care leavers receive and the range of multi-agency staff co-located within the Pathways Team. It was conveyed to the scrutiny panel that the Pathways Team continues to offer care leavers with high-quality support and guidance - with the aim of ensuring young people have maximum opportunity to lead happy, healthy and fulfilling lives and make a positive contribution to their communities. It was explained, however, that the Pathways Team acknowledges that further work is required to ensure questionnaires are completed - to ascertain the views of care leavers. Furthermore, there is a requirement to ensure that the feedback received is collated and analysed to improve service delivery.
9. In addition to the evidence detailed above, the scrutiny panel was presented with the sub-group's findings following site visits to Middlesbrough's secondary schools.
10. In respect of the site visits, the sub-group found that excellent specialist support is provided to children in care – not only in determining the personal and academic needs of students but also in establishing what is required to enable them to make expected progress and fulfil their potential.
11. Alongside this, the visits did highlight areas that would further improve support, these included - streamlining the Personal Education Plan (PEP) process, designated teachers working more closely with other schools and service providers and the commissioning of services to promote the emotional and social wellbeing of young people.
12. The scrutiny panel conveyed that - although a number of schools have already been visited - it is essential and of the utmost importance that the Sub-Group meets face-to-face with representatives from each and every secondary school in Middlesbrough. Therefore, further contact will be made with the remaining schools.

RECOMMENDATION

13. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board notes the progress of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel.

COUNCILLOR JEANETTE WALKER

CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

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