

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on 13 December 2016.

PRESENT: Councillors Sharrocks, (Chair), Hellaoui, Lewis, McGee, Rooney, J A Walker and Walters

PRESENT BY INVITATION: Councillor Carr

OFFICERS: G Field, S Lightwing

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cole, Dryden, Higgins, Mawston, C Hobson.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest at this point in the meeting.

1 MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 8 NOVEMBER 2016

The minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 8 November 2016 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

2 SUSPENSION OF COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

ORDERED that, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 5, the Committee agreed to vary the order of business. The Panel agreed to deal with Agenda Items in the following order: Agenda Items 5, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9.

3 UPDATE FROM THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR FOR ENVIRONMENT, PROPERTY AND COMMERCIAL SERVICES

The Assistant Director for Environment, Property and Commercial Services provided the Panel with some information that had been requested following the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 11 October 2016.

The Recycling Reward Scheme was now in operation with the aim of increasing recycling rates throughout the town. Several rewards had already been awarded.

In relation to the recruitment of two apprentices for the Cemeteries Service, there had been a slight delay but the apprenticeships would start in January 2017. A copy of the Apprentice Rates of Pay as from 1 October 2016 was tabled and circulated. It was confirmed that the pay rates were in line with national recommendations.

The Service Area was hoping to take on up to twenty apprentices during the next year including some in Area Care and others in more specialist areas such as mechanics. There was a shortage of mechanical engineers as well as an ageing workforce. Training for administrative type functions was provided in-house whereas for more technical jobs the Council would approach individual specialist companies or organisations such as Middlesbrough College to provide training.

The Chair informed that Panel that the Ad Hoc Scrutiny Panel was due to commence a scrutiny review of recruitment and retention of apprentices for Middlesbrough.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

4 ATTENDANCE OF EXECUTIVE MEMBERS AT THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

LEAD EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES - COUNCILLOR M CARR

The Democratic Services Officer submitted a report to provide information in respect of the scheduled attendance of Members of the Executive at the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB). It was intended for Executive Members to provide updates on their respective work in terms of their aims, aspirations, objectives, priorities and any emerging issues.

The Chair welcomed Councillor Carr, the Lead Executive Member for Children's Services, to the meeting. Councillor Carr indicated that he would provide an update on progress since the last OFSTED inspection and also the way forward for safeguarding Children's Services in future.

The number of children coming into the care system was increasing and there were 434 Middlesbrough Looked After Children (LAC) at the end of October 2016. Although the increase could in part be due to connected persons being incorporated into the system, a snapshot of the last 20 children brought into the care system in September 2016, showed that 19 had been through the connected persons route. Whilst this was a national trend, Middlesbrough's numbers were always higher than national numbers.

Connected persons or kinship carers were family members who looked after children who could not reside with their parents. In accordance with the legislation, children in these circumstances should be treated as being in care and the connected persons carers should be assessed and paid as foster carers. One of the difficulties was that some connected persons carers, whilst providing adequate care, would not necessarily meet the rigorous requirements as foster carers. If connected persons were treated as foster carers they would receive a foster carer allowance. If they cared for children on an informal basis they might or might not receive an ad hoc allowance. The best outcome for children was for connected persons carers to obtain a Special Guardianship Order (SGO) and take parental responsibility. However, if an SGO was granted, there was no requirement for the carers to receive any financial support.

The Executive Member explained that the increase in the numbers of children being cared for was regarded as a national problem and that the Courts interpreted the law differently. It was not clear whether this was strictly to do with the wording of the legislation. Whereas other Local Authorities would disagree with the Courts, it seemed to be the case that Middlesbrough almost anticipated judgements and did not argue for different outcomes.

There was currently an over-reliance on external provision for foster care and residential placements in Middlesbrough. There had been much change at management level over the last year and there were now very significant savings targets which would have to be met over the next two years. Whilst Children's Social Care had not been totally exempt from the last five years of austerity, to some extent it had been protected.

This time last year Middlesbrough underwent an OFSTED inspection of its Children's Services which identified some strengths and weaknesses. There were no weaknesses in the actual care of children. The weaknesses identified included how data was collected and used, IT systems and listening to the voice of the children.

Middlesbrough was currently trying to recruit more in-house foster carers to enable children to come back to Middlesbrough from more expensive out of area placements. In the last year, 12 children and young people had been brought back from placements outside of town and re-located with birth families. There were also 13 children and young people who might have come into care but were being supported in their families. For those 25 children and young people, this equated to £650,000 per annum savings. There were currently 117 Middlesbrough foster carers and the target was to reach 130. Middlesbrough was still using 133 independent foster carers although that number had decreased. The Council was currently looking at ways to improve the commissioning of residential care. There were four children's homes in Middlesbrough.

Reference was made to the Regional Adoption Agency, which was a concept that had been around for a long time. If the five Tees Valley Local Authorities worked together on adoption there would be some savings as well as a pool of children available for adoption and adoptive

parents. The Government was in favour of the concept but wished to create a structure outside of local authorities, involving voluntary agencies. In some parts of the country voluntary bodies had effectively taken over the Local Authorities' role in adoption. The Executive Member added that the Government had provided funding for Consultants to work on suggestions for a Regional Agency and a report had been produced. However their recommendation for a separate local organisation had not been well received.

Referring back to the increased numbers of LAC, the Executive Member stated that the numbers were phenomenally high and Middlesbrough was ahead of statistical neighbours as well as nationally by large amounts. This was also the case with children in need and those on child protection plans. Despite Middlesbrough's problems with deprivation, local educational attainment, families with drug and alcohol abuse, these issues were no different to those faced by statistical neighbours, yet Middlesbrough's numbers were higher.

OFSTED had never criticised Middlesbrough's thresholds and no external examination had ever suggested that Middlesbrough was overly risk averse. However, there was a view that if you were being risk averse and bringing children into care, you were generating greater risk towards children further down the line because the children who were in care, did less well in school, had poorer outcomes, were more likely to be unemployed or be involved in the criminal justice system. So avoiding one sort of risk potentially expanded the risk of other things.

The safeguarding budget was currently £28 million but between now and April 2019 there was a requirement in the Council's Strategic Plan to save £5 million. The service needed to transform and change the way it worked completely to deliver better outcomes for children and families, bring fewer children into the system and also saves money. This had been done successfully in other local authorities. The Executive Member identified Leeds as one Authority where by changing the way they worked and their approach they had vastly reduced the number of children taken into care. Since they had fewer children in care they could be more effective in supporting them, as well as restoring families and enabling them to look after their children rather than bringing them into the care system. Middlesbrough had an early help department that could work with schools, health, police and other regional bodies to enable families to get through difficulties. In the last six months approximately 600 families had been supported.

The impact of Surestart Centres on Looked After Children (LAC) was unclear. Much of the Surestart work was around the concept of early help and building communities. It was noted that Parent Support Advisers, who were introduced about ten years ago, had been retained in Local Authority run schools and were dedicated to working with families. The conversion of many schools to academies had created a fragmented system and the Local Authority did not have as much influence. Through meetings with Headteachers, the high number of LAC had been highlighted. It was positive that the education outcomes of LAC were better than some statistical neighbours, although still below their peers.

The Executive Member summarised that it was time to change and do things differently, not only to save money but to give better outcomes for children and young people as well. Whilst some progress had been made this was not yet comprehensive and three staff briefings had been arranged as well as meeting with Headteachers in January 2017.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for attending and providing an update.

5 **SCRUTINY TRAINING**

A report was presented to provide information in respect of Scrutiny Training which had been organised for all Members, but in particular for Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Board (OSB).

Training had been organised as follows:

Tuesday 17 January 2017

Seminar 1: 10 am-12 noon - Best Practice in Scrutiny

Seminar 2: 1 pm-3 pm - Effective Committee Meeting Skills in Scrutiny

Thursday 19 January 2017

Seminar 1: 10 am-12 noon - Chairing Skills

The Chair highlighted a recent issue regarding non-attendance of a Panel Chair at a meeting of the Executive and requested that in future, if Chairs or their Vice Chairs were unable to attend, to advise her at the earliest opportunity. The Chair also requested that she was kept fully informed of any site visits or task and finish groups that had been organised by the Panels.

AGREED as follows that the information provided was noted.

6 **EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chief Executive submitted a report which identified the forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive as outlined in Appendix A to the report.

The report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Board with the opportunity to consider whether any item contained within the Executive Forward Work Programme should be considered by the Board or referred to a Scrutiny Panel.

NOTED

7 **SCRUTINY PANEL PROGRESS REPORTS**

The Chair of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel provided Members with an update in respect of the Panel's current topic of kinship carers/connected persons.

The Vice Chair of the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel informed the Board that the Final Report on Pothole Repair had been completed and would be submitted to the January meeting of the Board. The Panel had received an update on the Teesside Media and Innovation Village at the last meeting and the next topic for review was Linthorpe Road Re-generation.

The Chair of the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel provided an update on the current topic of investigation of Sextortion.

The Chair of Environment Scrutiny Panel informed the Board that the Panel had arranged its next meeting at North Ormesby Market as part of its review into the transfer of the market to the independent organisation NONDET. The Panel had also almost completed its review into Commercialisation.

The Chair of Social Care and Adult Services Scrutiny Panel advised that the Panel was continuing its investigation on the topic of Safeguarding Adults.

NOTED