


BRIEFING FOR MEMBERS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES – OFSTED ACTION PLAN

(Circulated to Members 08/04/20)

RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS/COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM MEMBERS

NAME OF MEMBER	QUESTION/COMMENT	RESPONSE TO BE PROVIDED BY (DATE)
Councillor Cooper	<p><u>Question:</u> How many children in MBC care have been safely reunited with their families since 1st of January 2020?</p> <p><i>Two children have returned home to a parent or a person with parental responsibility for them.</i></p>	
Councillor Cooke	<p><u>Question/Request:</u> Please can we be provided with an updated version of the RAG rated document (Immediate Assurance Plan) to compare progress from the original. (This would be beneficial as I don't think we have seen that document since originally presented).</p> <p><i>The documents sent to Councillors previously gave an overview of progress. Please find attached the updated Immediate Assurance/Recovery plan</i></p> <p> Item 7 - Recovery plan and impact.ppt</p>	
Councillor Wilson	<p><u>Questions:</u></p> <p>1) Re Accusations of bad parenting, (single parent mainly)at the moment. How do social services follow up these accusations? How deep do they go apart from witness statements do they carry out site visits? Do they check the information in a statement is accurate?</p> <p><i>Any contact made with our MACH (Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub) is considered on a case by case basis whether or not the child lives in a single parent household. If the child's situation does not reach the threshold for social work intervention then family can receive support through 'Early Help'. If the child's situation does reach the threshold for social work intervention then the child can be considered as a Child in Need and receive support accordingly. If the child's situation is one where the s/he is at risk of significant harm now or in the future then a multi-agency strategy meeting is call to plan a child protection enquiry.</i></p>	

	<p><i>The home will be visited and the child should always be seen and seen alone. Other agencies that know the child such as the health visitor, school nurse, school, GP and the referrer will be contacted for their information and views and opinions. .</i></p> <p>2) Re Long term fostering - Are social services after kinship care, if this is not going to happen will long term fostering be an option rather than adoption.</p> <p><i>Children need permanence – that is they need to know be in their ‘forever homes’ as swiftly as possible.</i></p> <p><i>If children cannot live within their birth families every effort will be made to keep them within their extended families and their communities if it is safe to do so.</i></p> <p><i>Both adoption and long-term fostering are forms of permanence and social workers will assess children’s needs to inform a decision as to which is the best one for them. Adoption is usually the best form of permanence for younger children.</i></p> <p>3) During fostering are relatives allowed access. After adoption are relatives allowed contact?</p> <p><i>Contact with relatives will depend on individual children’s situations and must be in their best interests. Contact post-adoption is usually indirect contact by exchanging letters between birth family members and the adopters. This may only be once or twice a year.</i></p>	
<p>Councillor Uddin</p>	<p>Questions:</p> <p>1. Where is the RAG document and is there any reason why it is not being shared with councillors as previously promised?</p> <p><i>The documents sent to Councillors previously gave an overview of progress. Please find attached the updated Immediate Assurance/Recovery plan</i></p> <div data-bbox="491 1442 544 1503" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Item 7 - Recovery plan and impact.ppt</p> <p>2. In the briefing to Members, page 2-3 bottom paragraph “Culture, Capacity and COVID”. <i>Second line states that, “we have brought in an additional team of auditors ... The results of the audits are shared with staff.”</i> I wonder whether the audit results can also be shared with the Members of both Children & YP Social Care & Services Scrutiny Panel and Corporate Parenting Board?</p> <p><i>Innovate are providing a managed audit team to Middlesbrough Children’s Social Care for a 12 week period which runs from 9 March 2020 until 29 May 2020. Monthly thematic audit reports are produced</i></p>	

	<p><i>which are available for Scrutiny Panel and Corporate Parenting Board. A final review report will be produced and will be available on 1 June 2020.</i></p> <p>3. In the second paragraph, it was mentioned that as of 3rd April there were 61 members of staff self-isolating. I acknowledge that it is an extremely difficult time for everyone involved more so, for the 61 staff members and their close families to see through that they are having to go through self-isolating. I am sure all my colleagues would be concerned as much as I am, for all our staff's well-being, in particular for those who are subject to being isolated. I would be grateful if Members can be updated on the 61 staff members' current situation in terms of their well-being and is there any necessary support available for them, if needed?</p> <p>Of the 61 employees in Children's Services that were self-isolating, 28 have since returned to work and 33 remain self-isolating due to shielding. The majority of the affected employees although self-isolating are still able to work remotely from home.</p> <p>All employees are able to access a wide range of wellbeing services through their staff portal. A new Employee Assistance programme was launched on the 01 April and is available to all of our staff 24 hours a day, they provide a telephone counselling service, advice on health and wellbeing issues as well as personal financial information.</p> <p>To ensure staff are informed and remain connected we ask managers to keep in regular contact with staff alongside this the Chief Executive and the Director of Children's Services have been providing regular video updates. Staff have also been engaging with the employee Facebook group which has seen an increase in the number of staff using it, this group allows information on support mechanisms to be shared such as mental health and financial wellbeing support. It also allows general updates to be provided as well as offer a little light relief.</p>	
Councillor Uddin	<p><u>Comments:</u> Councillor Uddin expressed concerns around how the scrutiny process can be effective and how Members can have input into the improvement planning whilst meetings are currently suspended.</p> <p><i>Written briefings are being provided to all members on a monthly basis until Democratic Services can complete the processes necessary for holding remote meetings.</i></p>	N/A
Councillor Rathmell	<p><u>Questions:</u></p> <p>1) At Member briefings we have been told that we must all work together to ensure that Children's Services are kept in-house and are not run under a model in which they are removed from the control of the local authority.</p> <p>a) Please provide me details with the SWOT (or similar), cost-benefit or any similar analysis that was used in making this decision.</p>	

The belief that the responsibility for providing the best possible services to the children of Middlesbrough should rest with the democratically elected representatives of the town was not based upon a cost benefit analysis. It was informed by a conviction that it was better for local people to take the responsibility for improving these services to our own children than to outsource this responsibility to a third party who would not be accountable to the people of Middlesbrough.

- b) Please provide details of who was shown the analysis and the dates this information was shared.

There was no analysis to be shared.

- 2) Can you look to provide key performance indicators – every month. These should include all key measures and show the trend over the past 2 years.

Briefings are being provided to councillors on a monthly basis

- 3) Please can you provide Members with access to the papers that will be circulated to the next Strategic and Operational Improvement Board on 22nd April 2020.

Briefings are being provided to councillors on a monthly basis

- 4) “Staff in Children’s Services are still working to build the culture of High Support and High Challenge. We have brought in an additional team of auditors to review the work with children on child protection plans under the category of neglect as part of the Immediate Assurance. “Briefing note for members (05/04/20) by Sue Butcher – please can we be provided with details of the outcome of these audits?”

Innovate audit team are providing a managed audit team to Middlesbrough Children’s Social Care for a 12 week period which runs from 9 March 2020 until 29 May 2020. Monthly thematic audit reports are produced which are available for Scrutiny Panel and Corporate Parenting Board. A final review report will be produced and will be available on 1 June 2020.

- 5) How many ‘vulnerable’ children are:
a) still attending school and how many are at home?
b) What checks are made on those ‘vulnerable’ children who are not attending school?

All vulnerable children whether they attend school or at home have been subject to an EHCP review of a safety plan carried out by a social worker working with school and other agencies to appraise the risk posed to the young person.

- 6) How many ‘at risk’ children are:
a) still attending school and how many are at home?
b) What checks are made on those ‘at risk’ children who are not attending school?

	<p>7) How many vulnerable children, eligible for free school meals, are still having free school meals?</p> <p>a) What process are schools using to make free school meals available to pupils?</p> <p>b) Are there any schools in which parents are expected to collect the free school meals from the school? If so, what is the Council's position on this?</p> <p><i>The government have developed the national voucher scheme which means eligible families will receive a £15 voucher for each child. The administration of the scheme is through schools as they are best placed to know who their eligible families are and will be ensuring that they receive FSM provision. The Council is communicating to the Regional Schools Commissioner, regional councils and schools daily to ensure everyone remains up to date with latest policies and practice. Access to additional support is available via the Coronavirus pages on the council website which provide information in community hubs etc. and is also in leaflets promoting welfare and support published in 17 languages which are being handed out in specific wards by Street Wardens.</i></p>	
Councillor Rathmell	<p><u>Comments:</u> What is the turnaround time or estimate as to when responses will be received? (Obviously having regard to Covid-19).</p> <p><i>By 4th May 2020</i></p> <p>Since the Ofsted report was released to members & the public there's been no meaningful opportunity to scrutinise the effectiveness of the action plan and ask questions of the lead member.</p> <p><i>Our Commissioner, Mr Dwyer, has already consulted widely on his report the contents of which will have a direct impact on the Children's Services Improvement Plan.</i></p> <p>I have been in continuous discussions with Mr Dwyer but I'd like to seek assurances that we will receive responses before the finalising of Mr Dwyer's report because at present members haven't had any meaningful opportunity to have an impact on the effectiveness of the children's services action plan.</p> <p><i>Our Commissioner, Mr Dwyer, has already consulted widely on his report the contents of which will have a direct impact on the Children's Services Improvement Plan.</i></p> <p>There has also been no real opportunity for members to put forward suggestions to improve the delivery of the action plan, given the lack of written updates.</p> <p><i>Unfortunately the planned monthly briefing sessions had to be cancelled due to COVID. However updates will now be sent by email at the same interval.</i></p>	

Councillor J Walker	<u>Comment</u> Thank you very much for these updates and outcomes thus far, very useful and informative.	N/A
Councillor C Hobson	<u>Comment</u> I am happy with the update. Sue seems to have managed to get a lot of things sorted by working differently. Hopefully we will go from strength to strength. Please keep the regular updates coming through it is important to know how things are working in this dept.	N/A
Councillor Thompson	<u>Comment</u> Thanks for the update. It looks like we have our finger on the pulse, hopefully enough to satisfy Ofsted.	N/A
Councillor Higgins	<u>Comment</u> Thank you for the update I can see a lot of work has been done. I know we have a long way to go but we are going in the right direction. I have no problem with the report just a big thank you to all the hard work of everyone involved.	N/A
Councillor Nugent	<u>Comment</u> Thank you for the update and the ongoing work of the department. No questions at this stage.	N/A
Councillor Platt	<u>Comment</u> I've read the report and right now I have no questions as it feels like there is a good plan in place. However I feel it's important to monitor the progress to ensure we stay on track.	N/A
Councillor Dodds	<u>Comment</u> This report has given us a starting point to improve in all areas. We can only move forward with improvement. Covid 19 couldn't have arrived at a more inappropriate time. Obviously this has created a huge amount of extra work and a new way of working. But it is what it is and we have to deal with it. I am confident that Sue, Catherine and their team are working to take us where we need to be. It is appropriate that Sue admits where risks have been identified there are plans in place to respond. This gives me reassurance that the team are accepting things need to improve and are working on this. It is pleasing to learn that the Commissioner has recommended we can keep working on the 'No Wrong Door' project. When this was discussed at our Panel Meeting I was really impressed with the planning which hopefully will see more children eventually being looked after in our own town, which surely must benefit the children. I do believe the team are working in the right direction and we should give them time to get on with the job in hand. Of course we will need updates and evidence that the work is moving forward but without hindering the progress.	N/A