

Overview of Progress made against the Immediate Assurance Plan.

All **Early Help** cases held by the Middlesbrough Council internal teams i.e. not those being worked by partner agencies, have been audited and RAG rated (900 cases). As a result, all high risk cases have then been audited in depth and remedial action taken where appropriate. This resulted in 130 children (15%) of the cohort of cases being stepped up to the social work teams. These cases are being tracked to ensure these families receive the "right" outcomes as a result of the social care assessment. All cases which require a step down to Early Help are audited at a Team Manager level to ensure they meet the correct threshold. A sample of new Social Care Assessments which result in no further action are audited on a weekly basis to ensure families are receiving the correct intervention. Decision making in the Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH) is audited on a weekly basis to check that it is correct and thresholds are being applied appropriately. Decision making in the MACH is also being audited by an external commissioned team which has reported on marked improvements in the quality of decision making and application of thresholds.

SO WHAT? As a result of the process we can now be confident that this cohort of children are receiving a social care assessment and intervention where appropriate and the cases held in Early Help are appropriate to be held in Early Help. There has been an increase in demand in the Social Care as a result. We are working to ensure an increase in demand does not impact on the improvements we are making in the quality of practice.

The **MACH** has increased its management capacity and now have 2 Team Manager and 2 Assistant Team Managers in post.

SO WHAT? As a result there is more resilience to support the operation of the front door to social care services. This will support the quality of management oversight and the timeliness of finalising contacts and referrals.

The **MACH – joint with Redcar** has resulted in some key challenges for the MBC improvement journey. MBCs lack of direct control over the operational running of the team has resulted in a considerable dialogue and challenge with Redcar to support the key improvements we require. The audit activity (which has been internally and externally provided) does assure MBC that the correct thresholds are being applied to MBC children. However, different thresholds seem to have been applied to Redcar's children which results in vulnerabilities to the system and confusion in the workforce. The whole team have attended the Clarity and Confidence workshop on thresholds and front door decision making to support consistency with MBC practice.

SO WHAT? As a result we are more confident that the correct thresholds are being applied to MBC children. This is consistent with MBC practice. However, the lack of consistency in the application of thresholds with Redcar has contributed to MBC considering a different delivery model for the MACH.

Thresholds. Internal and external audit focused on the front end of the system (i.e. Early Help, MACH and Assessment) have identified that we are now applying more appropriate thresholds. Our threshold

document has not been updated as it is a Tees wide document however the Appendix to the document which outlines the criteria for each tier has been amended internally and is being applied across the service. We acknowledge further work is required to continue to embed appropriate thresholds i.e. thresholds for child protection and children looked after but our progress is in line with our targets and we are transferring audit capacity to support these areas of work.

As a result demand for Social Care has increase by 27% in the past year beyond our statistical neighbours, regional neighbours and national indicators. The increase in child protection and children looked after has spiked after the inspection. In the past year the number of looked after children increased by 20% and Child protection by 41%. The rate of Children Protection has increased 19% between Nov. 2019 and March 2020 compared with 10% between July – Oct 2019. The rate of looked after children has increased 10% from Nov 2019 – March 2020, compared with 1.5% between July – Oct 2019. The number of children in need (CiN) has increased by 27% and Early Help by 15%.

SO WHAT? More children are receiving the right level of intervention to support their needs. We are aware further work is required to improve the quality of social work intervention.

Homelessness. Training was has been provided to all appropriate staff via the clarity and confidence workshops with the commissioned Strengthening Practice programme.

SO WHAT? Children who are aged 16 are now receiving the correct support and accommodation. They are all aware of their rights under the Southwark Judgement. The social care workforce understands its role and responsibilities and those of partner agencies (housing in particular). This is clearly recorded on our information data system LCS. Further work is required to support a joint homelessness protocol with Housing. The Homelessness provision is due to be brought in house imminently. This will further support joined up work with partners to strengthen this area of practice.

PACE Beds: The protocol to support our approach to children held in police custody has been developed and signed off. The police are sharing the data with their data with the MBC as agreed. A pathway is being set up on LCS to support the recording of when children have reached the threshold for a PACE bed. This pathway sends an automated message to the Director of Children's Care to support leadership oversight. Further work is required to link this work up with the Emergency Duty Team, currently delivered by Stockton. This will ensure all partners, i.e. EDT, Police and the Youth Offending Service (YOS), agree on the given protocol to satisfy Ofsted recommendations. A process is planned whereby the information will be scrutinised in the YOS Management Board on a quarterly basis

Safety Planning: Clarity and Confidence workshops training on safety planning by our commissioned training provider has been rolled out to the majority of the workforce. This has been partially suspended due to Covid 19, however online options and online coaching has now been made available. The safety plan template and guidance has been developed and placed on LCS to support consistency in recording and our ability to

performance manage the number of safety plans being completed. To date, over 940 safety plans have been completed, and 10% have been quality assured.

SO WHAT? We are now clear that risks have been clearly identified and we have a planned approach to responding to them, should they arise, supported by mitigating actions. We are aware that there is still considerable work outstanding to ensure the quality of safety planning is good, however we are on the expected trajectory for this area of work.

Children with a disability receiving a short break: Social workers have been recruited to support the assessment, tracking and re-assessment of all children receiving a short break. These posts are planned to be in place from May 2020. All new children identified as needing a short break are receiving a service in line with statutory guidance i.e. assessments are undertaken by a social worker. However there is a back log of cases which require a social worker to complete a reassessment of their needs. Once these posts are in operation, we will be assured that all children receiving a short break are being assessed in line with statutory guidance.

Permanency planning remains a key area for development to take forward into the wider improvement plan this includes the work on the policy, associated pathways on LCS and the Permanency Monitoring Group (PMG). Whilst there have been some refinements to the process, such as Adoption Tees Valley participation on the PMG, and additional panels put in place to support the ratification of plans for children to be in their 'forever homes' considerable improvement still needs to be made

Personal Advisors (PAs) in the Care Leaving service. The service sourced agency PA's to support a reduction in the caseloads of PA's and support quality of practice until permanent appointments could be made. Caseloads have reduced from over 30, to an average of 22, in line with the Service target. Permanent recruitment has since taken place and one of the agency workers is taking a permanent role which will ensure continuity for the young people on her caseload.

Unregulated placements. All children in unregulated placements have a risk assessment identifying care verses support needs, using a template developed with Ofsted during the ILAC inspection. This form is being uploaded onto LCS so we can report on this area of work. All unregulated providers have been contacted and supported to register with Ofsted if they have wished to do so. One provided has registered the Care aspect of their home with the CQC and care is provided under a short break provision.

So what? We are assured young people are receiving the right support to meet their needs, with providers who are regulated and therefore inspected by Regulatory Bodies and our internal Commissioning arrangements.

Improvement programme and skills and capacity. Since the creation of the plan the leadership team has been further strengthened through the appointment of Sue Butcher as the Director of Children's Services, Catherine Parry as Director of Children's Care and Pauline Nasraine as Head of Safeguarding and Care

Planning. These roles are pivotal to the leadership of the improvement journey and cultural shift required in Children's Services. All are experienced social workers and leaders in working with Local Authorities in need of significant improvement. The governance of the Improvement Programme is in place and all meetings are supporting the drive, challenge and support of the improvement programme. The leadership are working with the workforce to develop the vision for the Children's Improvement Programme and have identified 'Middlesbrough Children Matter' as the banner under which we will all practice.

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