

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

Date: Tuesday 21st September, 2021
Time: 4.00 pm
Venue: Virtual

Please note this is a virtual meeting.

**The meeting will be livestreamed via
the Council's YouTube channel at
[Middlesbrough Council - YouTube](#)**

AGENDA

1. Appointment of Chair Pro-Tem

To seek nominations and appoint a Chair 'Pro-Tem' for this meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest

4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Children & Young People's Social Care & Services Scrutiny Panel held on 27 July 2021 3 - 10

5. Introduction to New Scrutiny Topic - Locality Working (from a Children's Services Perspective) 11 - 26

The Executive Director of Children's Services will provide an introduction to the Panel's new Scrutiny Topic – Locality Working (from a Children's Services perspective).

The Panel will be asked to consider how it wishes to proceed with the review.

6. Update - 12 month Review Report of the Children's Commissioner into Children's Services 27 - 40

The Executive Director of Children's Services will provide the Scrutiny Panel with an update in relation to the Commissioner's 12-month review report into Children's

Services.

7. Covid Update - Children's Services

The Executive Director of Children's Services will provide an update in relation to Covid recovery in Children's Services, as and when appropriate.

8. Overview and Scrutiny Board Update

An update on business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meetings held on 28 July and 8 September 2021 will be provided.

9. Date and Time of Next Meeting - 11 October 2021 at 4.00pm

10. 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 13 September 2021

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors: D Davison, T Higgins, T Mawston, M Nugent, Z Uddin, M Storey, J Walker and G Wilson (+ 1 vacancy).

Assistance in accessing information

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

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 27 July 2021.

PRESENT: Councillor Garvey (Chair), Councillor Dodds (Vice Chair); Councillors: Higgins, Jones, Uddin and Wilson.

OFFICERS: S Bonner, S Butcher and J Dixon.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Nugent, M Storey and J Walker.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 19 April 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

OVERVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

S Butcher, Executive Director of Children's Services, was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with an overview of the main services within its remit and to outline the key priorities, issues and challenges for the year ahead.

The Executive Director explained that her post was a statutory role that all local authorities were required to have. All local authorities were also required to have a Lead Member for Children's Services and this role was currently being fulfilled by the Mayor in Middlesbrough.

The Executive Director was responsible for children in Middlesbrough, both in terms of social care and education, heading up a single Children's Services and emphasised the importance of all parts of the directorate working together as a single service to provide the best outcomes for Middlesbrough's children.

Children's Care and Education and Partnerships sat within the Children's Services directorate.

The following Services sat within Children's Care, headed by the Director of Children's Care:-

- Early Help – Preventative work undertaken with children and families. A shift towards more work being done at Early Help level had been identified as part of the ongoing improvement journey which was a positive sign as it meant more children and families were being helped at an earlier stage before issues increased to crisis point and statutory interventions were required. Caseloads within Early Help were currently quite high so positioning of resources needed to be monitored. An Early Help Strategy was in place.
- Multi Agency Children's Hub (MACH) – First point of contact for all agencies where there was a concern about a child or young person. All contacts were filtered and measured against the threshold of need to determine where the referral should be directed. Some would be referred to Early Help and those considered to require social care intervention would be referred to the Assessment Service.
- Assessment Service – The function of this Service was to assess the situation with the family by carrying out a Single Assessment within 45 days from the point of referral. The assessment would determine whether any further action was needed, whether the case could be stepped

down to Early Help or whether the family required more significant help. Where more significant help was needed, the family could be directed through the following routes:-

- Child in Need – Middlesbrough currently had two managed Innovate Teams who were taking on a significant amount of Children in Need work. The target timescale for completing work with Children in Need was 12 weeks.
- Safeguarding and Care Planning – Where a case was considered to be more serious or significant risks were identified within the family, it would be moved to this Service. This Service worked with children on Child Protection plans and it was highlighted that the numbers of children on Child Protection plans had started to reduce slightly, with a shift towards more Early Help provision. Safeguarding and Care Planning was also the area with legal expertise and determined whether applications for Court Orders, including Care Orders, should be made. This was a very skilled area of work requiring Social Workers to go into the Court arena, being well-prepared.
- Children Looked After – Consisted of three teams. The numbers of children looked after had significantly reduced – from 702 in August 2020 to 531 in July 2021.
- Care Leavers (Pathways) – From the age of 18 children were no longer considered 'looked after' but were supported through the Care Leavers Team. The Team's practitioners ensured that young people were supported into education, employment and training. A CAMHS worker was situated within the team and was making a difference to young people's lives. Many young people needed support between the ages of 18 – 25 which was provided by this team.
- Independent Reviewing Officers – This was a Team of Officers who reviewed all children who were looked after children on a regular basis – generally every six months. This provided an assurance mechanism to ensure children were happy and thriving in their placement.
- Adoption – Adoption work was mainly undertaken with Adoption Tees Valley – the Regional Adoption Agency. Children's Services worked with the children who were being recommended for adoption, whilst ATV was responsible for assessing adopters. Children's Services and ATV matched the children with suitable adopters together and the Executive Director was also the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) who made the final decision as to whether a child should be placed for adoption and then as to whether the match was suitable to proceed, following the recommendations made by the Adoption Panel.
- Children With Disabilities Team and Short Break Service
- Residential Children's Homes – Middlesbrough was fortunate to still have internal residential provision (as not all local authorities did). More recently, a nine-bed supported lodgings accommodation was opened at Daniel Court for care leavers prior to moving to independent living.
- Strategic Services - Led by the Head of Strategic Services, this Team was responsible for the planning, monitoring and preparation of key information for various bodies such as the Children's Improvement Board and inspections.

The following Services sat within Education and Partnerships, led by the Director of Education and Partnerships:-

- Provision of support to schools in Middlesbrough, including 11 maintained primary schools (all other primary schools in Middlesbrough and all of its secondary schools were academies).
- Virtual School – ensuring that the best interests of children looked after were upheld in school.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) – Support for children with SEND, including maintenance of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP). This service worked closely with

Children's Social Care and the Virtual School. Support was also provided to vulnerable children, for example, those who had been excluded from school or children who were not achieving as expected.

- Community Learning – further education programmes and support.
- Youth Offending Service – Operating across the south tees area.

The Executive Director highlighted that relationships between schools and Children's Services had improved immensely during the pandemic which was promising.

The Panel heard that the following were priorities for 2021/22 within Children's Services:-

- Covid Recovery – continuing to work through Covid to improve services.
- Recruitment and Retention of Social Workers – Children's Services currently had a high proportion of agency staff and it was recognised that a stable workforce was key to sustaining improvement. One of the main strands of the Workforce Development Strategy was recruitment and retention, looking at how to make Middlesbrough's Children's Services an employer of choice.
- Use of finance – A good deal of work had been done on demand forecasting – identifying what was needed to provide services. Once a stable status was achieved in terms of workforce and a move towards more preventative work being undertaken, budgets would need to be brought in-line.
- Variability of Practice – A key theme throughout Ofsted visits and inspections was variability of practice. It was acknowledged that Children's Services had good practice in some areas but this needed to be levelled up across the service and be consistently good.
- Partnership Working – Essential within the directorate, corporately and with external partners such as Health, Police, Schools, other Local Authorities.
- Vulnerable Children – To look at young people who were missing and/or at risk of criminal exploitation. The Futures for Families Hub worked with families on the edge of care and a Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy had been produced, exploring how to work with and best support those vulnerable young people who were at a critical point in their lives.
- Overarching all of the above was the Improvement Plan. The plan was refreshed each time there was a visit/inspection by Ofsted or the Children's Commissioner.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- The Executive Director was asked to provide clarification around the term 'maintained primary schools'. The Panel was informed that a maintained school was one that was still run by the local authority. Many schools had now moved out to become academies and operated independently, with some schools belonging to multi-academy trusts made up of several schools. Whilst the local authority had some influence on academies, they operated under their own rules.
- It was queried how many children the Youth Offending Service worked with. The Executive Director advised that it was a South Tees Service operated in partnership with Redcar and Cleveland and worked well. The Executive Director did not have the figures to hand but would provide the Middlesbrough figures to the Panel in due course.
- Reference was made to the occupation of Daniel Court and it was confirmed that there was currently eight young people residing there with a ninth person due to move in. It was also confirmed that the accommodation was supported.

- It was queried how many children were receiving short break support. Again the Executive Director advised that she would provide the Panel with those figures in due course.

The Panel wished to place on record their thanks to all staff working within Children's Services for their hard work and continued efforts in supporting the improvement journey. The Executive Director advised that she would convey this to staff at her next staff briefing meeting.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

SETTING THE PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

The Democratic Services Officer submitted a report inviting the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel to consider its work programme for 2021/22.

A list of potential topics, which were anticipated to be of particular interest to the Scrutiny Panel, and the suggestions received in respect of the Scrutiny Panel's remit were contained in the report.

Members were advised that the topical issues and suggestions outlined in the report were merely proposals and the content of the work programme was entirely a decision for the Panel to make.

The Panel was encouraged to select two topics where scrutiny could make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development.

The Panel was reminded that it could also identify shorter 'one-off' topics and receive any relevant updates throughout the year as it considered necessary.

Paragraph 11 of the report set out the key considerations when agreeing to include a specific topic on the work programme. The Panel's chosen topics for inclusion on its Work Programme would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 28 July 2021 for approval.

The Panel held a discussion in relation to the suggested topics within the report and selected the following topics for the inclusion in the Panel's Work Programme:-

Full Review topics:-

1. Locality Working (in the context of Children's Services).
2. PACE bed provision.

Update on previous review

1. Early Help - To receive an update on the latest position following the Panel's review of Early Help in 2019.

Task and Finish

1. Small task and finish groups to undertake visits to various service areas within Children's Services, on a regular basis and to feedback information to the Scrutiny Panel.

Regular Updates

1. Ofsted/Children's Commissioner – continue to receive regular updates regarding visits, inspections and findings of Ofsted and the Children's Commission and progress on the Children's Services improvement journey.
2. Covid Recovery – continue to receive updates as and when appropriate in relation to Covid recovery in Children's Services.

AGREED that the topics, as listed above, be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Board for approval and inclusion in the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel's work programme for 2021/2022.

UPDATE – OFSTED FOCUSED VISIT TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Executive Director provided the Panel with a presentation in relation to the Ofsted Focused Visit to Children's Services that took place on 26 and 27 May 2021. A copy of the Ofsted letter, dated 15 July 2021, detailing its full findings from the visit, had been circulated with the agenda prior to the meeting, for information.

To provide context to the focused visit, Ofsted's overall aim was "How has England's social care system delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the pandemic?" For Middlesbrough, this meant how this was delivered whilst continuing to improve.

The focused visit used the same methodology as for the November/December 2019 inspection, looking across the whole of Children's Services. The visit was undertaken by four Social Care Inspectors and one Education Inspector, who were 'on site' for two days, however, prior to being on site, Children's Services supplied requested documentation and performance information and key personnel were also interviewed.

In relation to Covid, the strategic findings were as follows:-

- Leaders invoked their major incident plan swiftly and effectively (corporately).
- A framework for identifying and monitoring vulnerably children in their communities was established.
- Opportunities for different ways of working were brought about across the Council as well as revitalising partnerships.
- Weekly communications meetings with strategic partners were held to establish multi agency pathways – for example Domestic Abuse pathway (this had been nationally evaluated), and school networks.
- Successful progress on much of the Improvement Programme but some elements inevitably effected by Covid.

The findings in relation to Covid from a practice perspective were:-

- Some Social Workers were creative and persistent in their engagement with children despite restrictions imposed by lockdown.
- Staff had benefitted from Covid-safe working practices and technology to support engagement with children and families.
- Despite the challenges of last year, staff reported feeling supported and liked working for Middlesbrough and understood the vision for change.
- The numbers of Electively Home Educated (EHE) children increased during the pandemic, however, Children's Services had effective systems in place to monitor electively home educated (EHE) children.

In terms of Leadership, Ofsted found that Leaders were positively engaged in a comprehensive programme of improvement and introduced:-

- Audit to Excellence Framework – a comprehensive plan measuring quality of practice through auditing.
- 'Non-negotiables' Practice Standards – expectations of how Social Workers should work using core standards.

Ofsted also found that Children's Services had:-

- Appropriately prioritised recruitment and the development of the Workforce Strategy.

- Recognised the variability in practice which was not meeting their own expectations regarding quality of practice.
- Did not yet have a sufficient understanding of children who were missing education. (This applied to a small cohort of children)

The Panel was informed that the main overall findings were:-

- Demand for Children's Social Care Services had increased over the last year.
- The MACH had continued to improve.
- Caseloads were reducing but remained too high for some Social Workers.
- Children were seen regularly and direct work was making a demonstrable difference to their lives.
- Workers were persistent and built good relationships with children so that interventions were more effective.
- Personal Advisers maintained regular contact with care leavers.
- There was effective partnership work to identify exploitation risks and trends.
- Social Workers were increasingly working with children who had multiple and complex needs. This was as a result of a legacy of poor practice.

Ofsted also identified the following areas for improvement:-

- Quality of assessments and plans was variable and management oversight and supervision was not suitably evaluative. (Oversight was currently more directive and needed to develop to include more evaluation of the work being undertaken).
- Children came into care when they needed to but there was some delay in finding the right homes for them.
- Lack of suitable foster placements and children's homes. (This was both internal and external and it was highlighted that Middlesbrough was trying to develop internal provision).
- Too many care leavers were not in education, employment or training.
- Children's identities and diverse needs were not given sufficient consideration. (This was not only in relation to ethnicity and culture, but about working with the whole child, for example, did the child have a particular health need, or mental health need).
- Some children experienced too many changes of Social Worker. Children told inspectors they would like to have Social Workers that stayed with them for a long time.

In relation to education matters, there was a significant focus on children missing education. Ofsted found that there were effective systems in place to monitor electively home educated (EHE) children. However, Children's Services had insufficient knowledge of the circumstances of vulnerable children who were missing education so that their needs were not being met. This included a small cohort of children looked after who were on a reduced timetable or who had experienced no education for too long; some children with special education needs did not receive a school placed within the 20 day timescale; and, a very small number of the aforementioned children attended unregistered provision on a part time basis as their sole provision.

Finally, Ofsted had made two new recommendations, as follows:-

- Management oversight and actions to ensure that vulnerable children and children in care, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), received their full educational entitlement.
- The understanding of identity and the diverse needs of children and their families to inform assessment, planning and support.

Overall, it was a positive outcome showing that Children's Services 'knew themselves' and what needed to be done.

In terms of the next steps, the Children's Commissioner was in the process of finalising his 12-month review report to the Minister, having been with Children's Services during the week commencing 12 July 2021. This report would be brought to the Panel once it was available. It was also expected that a further Ofsted Monitoring Visit would take place towards the end of the year/start of next year.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to the finding that 'there was a lack of suitable foster placements' and it was queried what was being done to try and rectify this. The Executive Director advised that recruitment of foster carers was a continuous process but it was acknowledged that there had been a net loss of foster carers over the last year partly due to different ways of working being introduced which had led to some carers, regrettably, resigning. In addition, there was also a shortage of external independent (IFA) foster placements and residential placements. Whilst the number of children looked after had reduced in Middlesbrough, other local authorities were seeing a rise in numbers, making external placements more difficult to source. Children's Services had also had some success in bringing children from external provision into internal provision and continued to try and build its own internal residential provision, including the opening of Daniel Court and the refurbishment of an existing residential home which would soon be available again for placements. It was highlighted that some children looked after had very complex and specific needs which often meant they required specialist placements which were more expensive.
- Reference was made to the Ofsted findings that 'children are seen regularly and direct work is making a demonstrable difference to their lives' and 'the quality of assessments and plans is variable', and it was queried how the two correlated and whether it was a 'paperwork' issue. The Executive Director explained that particularly in the longer term teams, Social Workers built up relationships with children and were often better at understanding children than they were at writing it down. Assessments and plans needed to be more reflective. Other reasons for the variability of assessments and plans could include caseloads, the numbers of newly qualified social workers, turnover, handover of work and training opportunities and standards needed to be implemented. This was one of the reasons for continual audit to assess improvements in practice.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

UPDATE - COVID RECOVERY - CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Executive Director of Children's Services, provided the Panel with a verbal update in relation to Covid recovery in Children's Services.

The Panel was advised that the in the week commencing 17 July 2021, in Middlesbrough, there were 1,396 Covid cases per 100,000 population, this had reduced to 790 per 100,000 as of week commencing 26 July 2021, however the numbers were still high.

Whilst schools had encountered a difficult time with an increase in positive cases leading up to the summer holiday, a programme of holiday enrichment activities was taking place in a number of secondary schools.

It was highlighted that there had been an increase in instances of covid amongst children and young people. Between March and July 2021 the following numbers had been confirmed:-

- Age 5-9 – 545 cases
- Age 10-14 – 947 cases

- Age 15-19 – 1,512 cases
- Age 20-24 – 2,093 (this was the highest figure across all age groups from 0-90)

In relation to Covid in schools, it was reported that in September 2020, 45 staff had tested positive across Middlesbrough schools and this increased to 59 in July 2021. The number of school pupils that tested positive was 74 in September 2020, increasing to 310 by July 2021.

The numbers of school staff isolating in September 2020 was 25, rising to 144 by July 2021 and the number of pupils self-isolating was 290 in September increasing to 1,750 in July 2021.

Social Workers were still meeting children and families face to face whilst ensuring covid safety measures were followed.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

PROPOSED SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES FOR THE 2021/22 MUNICIPAL YEAR

A proposed schedule of meeting dates for Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel for the 2021/22 Municipal Year was submitted for the Panel's consideration.

AGREED that the proposed meeting schedule for 2021/22 be approved with the exception of the proposed date of 18 April 2022 being moved to Tuesday, 26 April 2022 at 4.00pm.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES SCURTINY PANEL 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

Background and Business Case

Strategic Context

A report outlining a proposal to implement Locality Working was approved at Executive on 8th October 2019. Locality working involves a system change to the current operational delivery model across Council services. It seeks to achieve joined-up systems and reconfigure relationships between statutory organisations, partners and the community. It will involve developing collaborative approaches to address the underlying causes of community problems and build capacity within the community in order for residents to take charge of their own future, to have a strong voice and to build social capital and connections within the community. It was agreed that Locality Working will commence with two pilots in North Ormesby and Newport.

Background

Evidence shows that having multi-agency teams working together from one location brings benefits. It reduces the need for referrals when a quick conversation with a member of the team can identify the most appropriate course of action. Through better information sharing it also provides an opportunity to identify support needs early and proactively intervene to prevent crisis.

In addition to this Locality Working also improves access for the local community as they will have a single point of referral via the team. Evidence suggests that people in need of advice or help don't always need just one service and often find themselves needing to access support from multiple services. Residents and key partners can sometimes find it difficult to navigate the current system and don't always know where to go for the most appropriate support. Through this pilot we have an opportunity to make every contact count and train the team to focus on delivering services based on the people who receive them and the communities in which they live, and not on the organisation or the departments that may deliver in different ways.

Building 'quick wins' into this project will be an important tool to raise morale and spread awareness within the neighbourhood, utilising existing links, assets and organisations to build trust. We will also build in mechanisms to regularly celebrate successes, reflect and share learning, and communicating these with the wider community.

Business case for pilot in Newport

The Newport Ward is the 5th most deprived ward in Middlesbrough moving from the 123rd most deprived ward nationally in 2007 to the 38th most deprived ward in 2015. Newport had the 3rd highest number of recorded Racially Motivated crimes with only Central and North Ormesby having more. With all three wards having more than double the Middlesbrough average per 1,000 population.

In addition, whilst these three wards had all seen reductions in recorded antisocial behaviour between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2019 they still had the highest level per 1,000 population in 2018/19 meaning that the gap between the wards with the highest level of antisocial behaviour and the lowest is still a challenge.

Newport Ward also had the 2nd highest rate of female victims of violent crime per 1,000 population in 2018/19 with only North Ormesby having more. When looking at alcohol related hospital admissions to James Cook University Hospital, Newport Ward had the 3rd highest number of admissions in 2018/19 and in the previous year it was 2nd highest. When looking at alcohol and substance related ambulance pick-up data, Newport Ward had the 3rd highest level of recorded pick-ups with only North Ormesby and Central having higher levels.

When looking at incidents reported to Middlesbrough Council in 2019, Newport Ward had the highest number of low level antisocial behaviour and environmental crimes and 2nd highest level of fly-tipping.

Newport and 'Gresham' were therefore identified as a priority area for Middlesbrough Council, Thirteen Housing and for other key partners such as Cleveland Police, Cleveland Fire, Teesside University, and North Star Housing. All partners have commitment to work together to tackle the issues within the neighbourhood.

A number of Council initiatives currently happening in Newport and surrounding areas, will help bring capacity and immediate momentum to Locality Working. For example Newport has recently seen the introduction of Selective Landlord Licensing, it is within the Public Space Protection Order that covers the TS1 area and it sits within the boundary for a new Town Centre Enforcement Team that includes additional wardens, 2x dedicated police officers and a dedicated Neighbourhood Safety Officer. All of this activity will complement the Locality Working Pilot in this Ward.

Benefits:

The specific objectives and benefits of the pilots for the respective areas will be identified via stakeholder engagement with the respective communities and teams within the Council, Police, Fire Brigade, Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, South Tees NHS Foundation Trust, South Tees CCG, Voluntary Community Sector and private housing providers.

The high level project objectives are as follows:

- Healthier population
- People feel safe
- Increase satisfaction in environmental standards
- Improve perception of community cohesion
- Improve physical appearance of neighbourhood
- Improve customer experience (Council and partners)
- Build Community Capacity
- Improve economic outcomes
- Better outcomes for children

Table 2 – Qualitative Benefits

Benefit	Description
Improved public perception within the 2 localities	Improved perception of: Crime, ASB, ability to influence decision making, community cohesion, ability of LA and partners to tackle local issues
Improved outcomes for Children and families	Reduction in the number of LAC. Reduction in the number of children subject to sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation Increased educational attainment
Improved physical environment	Cleaner environmental standards engaging with the community to share responsibility. Reduction in the number of people raising issues that have been reported but not dealt with
Stronger communities	Communities that engage and take shared ownership of local issues.
Improve user experience	A single point of contact within the community for the public and professionals will remove time spent navigating services improving user experience.
Right service first time.	As the pilot areas will provide a single source for coordinating referrals and signposting information.

Having a multifaceted team will encourage the sharing of knowledge and skills and result in an improved customer experience	The pilots will bring together staff from multiple areas across the Council and partners agencies, meaning more knowledge and information will be available to inform decision making on referrals which will lead to efficiency gains.
Utilise all services	By having access to all services available including voluntary sector, the load will be spread across a wider range of providers easing pressures particularly on social care.
Support for integrated working	The pilot will put into practice the key principles of integrated working including relationship building, improved communications, information sharing, pooled budgets, joint planning and management of resources. These will provide a governance framework and working practices that can be re-used by future integrated working initiatives

The approach will include the co-location of staff from across different departments including Community Safety, Area Care, Education, Asylum Support, Libraries and Hubs, Adult and Children Social Care, including Mental Health Support, Early Help and Youth Offending within the communities they serve. Where appropriate it will also include partners such as Housing providers, Police, Fire Service and commissioned services such as drug and alcohol support, homelessness support and other specialist support services. The approach will be to work in the best interests of the people and place and not the departments or organisations that provide services. The proposed, agreed staffing levels for Newport detailed in Exec report February 2020 are;

- Environment: 5x Staff, 5 days per week (Existing)
- Community Safety/SLL: 10.5x Staff (Existing)
- Education EMAT team: 6 x Staff 5 days per week (Existing)
- Adult Social Care: 1x Staff equivalent 5 days per week (New)
- Cleveland Police: 10x Staff, 4x hot desks, 7 days per week (New)
- Public Protection: 2x Staff, 5 days per week (New)
- Revenue and Benefits team: 2x Staff hot desks 2 days per week (New)
- Early Help team: 2x Staff 5 days per week (New)
- Public Health team to include space for commissioned services: 2x Staff 2 days per week (New)
- Thirteen Housing (Neighbourhood Manager) 1x Staff, 5 days per week (New)
- Children Social Care 2 x Social Workers – 1 from assessment service and 1 from safeguarding service. As cases transition they will be allocated work from the Newport Ward and spend increasing amount of time in the Hub (New)

Total number of dedicated staff (some will work shifts i.e. Police) = **43**

Priorities and Objectives for Newport:

We have gathered data from a variety of sources; directly from the community and the demand on Council services:

Community feedback:

- Stronger Communities Middlesbrough conversations (2018/19)
- Public Space Protection Order Consultation (2019)
- Cleveland Police Crime survey (2018)
- Selective Landlord Licensing Consultation (2018/19)
- TS1 Meeting (September 2019)

Priority issues/trends within the community:

- Anti-social behaviour
- Environmental issues
- Lighting
- Community communication and involvement
- Housing
- Listening to the community and responding to issues

What the community want to see:

- More patrols / visible presence
- More CCTV
- Improved lighting
- Improved housing (empty properties and housing conditions)
- Improved environment (Dog fouling / rubbish / litter / alleyways / fly tipping)
- Better communication and support for residents: Improved communication, increased activity for all. Support for those who want to be more involved in their community.

Project Plan.

No.	Milestone Description:	Start Date (Baseline):	End Date (Achieved):	Responsible:
MS1	Take outline proposals and proposed governance arrangements to CMT for approval	14/11/2019	14/11/2019	Marion Walker
MS2	Agree financial arrangements and management arrangements for Neighbourhood Managers (NHM)	14/11/2019	29/11/2019	Marion Walker
MS3	Marion to meet with Kay Glew at Thirteen to discuss arrangements relating to the NHM for North Ormesby and agree for Newport.	20/11/2019	20/11/2019	Marion Walker
MS4	Geoff and Marion to discuss proposed management arrangements for NHMs with the project sponsor (CEX) and ask him to confirm arrangements with CEX of Thirteen.	25/11/2019	25/11/2019	Marion Walker
MS5	Marion to contact North Star and discuss their contribution to the Newport NHM.	25/11/2019	29/11/2019	Marion Walker
MS6	MW to email LMT and confirm attendees at DIG.	18/11/2019	21/11/2019	Marion Walker

MS7	MW to send out invites for first meeting of Design Implementation Group (DIG) x2.	22/11/2019	25/11/2019	Marion Walker
MS8	Meeting - Martin Harvey, Louise Kelly, Lyndsey Coe, Adam Parkinson, Sheila Bearcroft, Marion, Alexis	28/11/2019	12/12/2019	Marion Walker
MS9	Demand modelling	November	02/02/2020	DIG
MS10	Resource allocation	December	02/02/2020	DIG
MS11	Building (option appraisal)	December	12/06/2020	Marion Walker
MS12	Access to Information	December	29/05/2020	DIG
MS13	Link to / and Involvement of Commissioned Services	December	31/07/2020	DIG
MS14	Community Asset Mapping. Identify who/how key stakeholders need to be involved i.e. Schools, GP's, Pharmacy, Faith Groups, Community Groups, Businesses...	December	31/07/2020	Marion Walker/Martin Harvey/Adam Parkinson
MS15	Referral Pathways	January	31/07/2020	DIG
MS16	Phase 1 – Enforcement and Environment in Newport a: late January 2020	January	31/07/2020	Marion Walker/Andy Mace
MS17	Phase 2 – Individual and Family Support in pilot area relative to the needs of the neighbourhood i.e. Asylum Cohesion and early intervention family support will be a key focus in Newport): April 2020	April	05/09/2020	DIG

Business case for pilot in North Ormesby

Life expectancy is 13.3 years lower for men and 11.2 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Middlesbrough than in the least deprived areas. Public Health profiles show that Middlesbrough has high levels of Suicide as a significant cause of death in young adults. It is also seen as an indicator of underlying rates of mental ill-health. Across Middlesbrough in Year 6, 23% of children are classified as obese, in North Ormesby 34.8% of reception children are classed as overweight or obese, compared to the England average of 22.2%. Levels of teenage pregnancy, GCSE attainment, breastfeeding and smoking in pregnancy are also worse than the England average. Across Middlesbrough the rate for self-harm hospital admissions is worse than the average for England. This represents 486 admissions per year in Middlesbrough. The North Ormesby Ward is the most deprived ward in Middlesbrough and the 2nd most deprived ward in England and is therefore disproportionately impacted when reviewing these statistics.

North Ormesby had the 2nd highest number of recorded Racially Motivated crimes with only Central ward having more. Central Ward includes the Town Centre which results in a high level of these crimes.

When looking at police recorded antisocial behaviour between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2019, North Ormesby like other wards in Middlesbrough, had seen a reduction however it still had the highest level per 1,000 population in 2018/19 meaning that the gap between the ward and the rest of the Borough is still a challenge.

North Ormesby Ward had the highest rate of female victims of violent crime per 1,000 population in 2018/19. In addition, it also had the highest rate of Male victims of violent crime, this was even higher than the Central Ward which has the 'Town Centre'.

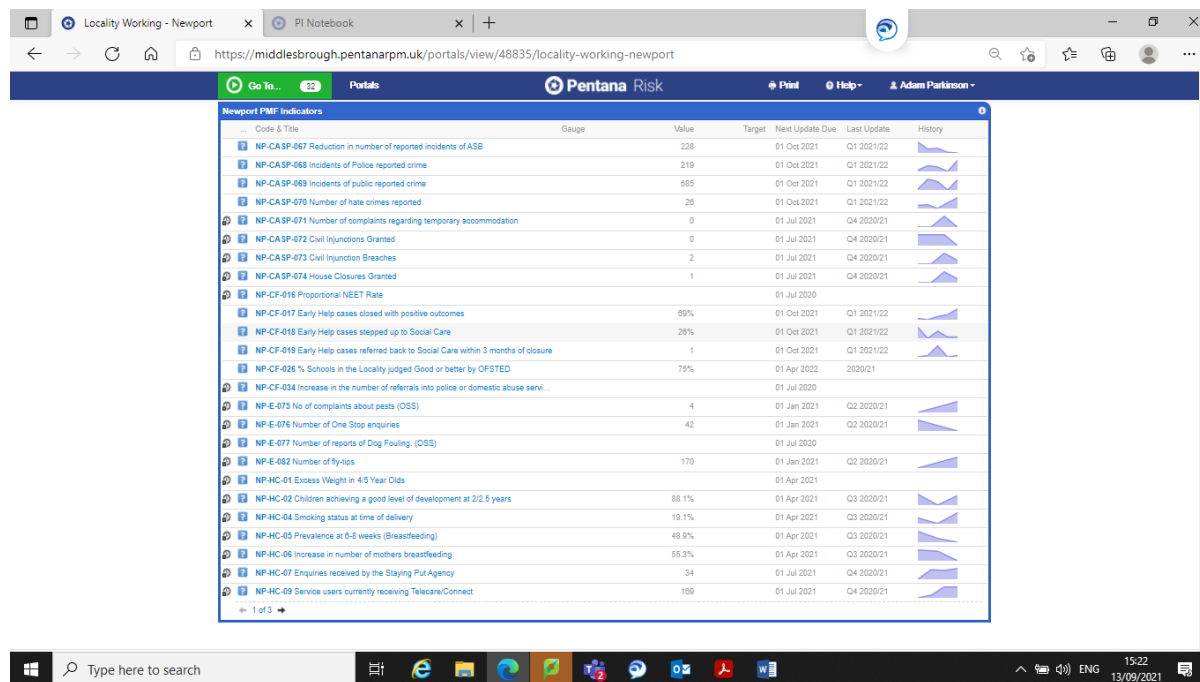
When looking at alcohol and substance related ambulance pick-up data, North Ormesby Ward had the 2nd highest level of recorded pick-ups with only Central ward having higher levels. North Ormesby ward has 14 licensed premises (2 on licensed, 8 off licensed and 4 working men's clubs), there are clear links between the availability of strong, cheap alcohol and crime and asb and poor health harms.

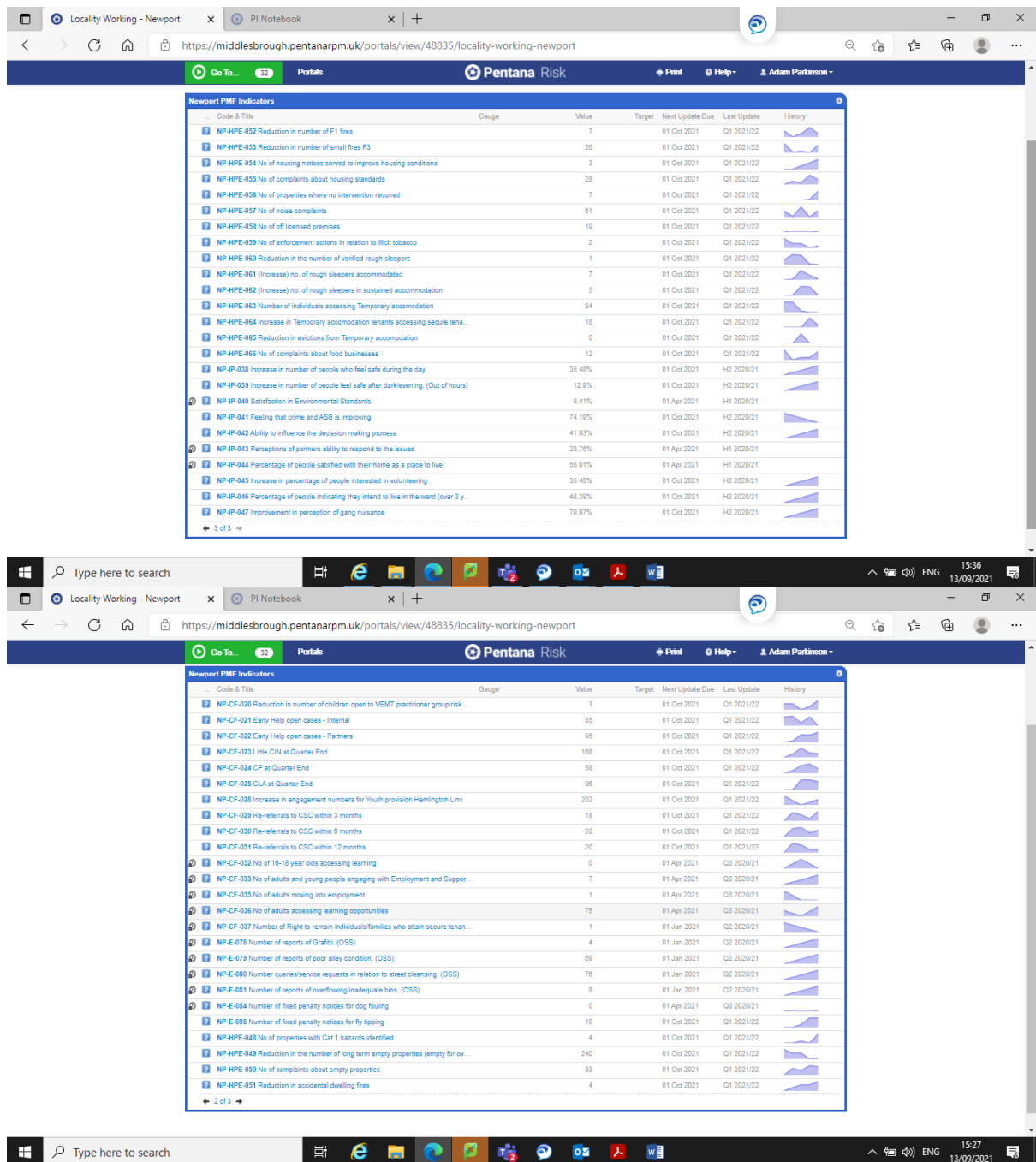
In addition it has the highest number of children in 'looked after care', unemployment levels are 6 times higher than the national average and >60% of children are living in poverty, all of which have a significant impact on families, schools and communities.

North Ormesby – proposed resource:

- Environment: 1x Staff, 5 days per week (Existing)
- Community Safety/SLL: 7x Staff, 5 days per week (Existing)
- Education EMAT team: 1x Staff, 5 days per week (Existing)
- Thirteen Housing / MBC (Neighbourhood Manager) 2x Desk 5 days per week (Existing)
- Adult Social Care: 1x Staff, 5 days per week (New)
- Cleveland Police: 1x Staff, 5 days per week – This will be revised as Neighbourhood Policing is re-introduced (New)
- Public Protection: 2x Staff, 5 days per week (New)
- Revenue and Benefits team: 2x Staff, 2 days per week (New)
- Early Help team: 1x Staff, 5 days per week (New)
- Public Health team to include space for commissioned services: 2x Staff, 2 days per week (New)
- Children Social Care 3 x Social Workers and 1x Resource Worker (New)
- Total number of dedicated staff (some will work shifts i.e. Police) = **24**

Progress is measured through a PMF that is currently on Pentana Risk, the agreed indicators as of September 2021 are :





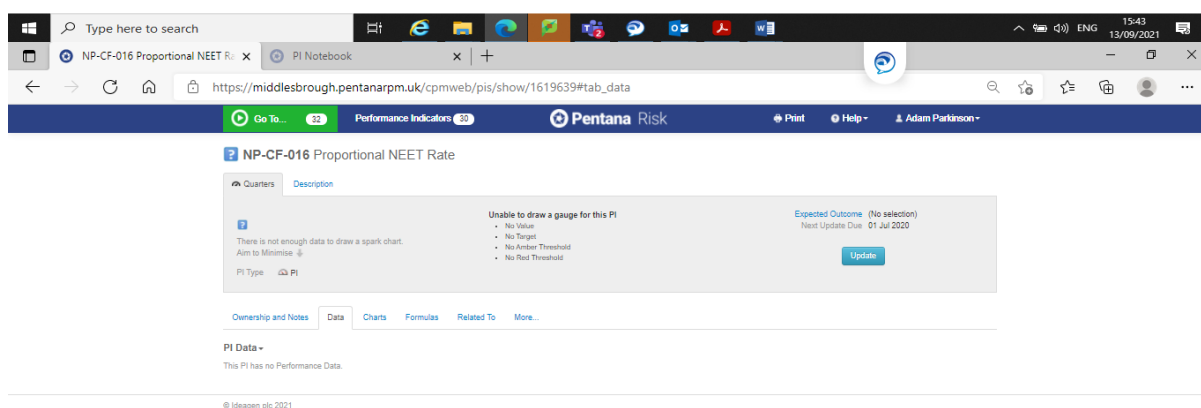
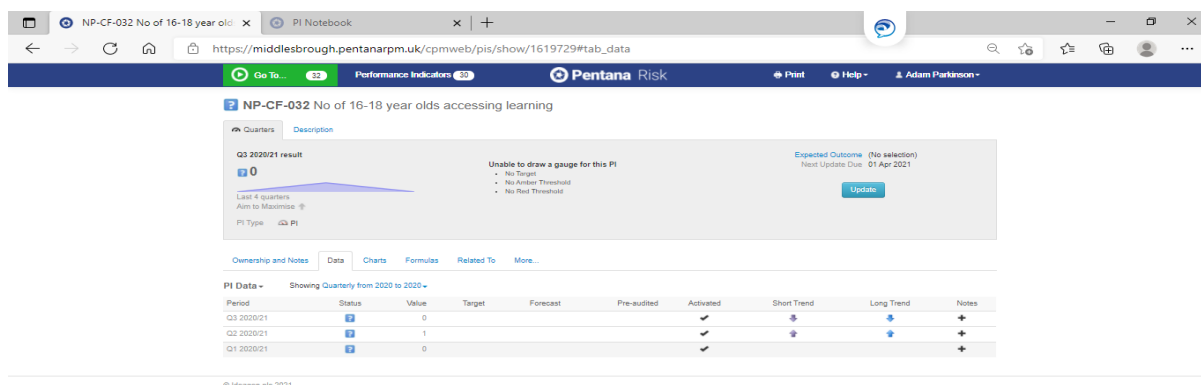
Children's Services current offer and fit.

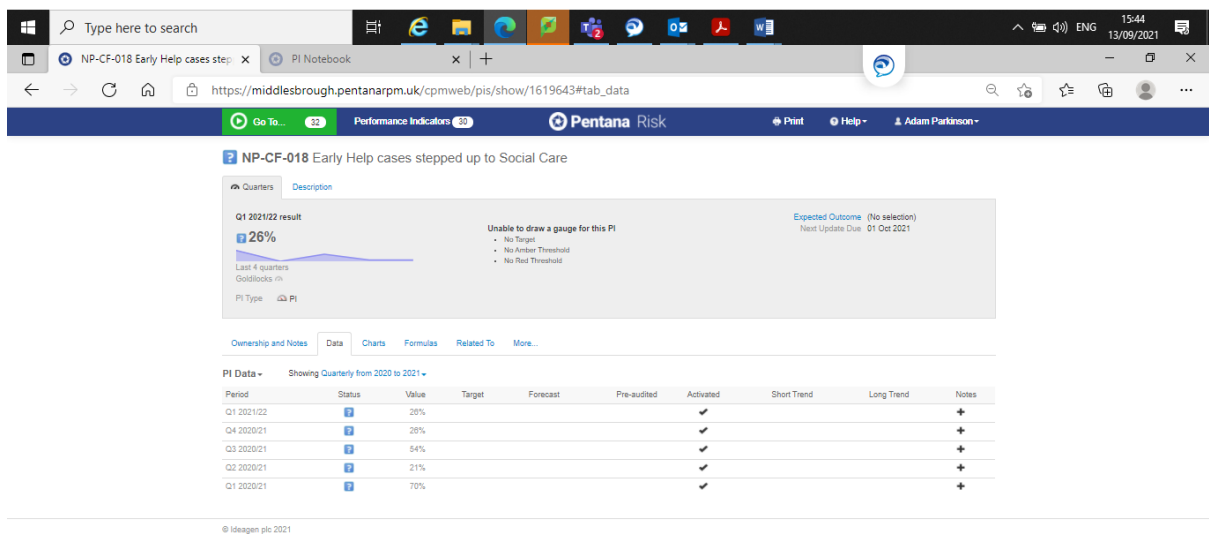
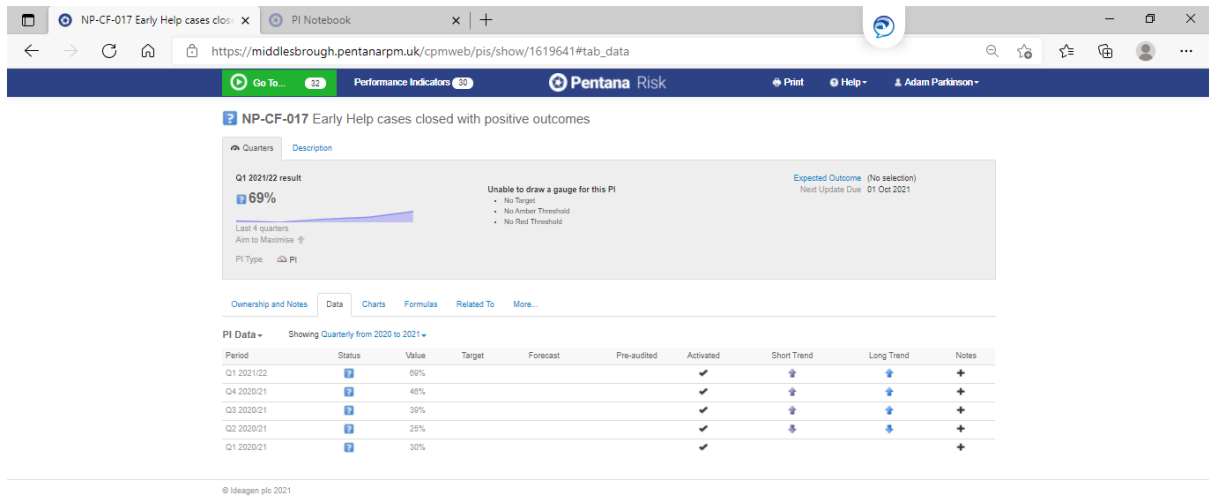
Resource allocation is confirmed and initial Action plan offer has been developed and actioned. Angela Hill currently leading on Children's and Families Action plans for Newport and North Ormesby. Children Services representatives attend virtual officer meeting on a weekly basis and Chair Children and families ward specific virtual meeting every 4 weeks.

Joint visits have been undertaken with Children Service staff and other locality officers (wardens, community development and Neighbourhood Safety) and working within the locality has enabled officers to develop a ward specific offer of diversionary activity and support available through developing local knowledge.

Officers from Children's services have also assisted with the development of Young person specific survey and link families in with additional departments or organisations locally as need is established.

Childrens Services PMF indicators and graph attached below. (Indicators shown contain Newport specific Data)





NP-CF-019 Early Help cases referred back to Social Care within 3 months of closure

Quarters Description

Q1 2021/22 result

1

Unable to draw a gauge for this PI

- No Target
- No Amber Threshold
- No Red Threshold

Expected Outcome (No selection)
Next Update Due: 01 Oct 2021

Last 4 quarters
Aim to Minimise

PI Type: PI

Ownership and Notes Data Charts Formulas Related To More...

PI Data - Showing Quarterly from 2020 to 2021

Period	Status	Value	Target	Forecast	Pre-audited	Activated	Short Trend	Long Trend	Notes
Q1 2021/22	1	1				✓	↓	↓	+
Q4 2020/21	0	0				✓	↓	↓	+
Q3 2020/21	0	0				✓	↓	↓	+
Q2 2020/21	1	1				✓	↓	↓	+
Q1 2020/21	1	1				✓	↓	↓	+

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NP-CF-026 % Schools in the Locality judged Good or better by OFSTED

Years Description

2020/21 result

?

Expected Outcome (No selection)
Next Update Due: 01 Apr 2022

PI Type: PI

Ownership and Notes Data Charts Formulas Related To More...

PI Data - Showing Annual from 2020 to 2020

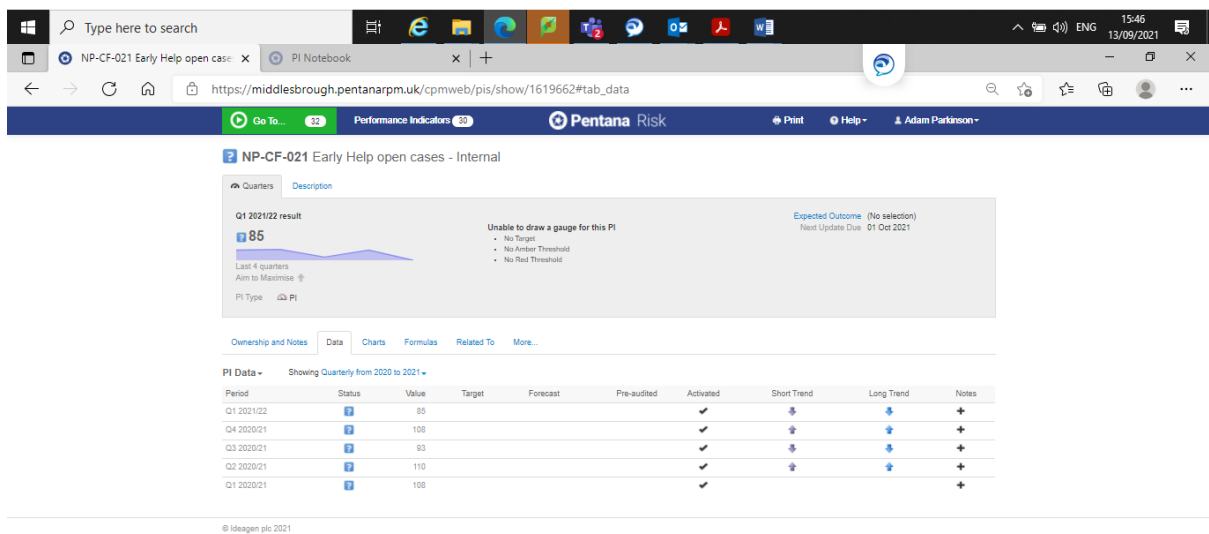
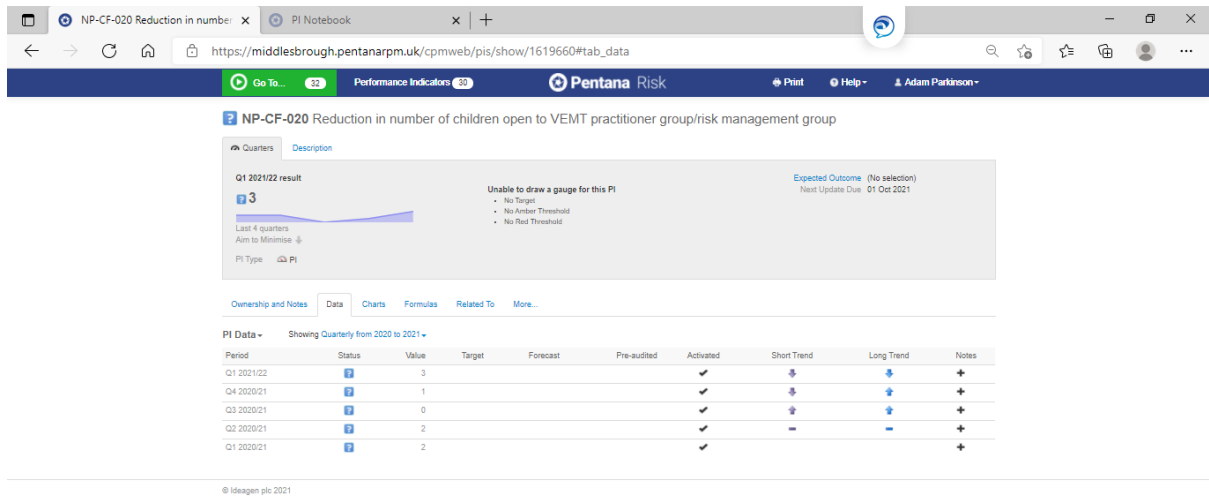
Period	Status	Value	Target	Forecast	Pre-audited	Activated	Short Trend	Long Trend	Notes
2020/21	75%	75%				✓			+

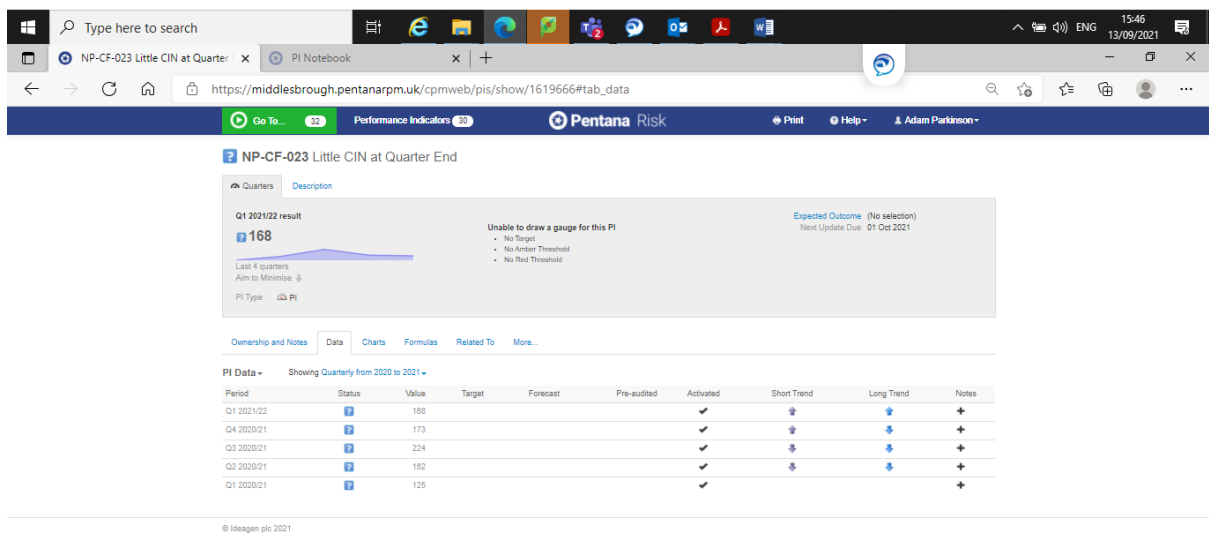
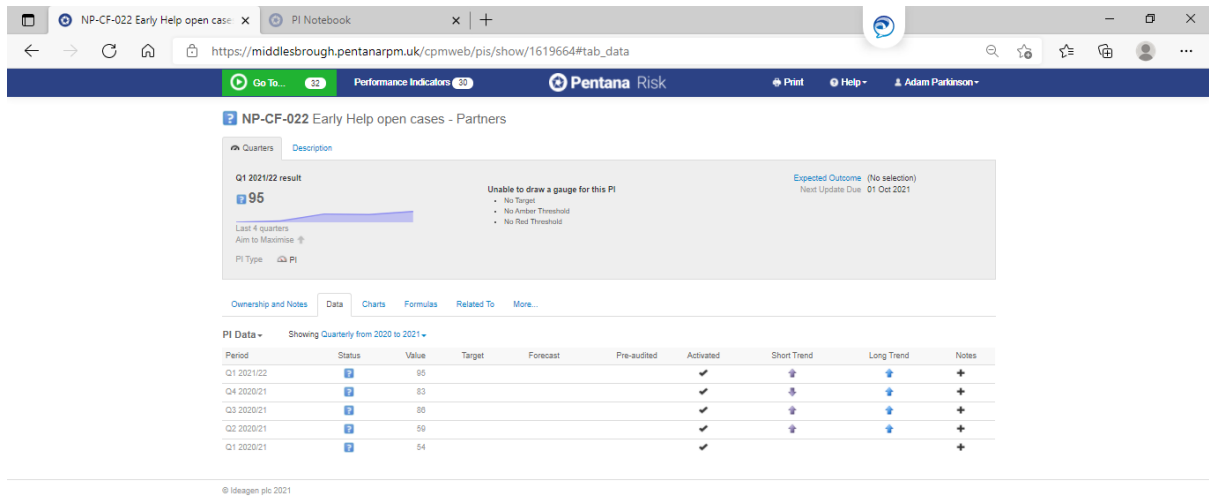
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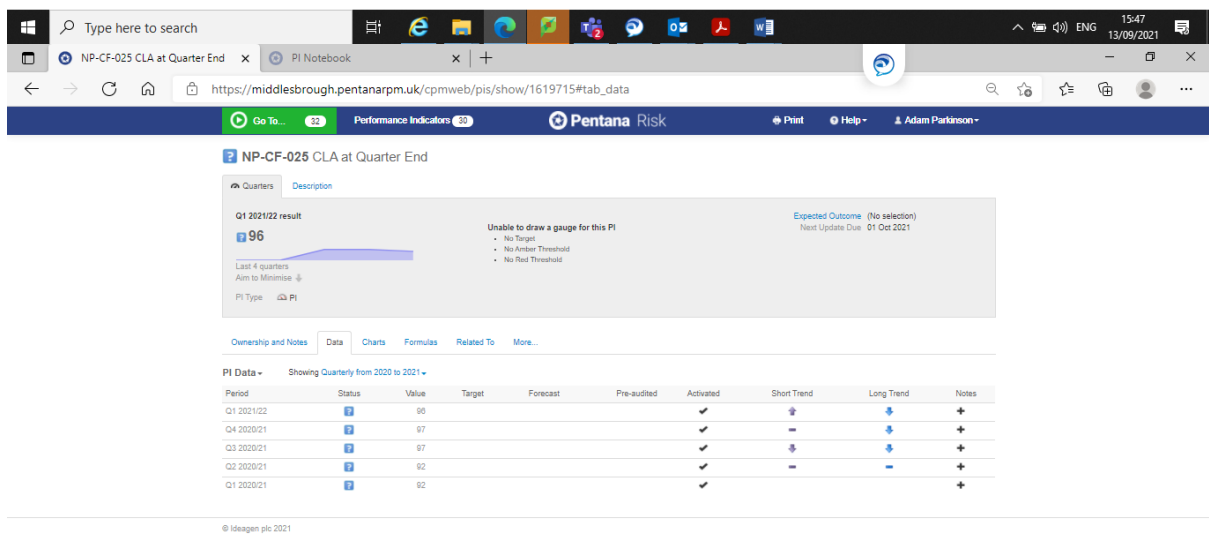
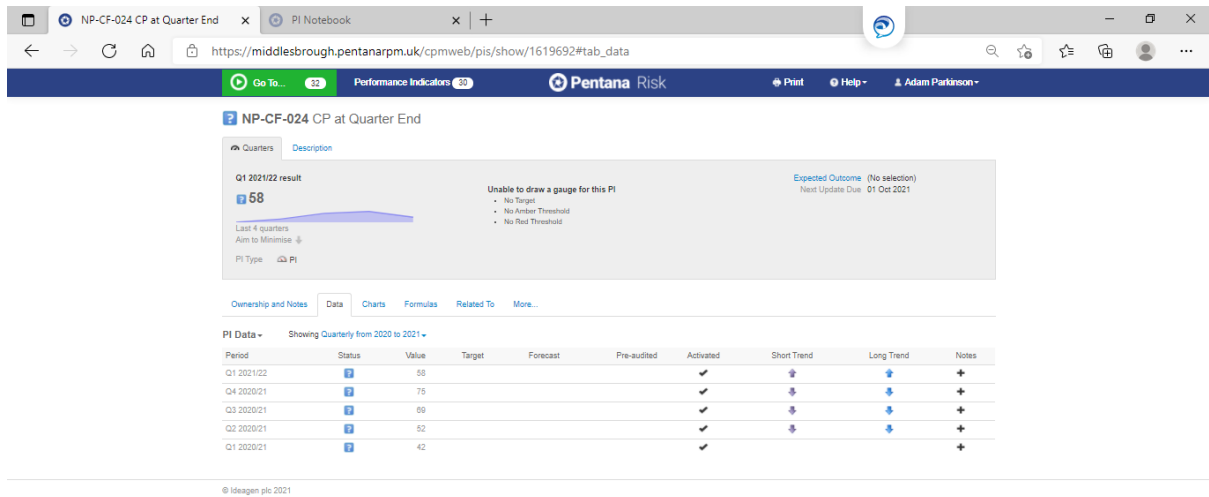
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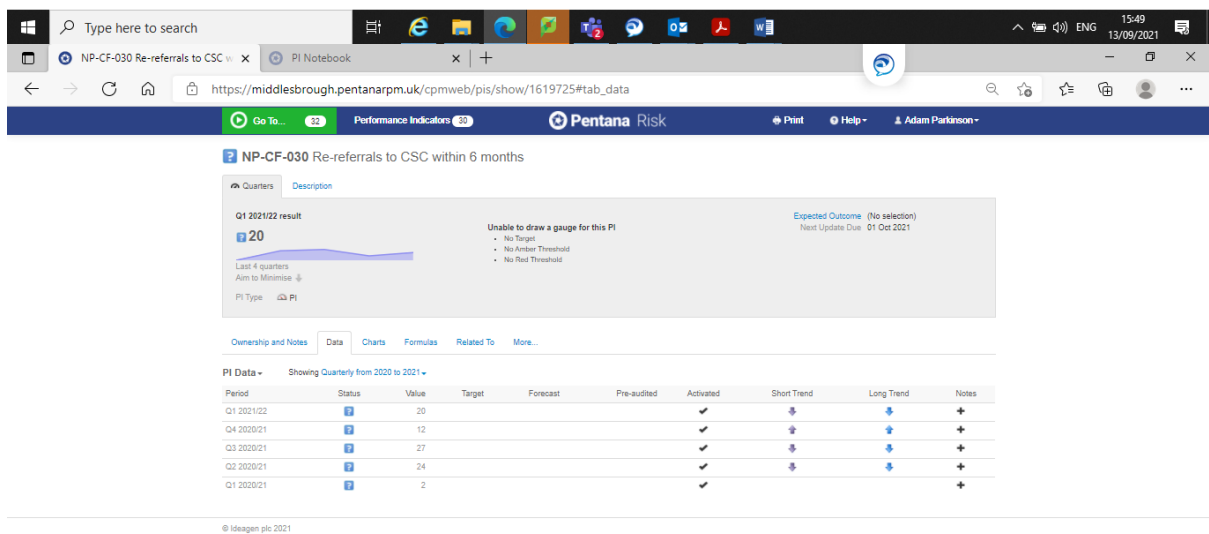
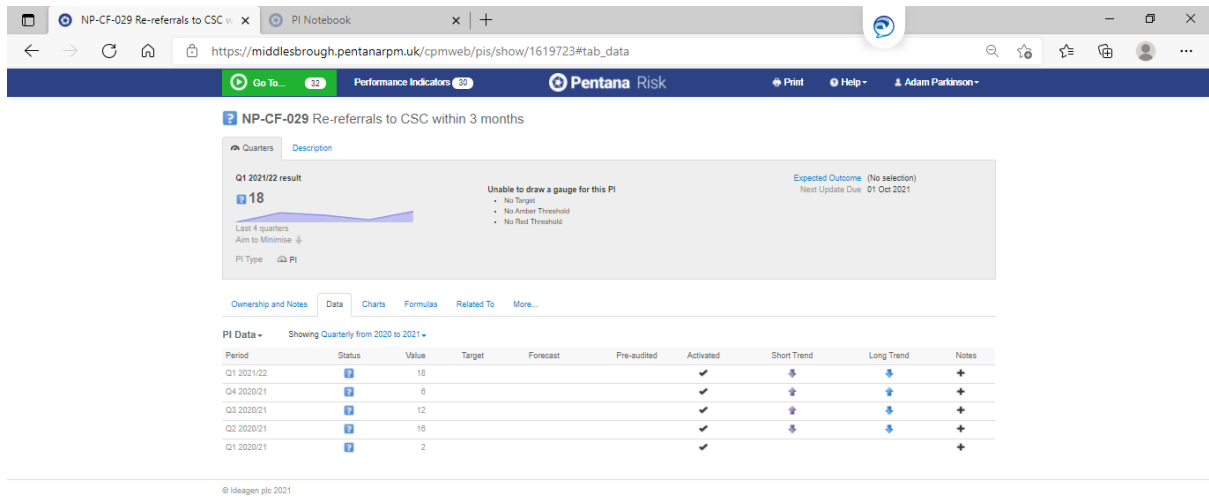
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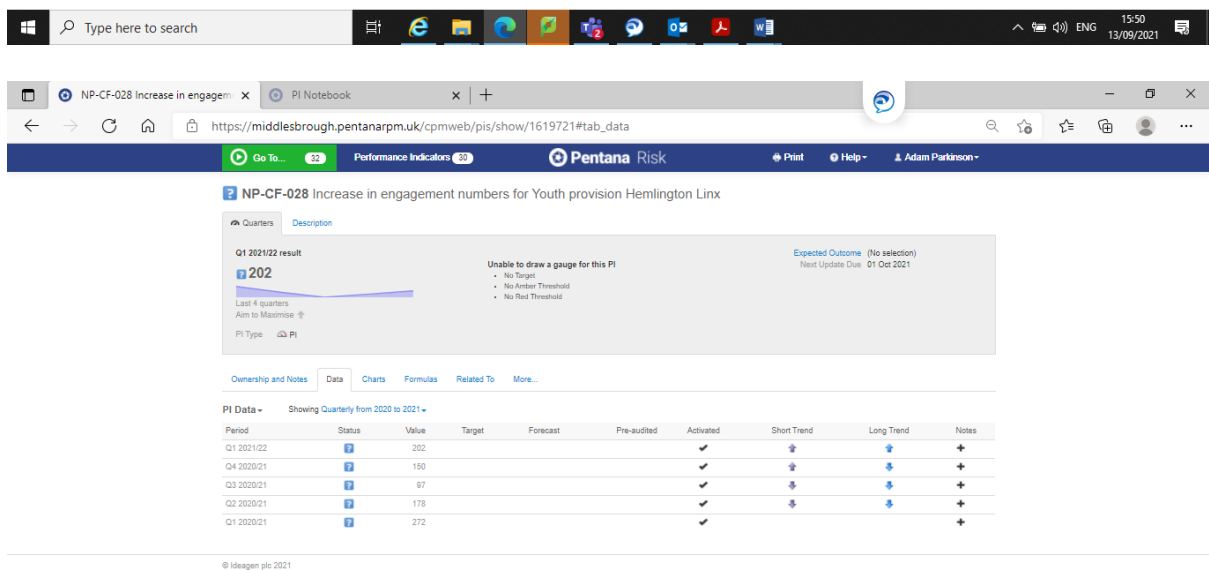
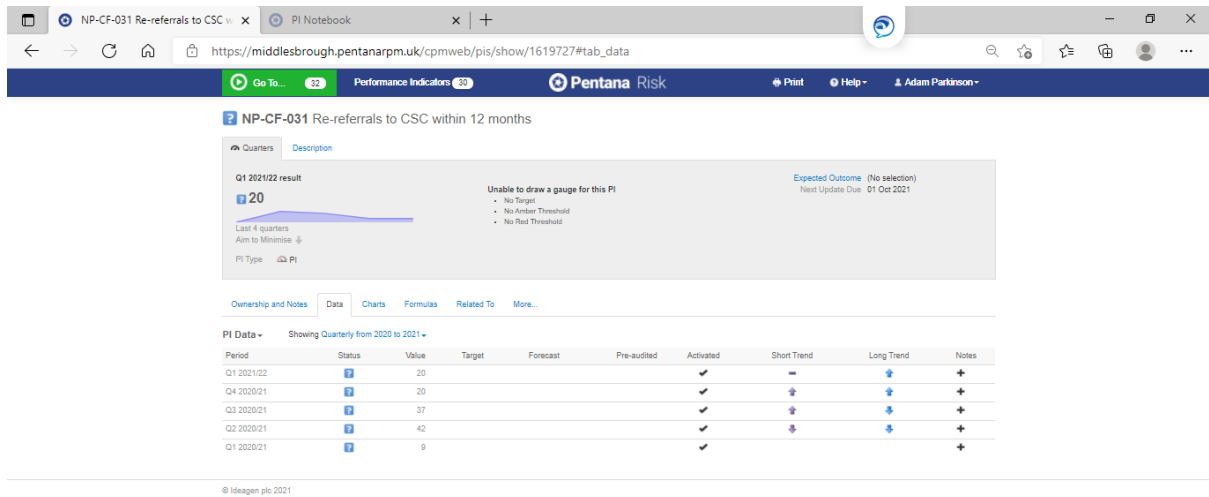
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12 month review report into Children's Services in Middlesbrough

**Peter Dwyer CBE: DfE
Commissioner for Children's
Services**

July 2021

Middlesbrough Children and Young People's Services: Commissioner 12 month follow-up report

1. Context:

1.1 This report provides further summary analysis of progress being made at Middlesbrough in addressing the significant weaknesses in practice identified through an Ofsted inspection of their services published in January 2020. At that point, the LA and its partners were assessed, in respect of childrens services, to be “inadequate” against all judgements. The full report is accessible at <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50143726>.

1.2 This systemic failure necessitated the statutory appointment by the DfE of a Commissioner. In my original report, I recognised the strengths in the response made by new senior leaders both political and managerial across the LA and its partners. I therefore recommended in May 2020, that the introduction of an alternative delivery model could serve only to disrupt the improvement programme which was firmly in place. This recommendation was accepted, with the usual expectations of a 6 and 12 month review by the Commissioner and that the independent Chair of the Improvement Board would provide regular updates to the Minister. It was also agreed in May 2020, that I would retain some ongoing involvement through to the 6 month review stage given the complexity faced of delivering improvement through COVID.

1.3 In my 6 month review report of November 2020 whilst highlighting areas for further improvement, I also confirmed that:

“A calmer focused systematic and informed approach is being taken based on good, trusted analysis and by leaders working better together on a partnership basis. Delivery against the improvement plan has been good but the delivery of marked improvements in the consistent quality of local practice remains a significant challenge”.

1.4 This 12 month review report was deferred, with the agreement of all parties, by 2 months as the original timing clashed with an Ofsted assurance visit. The short delay has also enabled this report to incorporate key feedback arising from that Ofsted activity. This report and its findings have also benefitted greatly from the insights of the DfE appointed Improvement Advisor Stuart Smith who has been working closely and effectively with the LA and partners over the past 6 month period.

2. Further updates by others since the November Commissioner report:

2.1 In his most recent update on 1 May 2021 to the Minister, the Chair of the Improvement Board (John Pearce DCS Durham) described how in his assessment: “Middlesbrough has put in place the foundations required for an effective improvement programme”.

2.2 He highlighted, in particular, the establishment of a permanent leadership team well supported politically and corporately, a good performance and planning infrastructure enabling a detailed understanding of progress and the issues facing

the area and an improvement plan covering all key areas with governance in place to track progress and challenges through to the Improvement Board.

2.3 At the same time he described how Middlesbrough continues to face a number of challenges due to starting from such a low base and the added challenge of delivery through Covid. He was keen to see still further impact of partnership work, better understanding and management of high levels of demand and the impact that has on capacity and quality and a further embedding and sustaining of the improvements made to date.

2.4 Across the country **Ofsted** have been undertaking COVID related assurance visits to all LAs where performance concerns exist. These assurance visits look at practice through a wider lens than is usually the case when Ofsted conduct monitoring visits. In that context, Ofsted conducted a remote assurance visit of Middlesbrough on the 26 and 27 May 2021. Their conclusions included the following strengths amongst others:

“Since the inspection in December 2019, senior leaders have been engaged in a comprehensive programme of improvement. Leaders have a good understanding of what they have achieved and of what more there is to do.

The multi-agency children’s hub (MACH) has continued to build on the improvements that had been identified at the monitoring visit in August 2020. Children’s risks and needs are identified through a thorough screening process that is timely and proportionate.

Children are seen regularly, and throughout the pandemic social workers have taken into account specific COVID-19 safety plans when planning their visits. Some social workers are creative and persistent in their engagement with children, despite the restrictions imposed by lockdown measures. This direct work with children is demonstrably making a difference to their lives.

Strategic and operational partners work together effectively to identify exploitation risks and trends for children in their communities. The tracking of children who are at risk of or who are being exploited continues until the risk is sufficiently reduced. There are clear and comprehensive procedures in place for children who are missing from home or care.”

2.5 At the same time Ofsted highlighted a number of agreed areas for improvement including:

“Senior leaders know, through their own audits, that too much work is still being evaluated as poor and not meeting their own expectations regarding the quality of practice.

The quality of social workers’ assessments of children’s needs varies. In the poorer assessments, the direct work with children is not contributing to a clear understanding of what life is like for them. Plans for children that are made following an assessment of need also vary in quality.

Management oversight and actions to ensure that vulnerable children and children in care, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), receive their full educational entitlement.

The understanding of identity and the diverse needs of children and their families to inform assessment, planning and support.”

Importantly the areas for development identified by Ofsted matched the self-assessment of the LA.

3. July 2021 Commissioner 12 Month Review: Process:

3.1 For this 12-month review, I have had well organised access to a range of key strategic documentation and performance reports including all papers for recent meetings of the Improvement Board. I have also undertaken a number of individual interviews with key leaders including political leaders and have held focus groups looking at key areas including QA and Performance; Workforce Development and Practice; and Partnership working.

3.2 In addition, I have held (with Stuart Smith DfE Advisor) focus groups with front line social work staff and a separate session with frontline managers. I have benefitted greatly from discussions with Stuart Smith (DfE Advisor), John Pearce (Independent Chair of the Improvement Board); Edwina Harrison (current Chair of Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements); Sam Morrison (DfE) and with LGA staff supporting the LA.

3.3 Headline feedback from this 12 month review was provided to the LA on Friday 16 July 2021.

4. July 2021 Commissioner 12 Month Review: Analysis

I have structured this feedback, as previously, broadly against elements of the “enablers for improvement” commonly recognised and used by the DfE.

4.1 Leadership and Management

[In the November Commissioner review report we said:](#)

[Whilst political and managerial leadership has been secured and enhanced this progress needs to be both maintained and extended. The maturity of member engagement needs ongoing support including from the LGA and greater stability is now essential at all levels of the LA leadership structure.](#)

The recent period has witnessed significant political leadership change. Resignations of key cabinet members including the Deputy Mayor/Executive Member for Children has disrupted considerable work undertaken over the past year in equipping already inexperienced cabinet members who have now departed.

The resulting political arrangements have since changed again, which now sees a new Executive Member for Education, the Mayor taking direct responsibility for childrens social care and a new Chair of the Corporate Parenting Board. Good political leadership of the childrens agenda matters and the work to establish that in Middlesbrough has been significantly disrupted. In the short-term there is nothing to suggest the current position will impact on the leadership and financial commitment to the service and indeed the Mayor’s direct involvement could create new championing opportunities. The current arrangements if allowed to continue could

destabilise the progress made, reduce the level of engagement by members, confuse political accountability and weaken the support to the service provided by elected members. The Mayor is aware of this and is taking steps to get the right person into the Executive Member for children role. New members for children and education would also benefit from the LGA development and mentoring programme.

A stable credible leadership team within the LA and with partners have made further significant strides in enhancing the quality of their analysis, their shared understanding of their communities and their response to the children and families of those communities. This is then leading to activity including enhancing the provision of early help activity particularly in areas of greatest need.

The work on understanding demand and future projections is of a very impressive nature, sophisticated enough to incorporate the challenges of analysing legacy issues whilst also incorporating ongoing COVID related impacts. The quality and clarity of this analysis and forecasting work enhances leadership credibility and corporate support and engagement in improvement activity. The work has considerable potential to meet the ambition of joining improvement and financial strategies in a comprehensive Medium-Term Financial Forecast for childrens services.

The “Middlesbrough Children Matter” branding developed through young people’s voice activity, is at the heart of key strategic documentation, organisational conversations and is used creatively via social media. It appears to be proving an engaging ambitious and unifying catalyst for change.

Key strategic documents are in place which combine a rich and systematic use of data analysis with a consistent style and narrative underpinned by shared principles and some great graphics. This strategic coherence must support effective delivery.

Within the directorate we continue to see a far greater sense of a single children and young people’s service operating collectively and without the historic silos. There continues to be a similar and important sense of a one council approach and a greater language about place rather than organisation. The Chief Executive is directly chairing a corporate reference group charged with ensuring full cross council engagement and understanding of the childrens improvement agenda. The group also has ambitions to widen that engagement into a wider pledge/commitment for all children – such a “child friendly city” style approach is welcomed but will require full engagement of members and the wider partnership via the Childrens Trust.

Leaders of Childrens services are more open in engaging with external sources than previously. They are more visibly engaged in regional and sub regional activity and keen to continue working with others e.g. North Yorkshire in the interests of improvement. Plans for a LGA peer review of the Virtual School is another example of this. It is encouraging to see local practice around the COVID response also being profiled by key national organisations like the What Works Centre.

4.2 Strategic Partnership Approach

In the November Commissioner review report, we said:

1. Significant progress has been made in partnership working and operational improvement has been recognised. Perhaps more could be done to ensure that delivery of the improvement plan does not simply revert to LA led improvement activity observed by others.
2. In the complexity of strategic partnership working the links between the children and young people's agenda and the local Health and Wellbeing board appears underdeveloped. Similarly, new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) across South Tees appear in their infancy and proposals for a new independent scrutineer role needs to complement rather than duplicate the current improvement board agenda.
3. Whilst communication routes within the LA have been enhanced the opportunities to improve communication across the wider childrens workforce on a partnership basis appears less developed.
4. As described above exciting opportunities are at hand but must be operationalised to further enhance the MACH through the injection of additional capacity most notably through the police. Given the significance of domestic violence this is particularly welcomed but must be delivered.

The Improvement Board continues to prove highly effective. It is well chaired, well attended and accesses focused and high-quality analysis on progress against the improvement plan. Exception report and rag rating of actions is well established. Its agenda enables deep dive activity into areas of particular concern or interest to the Board without losing its primary focus on delivery against the Improvement Plan.

There are welcome and advanced plans to enhance the Improvement Board through the engagement of additional members including the DASS, the Chair/Independent Scrutineer from MASA, housing and the VCS.

A chair/ independent scrutineer has been appointed into the Multi Agency Safeguarding Arrangements (MASA) (South Tees Safeguarding Children Partnership) and this is bringing real energy, expertise and optimism that greater strategic alignment of the key strategic forums work can be delivered. Greater confidence that improved partnership focus and governance is possible regardless of the geographic areas covered by bodies.

Under this new leadership the MASA has already held 2 major conferences and this may provide a useful model with the Improvement Board for further enhancing engagement and understanding on a partnership basis of improvement activity.

A combination of new leadership culture and possibly COVID requirements have had the impact of bringing partners closer together and many examples of much improved relationships were described for example between LA and the local school

community with the voice of education said to be more regularly heard and schools better supported to embrace wider responsibilities for vulnerable learners. Partners frequently described to me the openness and accessibility of known leaders who respond and deliver. One headteacher said she believed all others would agree that “our voice is valued” by leaders who “always get back” and who now “listen and engage”. At the same time this high support to partners was matched by “high challenge” with agencies described as being appropriately “held to account more”.

Leaders within childrens services in the LA are said to have also played a key role in enhancing the profile, practice standards and improving outcomes through their engagement with external bodies eg Adoption Agency and MARAC.

Frontline staff and their managers in LA services describe positive partnership working in many areas – much improved school engagement; excellent strategy meeting attendance; great housing and NEET pathways for care leavers; good engagement with police and creative ways to frequently monitor young people on the edge of school/missing have been created.

It does feel that opportunities are at hand to even further change the language of partnership working across the local authority area. A chance to move beyond the historic narrative around inward focused organisations, to put to one side frustrations that some may hold about earlier decision making eg MACH disaggregation or chair appointments and move to more mature and lived partnership behaviours where openness, transparency and trust can be ever more consistently rekindled. There is an incredible appetite for this and plenty of excellent examples of collaborative operational practice from which to build.

The partnership front door MACH continues to receive positive endorsement from both external inspection and internal audit processes. The police have followed through on committing additional capacity within the service and a triage system for the high volume of domestic abuse notifications has now been established. An ongoing debate on whether all such notifications need to enter this route may benefit from external support. Shared language around police domestic abuse notifications and whether they are contacts or referrals is urgently required.

4.3 Workforce

In the November Commissioner review report, we said:

1. Whilst there have been discrete areas of activity against the workforce development agenda the need for a comprehensive Workforce Strategy is now fully recognised.

2. The ambition for this to incorporate a consolidated staff offer, a rich learning and development package, a comprehensive approach to recruitment and retention, a greater understanding of demand and therefore required skills/structure is really welcome and progress must be prioritised.

3. This work should also see the needed clarity on the local Practice Model and associated practice toolkits being delivered. The LA is also keen to review elements of its work around the voice of the child to see greater engagement in key planning and support forums.

The LA has provided the required stability and quality of senior and middle leadership during the recent period. There is clear evidence of trusted high-quality relationships between LA leaders essential to further progress improvements within children's services.

There is now an approved, impressive Strategic Workforce Development Strategy with themes covering organisational design, recruitment and retention and workforce training and development. The sophistication and ambition displayed in the modelling work is really exceptional. The strategy is clearly aligned with other strategic activity and has impressively sequenced ambitions and desired outcomes. Work is advanced on finalising the approach and determining the financial implications of the approach to enhance recruitment and retention in key roles.

The new Learning and Development Programme contained within the above is providing more consistent induction, a clear ASYE offer, core training linked to improvement priorities, a multiagency offer around Early Help and thresholds and additional development training plus discrete managers programme. The learning and development approach now includes flexibility to respond to team specific needs arising from audit and, identified needs can be promptly responded to through "hot topic" style briefings. The offer and its responsive nature is positively described by frontline staff and managers with the only barrier to engagement apparently that of time in some areas. A call for some "hot topic" spots to be moved to the mandatory list will be welcomed in some quarters and may help prioritisation. It was also excellent to hear staff using the experience of apprentices in the service to reshape approaches and language eg on missing education.

The LA has made some progress in reducing the use of agency social work staff including agency managers but there is still too many and the quality of agency staffing available is recognised as one of the barriers to more consistent improvements in practice. The LA continues to use managed teams as an alternative model and investments made currently in the assessment function has proved effective in reducing caseloads without increasing throughput to other parts of the service. The timeline for moving to a "steady state" in resourcing is under development and will require finalising, approval and clear communication.

To enhance recruitment and retention the Workforce Development Strategy workstream has developed innovative options for an enhanced recruitment offer through welcome and retention payment scheme. At the same time a new specialist recruitment process and new website is about to be launched.

The outcomes from last years Annual Health check of the views of social workers made mixed reading albeit understandable in the context of the improvement journey. Whilst scoring highly for being cared for by managers and the organisation,

comparisons with others saw lower feedback scores around workload, access to regular and reflective supervision and understanding of the practice model. At that stage only half of social workers would recommend the organisation as a social work employer. Impressively the feedback has not been hidden but used and, at the Practice Week clear open messages were given about what actions were being taken to address the challenges made.

Whilst for many areas caseloads have now reduced, there are still areas (20%) where individual caseloads are above desired levels. An understandable focus on key pathways and Ofsted recommendations has inevitably meant that other teams eg children with disability are perhaps behind the pace of elsewhere in the organisation. Reductions in the numbers of children in care and on plans has enabled the IRO service to have manageable caseloads in line with national guidance and enhance their engagement in all key decision-making processes.

When we met social workers and frontline managers we heard positive feedback on the organisation culture and visible credible leadership. They positively recognised that enhanced management capacity and smaller teams has led to improvements in the levels of supervision, support and case management oversight at all tiers of the organisation. Staff also recognise the priority given to retention with additional career opportunities being created through, for example Practice Champion roles and through expansion of the frontline programme. Whilst supervision procedures have been updated and frequency is good, further work to increase reflective supervision and supervision around the quality of practice rather than pure compliance is now needed.

4.4 Practice Improvement and Innovation:

In the November Commissioner review report, we said:

1. Leaders have been rightly cautious about committing additional resources into a service where deficits in practice and management of that practice exist. They have been keen to have a sharper sense of genuine demand and subsequent capacity needed. Whilst legacy issues and COVID implications may still blur that analysis, there is sufficient evidence now available to fully justify further investment to enhance capacity. Caseloads are too high and must be reduced. At the same time developed work to better understand the nature of demand in an attempt to reshape the profile of interventions should be maintained.

2 The LA have clear opportunities with the further investment described above but must ensure the extra resources are targeted wisely. Used to reshape the workforce structure in the direction not always of current demand but in a way which creates capacity which matches the preferred practice model and philosophy. Additional targeted investment will also remain welcomed to address historic practice deficiencies ie out of authority placements and creativity should be possible to enable bespoke practice expertise to be mainstreamed over time.

3. Too many children are in care and too many are placed inappropriately elsewhere. The new approved strategy needs to be supported by detailed

implementation plans which ensure that such a statement is of historic rather than current relevance. The proposed further investment in the Innovate team on out of authority placements; the further embedding of the opportunities through Future for Families and the potential for further work with North Yorkshire on reviewing the local fostering offer are all welcome and require follow through.

Practice Weeks are used creatively by the organisation. In March 2021, a rich menu of short presentations by external speakers were alongside internal inputs. The programme was aligned with improvement priorities and saw very high engagement (over 1000 attendances) and strong feedback was received.

The integrated line management of Early Help within the same portfolio is adding real value. A historically stable reflective and effective service has enhanced its role and brings strong evidence of impact. Step down is used effectively as cases come from childrens social care and good handover arrangements are in place. There are also new innovative developments within early help funded creatively with the VCS eg Seen Heard Believed (trauma informed practice)

Progress has now been made in finalising the Corporate Parenting Strategy (which incorporates permanence and sufficiency); in developing and launching a comprehensive Early Help strategy and action plan; in jointly drafting an impressive and coherent Learning and Education Strategy which goes out to consultation this month, and a detailed comprehensive Learning and Development Programme which is now in place.

Within the permanency strategy considerable progress has been made in the tracking and oversight of children within the care system. This has led to impressive performance in timely moves for more children into adoptive placements and a significant increase in the use of special guardianship etc. We also see evidence of more appropriate use of PLO, a reduction in emergency hearings and a stronger relationship of trust is described with CAFCASS.

The Audit to Excellence programme has now been rolled out across the whole service with team plans/performance clinics and non-negotiables in place with strong endorsement of the approach across the service. Audit completion are 100% in some areas eg early help and, whilst more progress is needed in some areas the Audit to Excellence capacity has been extended for a further 12 month period to support embedding and extension of this highly impressive model.

It is encouraging to see further innovation and investment in challenging times. 2006-14 had seen the closure of much youth service provision in Middlesbrough and whilst some targeted activity continued, it was short term funded and lacked a strategic and aligned approach. April 2021 saw the new Youth Service go live with innovative commissioned services providing universal, targeted and transition provision. All contracts are closely aligned with Middlesbrough Childrens Matter principles and priorities and with clear organisational links to MACH and early help arrangements. Governance of new provision is through the Partnership and Prevention Board. April

also saw the launch of new trauma informed therapeutic service for 4-18 year olds who have witnessed traumatising Domestic Abuse.

Under the governance of the Childrens Trust, the LA is cautiously exploring models for enhancing and integrating provision at a local level. Ambitions to develop locality teams around targeted communities (Newport and N Ormesby); local pilots of school based social work staff (Park End) and ideas around direct supervision of designated school safeguarding leads are under discussion. This is welcome with recognised care needed that pilot activity does not result in fragmentation and confusion.

The Practice Model (Children and Relationships First) is clear, well communicated and increasingly well understood. It has been introduced through open and engaging dialogue and its profile is maintained in a number of innovative ways eg use of audit and champions. Behind the high level principles of the model sit developed practice standards and a rich raft of direct work tools. The dialogue on practice is ongoing with clear links back from practitioners via the PSW to the DCS and a really creative “courageous conversations” model of exchange between senior leaders with operational managers.

The service continues to work with North Yorkshire and a current workstream around the fostering service is clearly needed. The service is needing to resolve legacy issues whilst at the same time developing a new offer to attract new carers. In the interim the service has a reduced number of net carers. Care is also needed that the ambitious advanced plans for enhancing the residential care offer are also matched with the ability to resource and recruit high quality staffing. With these issues combined, the LA runs the risk of seeing children continuing to live in more costly IFA placements and in at least local residential care but in provision less well prepared to meet need.

It was suggested to us that progress in developing a wider range of commissioned services to support core social work activity whilst welcomed, may be at risk of leading to a plethora of referral processes and subsequently unnecessary delay and duplication. There are models of resource panels etc being used elsewhere to streamline and enhance access to the right service for the right child which could be considered.

4.5 What difference is being made?

In looking at recent performance report and analysis it is impressive to see that :

- Assessment timeliness has significantly improved from 76% in September 2020 to 95% currently and some evidence from audit of improved quality.
- 95% of child in need cases have been reviewed within timescale.
- 15% reduction of numbers of children on child protection plans with a 28% reduction of ICPCs in the past 6 months.
- The care population is down from a peak of 702 (August 2020) to 539 currently – in the last 6 months there have been 66 admissions and 172 have left care.
- Connected carer figures are down from 210 Sept 2020 to 119 currently.

- 34% reduction in children Placed with Parents.
- 40% of closed social care involvements result in step down to early help.
- 42% increase in cases in early help and the service able to evidence 78% of early help cases closed with positive outcomes.
- Targets for the Supporting Families/Troubled Families programme have been fully met 1027 attached to the programme and £312K reward funding claimed.
- Work to safely return children from external foster and residential care is delivering – including 4 children returned home from residential care with support at a saving of £1.4M annually. 34 of 40 children in community supported by Futures for Families remained at home.
- Good accommodation offer for care leavers and dedicated CAMHS worker and independence programme in leaving care.
- Good attendance reported at strategy meetings.
- Improved performance in children seen in assessments.
- Evidence that supervision levels have improved.
- Audit is evidencing and some evidence of very strong practice on voice of child and management oversight.

Performance concerns

- Inadequate practice is reducing although still at 22%
- Although improving from a low base, rereferral rates are too high
- Dental checks are too low (covid related issue)
- Family Group Conference numbers not where desired and model not embedded
- Pathway plans in place are low and audit says quality not good enough
- The timeliness of ICPCs
- Whilst average caseloads are fine at 19 some staff are said to be in high 20s – 19% have 26-30
- Early Help caseloads too high at 28
- Quality of PEPs is variable
- Quality of life story work variable
- Private fostering low numbers
- ICPCs – actions not SMART enough
- Single agency lead professionals have improved but more needed
- Agency staffing is too high and it creates too many changes of worker

5. Recommendations

1. The high quality of forecasting, analysis and service redesign work should provide the necessary confidence to move into an ambitious Medium Term Financial Plan which will fund activity where needed and desired rather than the historic use of funding on reactive activity which was neither desired nor consistently effective. This work however must be further progressed, finalised and the approach and financial implications approved.

2. Further reductions in the numbers of inadequate cases are needed. This will be achieved by maintaining and embedding existing high-quality activity. The potential for distraction through too many further new initiatives should be avoided. Progress will be made by doing even more of the same - consistent credible leaders leading a joined-up organisation supported well corporately, which prioritises a practice model, understood and delivered by permanent practitioners operating with great managerial support and manageable workloads.

3. There are many improvements in partnership working evident in the LA and, a further enhancement of the Improvement Board including improved engagement and leadership of MASA arrangements should help strengthen links between the key statutory agencies. Planned new members of the Improvement Board and increased joint activity between the Improvement Board and MASA must be implemented. The partnership tension surrounding triage of domestic abuse cases must be resolved and LA leaders must move into a style of partnership engagement which is more inclusive and consultative.

4. As described earlier the current political leadership arrangements need to be enhanced with additional capacity introduced and training for key roles identified. As the statutory guidance says

“The DCS and Lead Member Children’s Services (LMCS) roles provide a clear and unambiguous line of political and professional accountability for children’s well-being. The DCS and LMCS should report to the Chief Executive and to the Council Leader or Mayor”. And whilst no specific reference is made to the Lead member role the guidance is clear that “it is not appropriate for the Chief Executive also to hold the statutory role of DCS (except possibly as a temporary measure)”

Whilst I am fully reassured that the current arrangements do not present any immediate risk to further progress, a recommendation will be made to the Minister for the Mayor to provide an update within a 3 month period on progress in establishing the required informed political leadership in line with this statutory guidance.

5. The need for less reliance on agency staffing and managed teams is recognised and the work on the Medium Term Financial Plan must create a detailed timeline for progress. The plan must be underpinned by effective delivery against the Workforce Development Strategy.

6. Whilst supervision procedures have been updated and frequency is good, further work to increase reflective supervision and supervision around the quality of practice rather than pure compliance is now needed.

7. It is encouraging to see a prioritisation in improvement of the local fostering service but externally supported work is required. More local high quality placements are needed, equipped to provide greater placement choice and to support the appropriate return of children placed elsewhere to the local

authority area. At the same time planned enhancements to residential care placements locally must be matched by skilled, stable staffing to care for those with most complex needs.

8. The LA should seek to reduce complexity in frontline staff accessing new services whether directly delivered or commissioned from others. Ease of speedy access for the right service for the right child should be the aim.

9. Whilst much progress has been made, the performance challenges highlighted at section at Section 4.5 of this report must be prioritised.

10. The impressive ambition to locate improvements in childrens social care in the context of wider improvements in outcomes and choices for all children, young people and their families will need translation into effective delivery routes.

6. Summary

Considerable progress has been made and there is evidence of real impact. Most impressively in the face of significant demand and need, the LA has tackled legacy issues which had inflated the volume of cases in higher tiers of provision. Significant reductions in the care population have been achieved through a focus on permanency and supporting families locally and important reductions in children on child protection plans and within social care generally have taken place. The LA knows itself well and has clearly moved beyond having “the necessary building blocks” in place to an organisation impacting on outcomes and progressing impressively on their improvement journey.

On this basis, I would recommend to the Minister that no further direct engagement of an appointed Commissioner is required and continued monitoring and support to improvement is afforded by the Advisor and core DfE team.

Peter Dwyer CBE

DfE Commissioner

Middlesbrough