

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

Date: Tuesday, 15 July 2025

Time: 4.30 p.m.

Venue: Mandela Room, Town Hall

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Fire Evacuation Procedure

In the event the fire alarm sounds attendees will be advised to evacuate the building via the nearest fire exit and assemble at the Bottle of Notes opposite MIMA.

- 2. Apologies for Absence
- 3. Declarations of Interest
- 4. Minutes Children's Scrutiny Panel 24 June 2025

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5. Setting the Scrutiny Panel's Work Programme 2025/2026

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The Scrutiny Panel will be asked to consider its work programme for the 2025/2026 Municipal Year.

- 6. Date and Time of Next Meeting 15 September 2025 at 4.30 p.m.
- 7. Any other urgent items which, in the opinion of the Chair, may be considered.

Charlotte Benjamin
Director of Legal and Governance Services

Town Hall Middlesbrough Monday, 7 July 2025

<u>MEMBERSHIP</u>

Councillors E Clynch (Chair), D Jackson, J McTigue, M Nugent, A Romaine, S Tranter, Z Uddin and G Wilson

Assistance in accessing information

Should you have any queries on accessing the Agenda and associated information please contact Joanne Dixon / Chris Lunn, 01642 729713 / 01642 729742, joanne_dixon@middlesbrough.gov.uk / chris_lunn@middlesbrough.gov.uk

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Panel was held on Tuesday, 24 June 2025.

PRESENT: Councillors E Clynch (Chair), B Hubbard (in attendance as Substitute for Councillor

Wilson), D Jackson, J McTigue, M Nugent and Z Uddin.

ALSO IN

ATTENDANCE: D Hodgson (Local Democracy Reporter).

OFFICERS: C Cannon, L Cook, C Jones and C Lunn.

APOLOGIES FOR

ABSENCE: Councillors A Romaine, S Tranter and G Wilson.

25/25 WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and explained the fire evacuation procedures.

25/26 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Business
Cllr E Clynch	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.
Cllr D Jackson	Non-Pecuniary	School Governor.

25/27 **OVERVIEW OF SERVICE AREAS**

The Interim Director for Education and Partnerships and the Head of Safeguarding, Care Planning and Children with Disabilities were in attendance to provide Members with an overview of the services delivered across their directorates, and to highlight the strategic and departmental priorities for the coming year.

The officers each delivered a presentation, both of which focused on the following topics:

- A list of service areas within the directorate, together with a brief description of the work of each service area.
- Priorities.
- Current projects.
- Challenges.
- Corporate Performance Measures.

The Interim Director for Education and Partnerships explained that the service was large and comprised a variety of areas within it. These were: Access to Education; Achievement; Inclusion and Specialist Support Services; and Youth Justice Team. Members were provided with a brief description of the work these services carried out.

In terms of priorities for the year ahead, these were outlined as follows:

- · Reduce the number of permanent exclusions and suspensions across the town.
- Ensure sufficiency of school places for all children and young people.
- Improve attendance for all children and young people.
- Monitor the number of children choosing Elective Home Education (EHE).
- Increase inclusion within mainstream settings for children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Ensure EHCPs were completed within the 20-week statutory timescale.
- · Support schools and settings to have a skilled workforce.
- · Reduce the number of children and young people accessing out of area specialist

- provision.
- · Reduce the deficit on the High Needs Budget.
- Improve outcomes for all children and young people.

Details of several projects currently being undertaken were provided to the Panel, as follows:

- SHiFT Middlesbrough.
- Adopting a digital support system that embraced, Education, Early Help and Social Care.
- Improving Attendance.
- Introduction of a new Resource Allocation System to support children with an EHCP.
- Review of specialist provision.
- Family Hubs.

Challenges facing the service this year were outlined to Members, as follows:

- Exclusions and suspensions.
- Funding.
- Sufficiency of Alternative Provision (AP) placements.
- Sufficiency of Specialist Placements.
- Attendance.
- The increasing number of EHE children.

A number of Corporate Performance Measures were outlined to the Panel, as follows:

- Permanent exclusions: Currently 88, which was slightly lower than the previous year.
- Suspensions: Reduction in the days lost per pupil, suspensions rates were slowing.
- Attendance: 92.5%.
- · EHE currently 321.
- Completion of an EHCP within 20-weeks 97%. Comparatively, the figure was 50% nationally.
- Inclusion within mainstream settings for children with an EHCP 39.2%.
- Children currently accessing AP 377.

During the discussion that followed, a Member referred to EHE and queried the qualifications needed to educate children at home. In response, the Panel was advised that parents were not required to have any formal qualifications, but they would be required to follow the national curriculum. There were various reasons why parents opted to home educate their children; unannounced visits were carried out to ensure that this was being undertaken appropriately.

A Member referred to the Youth Justice System and queried the age group that the service supported. In response, it was explained that this was primary age upwards, though predominantly concerned older children and teenagers. Officers regularly visited secondary schools to undertake different preventative activities with children.

In response to a query regarding EHCPs, Members heard that children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) may have required a support plan. If a range of support was needed, an assessment would be carried out: there was a 20-week statutory process in place for this. Information was available on the Local Offer pages of the Council's website, but additional training could be arranged for the Panel Members, if required. This would be added to the list of suggestions for the Panel's work programme, in preparation for consideration at the next meeting.

A Member referred to Government funding and queried the impact that this was having on Children's Services; it was suggested that regular financial updates be provided to the Panel going forward. In response, Members were informed that although funding had provided for various activities, which had had a positive impact on the lives of young people, this was insufficient and consequently there was currently a deficit. Financial information/updates could be provided, but the Panel would need to be clear about the type of data they wished to receive. This would be added to the list of suggestions for the Panel's work programme, in preparation for consideration at the next meeting.

A Member asked how many young people were currently enrolled on the SHiFT programme and how successful it had been for them. In response, it was explained that 27 young people were currently involved and the programme was having a positive impact on their lives.

A Member referred to the excluded children and the provision made available for them. In response, it was explained that there was a range of AP in Middlesbrough. Reference was made to the Multi-Academy Trust that encompassed three schools and had received a very good report from OFSTED. Other provision was also available; placement was based on the needs of the child. In response to a subsequent enquiry regarding academies, Members were informed that all eight of the secondary schools in Middlesbrough were academies, which were governed by their own processes. A small number of the primary schools in Middlesbrough were maintained by the Local Authority, but the majority were also academised. An Education Alliance Board was in place to drive forward improvements for children/families; pupil funding was provided to the individual schools and not the Local Authority.

In response to a query regarding the impact of the pandemic, Members were advised that some children continued to feel anxiety around attending school, particularly those of primary school age.

Regarding the service area's priorities, specifically the aim to reduce the number of children and young people accessing out of area specialist provision, a Member felt that it would be useful for the Panel to receive a separate report on that issue. This would be added to the list of suggestions for the Panel's work programme, in preparation for consideration at the next meeting.

A Member referred to the improving attendance project and queried whether this referred to improvements at both primary and secondary level. In response, it was confirmed that it did. Attendance was actively monitored, and work undertaken with schools to try and improve it.

In relation to suspensions and permanent exclusions, a Member asked whether this predominantly referred to primary or secondary schools, or both. In response, it was indicated that there had not been any permanent exclusions from any primary school – all were from secondary schools. To date, 88 pupils had been excluded this academic year – the figure was expected to rise to around 117 by the end of it. A Member queried whether a breakdown of these by school could be provided. In response, it was explained that although specific schools could not be named, statistics could be provided at a later date, if requested.

The Head of Safeguarding, Care Planning and Children with Disabilities explained that the following service areas sat within Children's Care: Early Help; the Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH); Assessment Service; Safeguarding and Care Planning; Children with Disabilities Service; Children in the authority's care/Pathways; Aspire/Harm Outside of the Home (HOTH); and Residential Services. Members were provided with a brief description of the work these services carried out.

Regarding priorities for the service, these were outlined as follows:

- Practice/performance improvement.
- Implementation of a practice model Signs of Safety (SOS).
- Increase of permanent workforce.
- Reduction of children in external residential placements.
- Early intervention with families to prevent need/Risk.
- Prevention of children entering care/returning children home where safe to do so.

Details of several projects currently being undertaken were provided to the Panel, as follows:

- Residential.
- Edge of Care.
- Reunification.
- Implementation of SOS.
- SHiFT (overseen by Education & Partnerships).
- Workforce strategy.

Challenges facing the service this year were outlined to Members, as follows:

- Consistency of practice/performance.
- · External residential costs.
- Implementation of the reform.
- Demand.
- · Recruitment/retention.
- Numbers of children subject to Child Protection Plans (CPPs)/in the authority's care.

Several Corporate Performance Measures were outlined to the Panel, as follows:

- Children currently in the authority's care 482.
- Children Looked After (CLA) ceased in May 2025 21.
- Health assessments completed in timescale 92%.
- Visits in timescales: Child Protection (CP) 93%; Children In Need (CIN) 80%; CLA 86%.
- Health assessments completed in timescales 92%.
- Dental checks completed in timescales 76%.

During the discussion that followed, a Member referred to Early Help and queried general performance. In response, the Panel was advised that the service was steady, though there was a desire to increase resources. There was a good structure to the teams and the rereferral rate was low.

Regarding recruitment and retention and increasing permanence in the workforce, a Member acknowledged that this was a national issue and queried the current rates in Middlesbrough. In response, the Panel was informed that the service currently consisted of around 72% permanent staff and 38% agency staff. There was a succession plan in place, but this would take time to come to fruition. A social work academy had been established to recruit and train Social Workers and there were plans to expand this further.

A discussion ensued in relation to CLA; the following points were raised:

- Once children were returned home, they would continue to be monitored until officers
 were happy that an application to revoke the respective Care Order could be made.
 Local Authority involvement would continue via allocation of a Social Worker, who
 would undertake both announced and unannounced visits; carry out assessments and
 formulate an evidence base.
- In terms of practice standards, it was explained to the Panel that some were better than others. Monitoring and development work was continually being undertaken to improve those standards that required it; it was important to achieve consistency in terms of good quality practice. This was an improvement journey and work continued.
- A Member referred to Elected Members and their role as Corporate Parents, and also spoke of their experience in applying to be a Foster Carer. The importance of both roles was discussed. It was indicated to the Panel that one project currently being undertaken was looking at re-modelling fostering and examining the role and impact of mentoring.

A Member referred to the emotional aspect of this area of work and queried the impact that this had on staff and sickness/absence levels. In response, the Panel was informed that staff sickness was not particularly high. It was felt that staff showed high resilience and were supported well by management teams. Reference was made to the varying methods that could be employed if staff felt overwhelmed, such as a reduction in their workload. Mention was also made of therapeutic support sessions that had recently been undertaken with some staff, which had also been well received.

A discussion ensued in relation to the different ways in which care was provided, i.e. through fostering, kinship and connected care, residential and parental care arrangements. Consideration was given as to how these arrangements differed, together with the legislation, processes and support involved.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance and contributions to the meeting. It was requested that Members remained mindful of the information provided in preparation for discussing the Panel's work programme at the next meeting.

AGREED that:

- 1) The suggestions made in respect of the scrutiny work programme would be added to the document in preparation for consideration at the Panel's next meeting on 15 July 2025.
- 2) The information, as presented, was noted.

25/28 PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES FOR 2025/2026

A proposed schedule of meeting dates for the Children's Scrutiny Panel for the 2025/2026 Municipal Year was submitted for Members' consideration.

AGREED that the proposed meeting dates for 2025/2026 be approved.

25/29 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - TUESDAY, 15 JULY 2025 AT 4.30 P.M.

The next meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Panel had been scheduled for Tuesday, 15 July 2025 at 4.30 p.m. in the Mandela Room, Town Hall.

NOTED

25/30 ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

None.



MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL



Report of:	Democratic Services
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Relevant Executive Member:	Not Applicable
Submitted to:	Children's Scrutiny Panel
Date:	15 July 2025
Title:	Setting the Work Programme 2025/2026 for the Children's
	Scrutiny Panel
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	A healthy place
Key decision:	Not applicable
Why:	Not applicable
Subject to call in?	Not applicable
Why:	Not applicable

Proposed decision(s)

That the Children's Scrutiny Panel consider and agree its work programme for the 2025/2026 Municipal Year. Once agreed, the work programme will be submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Board, for approval.

Executive summary

The Children's Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider its work programme for the 2025/2026 Municipal Year.

The primary function of a Scrutiny Panel is to influence the policies and decisions of the Council and other organisations involved in delivering public services. It does this by gathering evidence on issues that affect local residents and making informed recommendations based on its findings.

Work programmes provide structure to the activity of the Scrutiny Panel and allow for the effective planning and preparation of work. The Panel is asked to select two scrutiny

investigation topics and note the standard agenda items for updates throughout the Municipal Year.

The Scrutiny Panel is asked to ensure that topics agreed for inclusion:

- Affect a group of people living within the Middlesbrough area.
- Relate to a service, event, or issue in which the Council has an influence.
- Are not issues which the Overview and Scrutiny Board or Scrutiny Panels have considered during the last 12 months.
- Do not relate to an individual service complaint.
- Do not replicate matters dealt with by another Council Committee unless the issue deals with procedure.

1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions.

- 1.1 Managing an effective work programme is essential to the success of Scrutiny Panels, as it assists with planning and managing the workload, focussing on the Council's ambitions and aims to assist with maximising impact on the Council's performance and outcomes for residents.
- 1.2 Scrutiny ensures that the decisions taken by the Council and its partners are appropriate. It creates an open and transparent way for Members to shape, question, evaluate and challenge policies, decisions and performance.
- 1.3 Scrutiny investigations are usually carried out over the course of several meetings, which consider information from relevant sources and examine current policies and practices. At the end of the exercise, a report is prepared which summarises the Scrutiny Panel's findings and puts forward recommendations.
- 1.4The purpose of this report is to agree a work programme for the Children's Scrutiny Panel, ensuring scrutiny investigation topics and updates support the delivery of the ambitions of the Middlesbrough Council Plan 2024-27:

Our ambitions	Aims	
A successful and ambitious town	Aims within this ambition are to:	
	 Attract and grow businesses to increase employment opportunities. Improve attainment in education and skills. Ensure housing provision meets local demand. 	
A healthy Place	Aims within this ambition are to:	
	 Improve life chances of our residents by responding to health inequalities. Protect and improve our environment. Promote inclusivity for all. Reduce poverty. 	

Safe and resilient communities	- Support adults to be independent for longer Improve transport and digital connectivity Promote new ideas and community initiatives Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
Delivering best value	- Ensure robust and effective corporate governance Set a balanced revenue budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan to restore financial resilience and sustainability.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Children's Scrutiny Panel agrees a work programme for approval by Overview and Scrutiny Board by:
 - 1. Noting the updates / presentations that will be scheduled throughout the Municipal Year.
 - 2. Selecting two scrutiny investigation topics, taking into consideration the suggestions from stakeholders and additional suggestions from Panel Members.

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

3.1 Under the terms of the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities have a responsibility of community leadership and a power to secure the effective promotion of community well-being. Therefore, in addition to the Scrutiny Panel's generally recognised powers (of holding the Executive to account, reviewing service provision, developing policy, considering budget plans and performance and financial monitoring), Panels also have the power to consider any matters which are not the responsibility of the Council, but which affect the local authority or the inhabitants of its area. For example, nationally, local authorities have undertaken scrutiny work on issues such as post-office closures, rural bus services, policing matters and flood defence schemes.

4. Background and relevant information

- 4.1 At the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 19 March 2025, a new structure for scrutiny arrangements in Middlesbrough was agreed. As a consequence, Middlesbrough Council now operates three Scrutiny Panels for 2025/2026 in addition to its Overview and Scrutiny Board:
 - Adult Social Care and Health Scrutiny Panel.
 - Children's Scrutiny Panel.
 - Place Scrutiny Panel.

4.2 For Members' information, the topics and updates considered by the People Scrutiny Panel in 2024/2025, which are relevant to the Children's Services remit, were as follows:

Scrutiny Investigation Topics

Co	mpleted		Ongoing	Not Started
Children Missing from Education (CME)		from	Homelessness	N/A

Updates / Presentations

South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report 2023-24	
Tees Suicide Prevention - Strategic Plan 2024-2029	

- 4.3 At the start of every Municipal Year, Scrutiny Panels discuss the topics that they would like to review during the coming year. The Panel is asked to select topics for investigation and to note the updates that will be scheduled as part of the work programme.
- 4.4 As part of the process for establishing the Panel's work programme, Democratic Services gather information and views from a number of sources. Following an annual consultation exercise which ran between 3 April 2025 and 9 May 2025, several topics were suggested by Councillors, residents, officers, and other stakeholders, which are listed in Appendix 1. Members are advised that the list is not exhaustive and that additional topics can be added and considered at the Scrutiny Panel meeting.
- 4.5 When considering topics for the work programme, Members need to consider the following to prioritise issues where scrutiny can make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development:
 - Does the issue affect a majority of the population of Middlesbrough or specific area?
 - Is the issue strategic and significant?
 - Will the scrutiny activity add value to the Council's overall performance?
 - Is it likely to lead to effective outcomes?
 - Will it be duplicating some other work?
 - Is it an issue of concern to partners and others?
 - Is it an issue of community concern?
 - Are there adequate resources to do the activity well?
 - Is the scrutiny activity timely?
- 4.6 In addition to the selected scrutiny investigation topics, Panel Members are asked to note the following update items which will be presented during the Municipal Year:

	Update
1	South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership - Annual Report
2	Performance data

- 4.7 In addition to these updates, it was suggested at the 24 June 2025 Panel meeting that Children's Services financial updates also be received during the year. A Councillor also suggested that further information/an update in relation to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the local offer also be provided.
- 5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate
 Ward Members were invited to submit topic suggestions as part of the consultation.
- 6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended No other alternatives are put forward as part of the report.

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	Details of Financial impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.
Legal	Details of Legal impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.
Risk	Details of Risk impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	Details of Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.
Reducing Poverty	Details of Reducing Poverty impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.
Climate Change / Environmental	Details of Climate Change / Environmental impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	Details of Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.
Data Protection	Details of Data Protection impact (if any) will be dependent on recommendations made as part of a chosen review.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
Approved	Democratic Services Officer	21 July 2025
recommendations to be		
submitted to Overview and		
Scrutiny Board		

Appendices

1	Suggested Scrutiny Topics for 2025/26

Background papers

None.

Contact: Joanne Dixon / Chris Lunn

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Appendix 1 – Suggested Scrutiny Topics for 2025/2026

Ref	Suggested Scrutiny Investigation Topic	Source	Council Plan 2024-2027, Ambition and Aim
1	Use of Trauma Informed Response in Schools (No further details provided).	Councillor	A successful and ambitious town - Improve attainment in education and skills. A healthy Place - - Improve life chances of our residents by responding to health inequalities Promote inclusivity for all.
2	Voice of Children and Young People "How do we include the voice of children and young people across directorates?"	Councillor	A successful and ambitious town - Improve attainment in education and skills. A healthy Place - - Improve life chances of our residents by responding to health inequalities Promote inclusivity for all.
3	"Support for Young Parents should be a topic because there isn't any at all. Without this there's an increase risk of DV, suicide, crimes, less kids going into the system and many more. I am making a PowerPoint regarding this which includes statistics and stories and many more which I'd be happy to present." (N.B no details of role or organisation provided).	Public	A successful and ambitious town - Improve attainment in education and skills. A healthy Place - Promote inclusivity for all. Safe and resilient communities - Promote new ideas and community initiatives Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

4	Child Exploitation "I would like to put the topic of child exploitation of children in the area particularly by gangs of men. Is there any evidence to suggest that this as being taken place in the Middlesbrough area?"	Public	Safe and resilient communities - Promote new ideas and community initiatives Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
5	Children and Child Exploitation "Are we taking Harm Outside The Home seriously?"	Councillor	Safe and resilient communities - Promote new ideas and community initiatives Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.
6	"Fostering and how we increase and retain foster carers. In particular, how we grow foster carers across different demographics. With pressures on children's social care and its budgets, its important we recruit and retain our foster parent cohort."	Councillor	A healthy Place - Improve life chances of our residents by responding to health inequalities Promote inclusivity for all. Delivering best value - Set a balanced revenue budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan to restore financial resilience and sustainability.
7	Vulnerable Children and Young People "How are we working together across Children's Services to support CYP who are vulnerable?"	Officer	A successful and ambitious town - Improve attainment in education and skills. A healthy Place - Promote inclusivity for all Reduce poverty. Safe and resilient communities - Promote new ideas and community initiatives Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.

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8	Children and Young People who do not wish to Engage in Education 1. YP NEET 2. High Needs Funding and the significant pressures locally and nationally	Officer	A successful and ambitious town - Improve attainment in education and skills. A healthy Place - Promote inclusivity for all. Reduce poverty.
9	Transition to Adult Services "Determining if the processes and support in place for preparing for adulthood (transitions) assists families and carers and supports the Council priorities".	Officer	A healthy Place - Promote inclusivity for all.
10	Out of Area Specialist Provision To look at the numbers of children and young people accessing specialist provision outside of the area; how services are accessed and the type of support provided.	Councillor	A healthy Place - Promote inclusivity for all.

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