

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

**Date:** Tuesday 26th April, 2022  
**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. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Interest
3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting of the Children & Young People's Social Care & Services Scrutiny Panel held on 21 March 2022 3 - 10
4. Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective - Draft Final Report 11 - 44  
  
(To Follow)  
  
Recommendation: That the Panel considers the content of the draft Final Report and agrees conclusions and recommendations for submission to the Executive.
5. Sufficiency, Permanency & Perceptions of Children in Care - Draft Final Report 45 - 112  
  
(To Follow)  
  
Recommendation: That the Panel considers the content of the draft Final Report and agrees conclusions and recommendations for submission to the Executive.
6. Update - Covid Recovery in Children's Services  
  
The Executive Director of Children's Services will provide a

verbal update in relation to Covid recovery in Children's Services, where appropriate.

7. Overview and Scrutiny Board Update

The Chair will provide a verbal update in relation to business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 23 March 2022.

8. 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, 18 April 2022

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors D Davison (Chair), T Mawston (Vice-Chair), A Hellaoui, T Higgins, M Nugent, Z Uddin, M Storey, J Walker and G Wilson.

**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](mailto: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 21 March 2022.**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Davison (Chair); Councillors: Hellaoui, Higgins, Nugent, Uddin, and Wilson.

**OFFICERS:** C Breheny, S Butcher and J Dixon.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** C O'Neill, Children's Improvement Advisor (North East Region), LGA.

**PRESENT BY INVITATION:** Councillor C Hobson – Chair of Corporate Parenting Board.  
Councillor D McCabe – Chair of Children & Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel.  
Councillor M Smiles – Deputy Mayor & Executive Member for Children's Services.

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mawston and J Walker.

### **\*\* DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

### **MINUTES – 21 FEBRUARY 2022**

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 21 February 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

### **DEVELOPING A COUNCIL-WIDE APPROACH TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

C O'Neill, Children's Improvement Advisor for the North East Region with the LGA, had been invited to attend the meeting to present the Panel with an overview of developing a Council-wide approach to Children's Services.

It was acknowledged that the Panel would be familiar with a large number of acronyms used within Children's Services and some of the key acronyms that would be used within the Council-wide approach were provided:-

- CHC – Continuing Health Care – a package of care for adults aged over 18, funded solely by the NHS, assessed by CCG as having 'primary health need'.
- CC – Continuing Care – package for child under 18 with needs arising from disability, accident or illness that cannot be met by existing universal or specialist services alone.
- Section 177 – free aftercare from NHS and social care for anyone who has been in hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- PfA – Preparation for Adulthood – process of moving from childhood into adult life, supported by education, health and care (transition).
- CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – specialist NHS service offers assessment, diagnosis, treatment and support for children experiencing problems with emotions, behaviour or mental health.

The Panel was advised that some of the key partners that Councillors and Officers, particularly in Children's Services, would engage with on a regular basis would be:-

- CCG (Clinical Commissioning Group – soon to change to an ICS – Integrated Care System) – statutory partners crucial to helping the Council fulfil its safeguarding duties.
- Police – as above.

- schools/education – universal service for all children and young people – vital partners to developing children's services.
- GPs – key to meeting the needs of children.
- community and voluntary sector – as above.
- hospital trust – as above.
- mental health trust – as above.
- Housing – important to ensure sufficient placements for young people to live, whether supported or independently, as they transitioned to adulthood.

The need to give very careful consideration to preparation for adulthood was highlighted. It was recognised that some children had additional vulnerabilities due to family needs or SEND and preparation was key. Several short videos were shown, demonstrating how young people were preparing for adulthood through:-

- Employment – How does the Council seek to secure employment for those young people with learning difficulties or disabilities? If it was possible to secure employment for those young people, then it may be easier to secure employment for young people without additional needs. Can the Council offer work experience, apprenticeships or employment to young people? Where it was unable to, how does it engage with other employers who may be able to help?
- Friends, Relationships and Community – How does the Council support young people to engage and take an active part within their community? How might partners be able to support the Council to provide a range of activities to meet the needs of all children transitioning into adult services and how well does the Council engage with those partners (and vice versa)?
- Independent Living – There needs to be a careful programme for children looked after transitioning to adulthood and moving into supported accommodation, independent living or staying put with a foster carer. How does the Council continue to meet the needs of young people preparing for adulthood and to support parents to be 'brave' to plan for young people to become independent.
- Good Health/Travel – A significant amount of money was spent on transporting children and young people with additional needs from home to their place of learning. This money could be redirected into education, therefore, the more young people that could be trained to travel independently the better. Being able to travel independently also had a positive impact on a young person's ability to be independent socially in order to meet with friends, etc. It was acknowledged that not all young people would be able to travel independently but was extremely beneficial for those that could.

In addition, the Panel listened to interviews with three young people with special needs living in different independent settings talking about their experiences of living independently – some supported with teams of carers, some supported by an individual carer. This demonstrated the vital importance of the Council engaging with health colleagues and housing to ensure that young people's needs were met and that there was good quality housing available.

The Panel was asked to think about:-

- How Middlesbrough seeks to secure employment for young people with disabilities and special needs.
- How well the Council, and Elected Members, engages with people in the community and how well the Council engages with partners.
- In terms of independent living, how the Council engages with partners, particularly housing partners, to deliver a carefully planned programme of support for children looked after and those with SEND, in moving into supported or independent living arrangements and how the needs of these young people would be monitored.

- In terms of transitioning to adulthood, how the Council supports parents to be brave in supporting their child on their journey into independent living.
- How Middlesbrough provides travel training to support those children and young people who are able to, to become more independent in travelling to school or other education settings. A large proportion of money is spent each year on transporting children from home to school or other education settings, therefore, the more young people that could be supported to travel independently, with confidence, the better.

Finally, the Panel was asked to consider four key questions which it may wish to find the answers to and to regularly monitor:-

1. How can you be reassured about the effectiveness of transition between Children's Services and Adult Services?
2. What percentage of adults with learning disabilities, with care experience, live independently and/or are in employment? How does Middlesbrough compare with the national average? (and trends over time)?
3. How effective are relationships with local CCG, schools, Police and other key partners and how assured are you that joint working is leading to better outcomes for children?
4. How good are links between children and adult services and housing to ensure the needs of young people transitioning are met?

A discussion followed and the following issues were raised:-

- A Panel Member expressed the opinion that Middlesbrough Council was committed to supporting children with disabilities and provided a first-hand example of how a family member – a young adult with a hearing impairment – had been supported to undertake travel training in conjunction with Middlesbrough College, to participate in voluntary work in the community and was supported to obtain a part-time job.
- Another Member referred to her own personal experience of previously working within special needs schools and agreed that all of the issues covered within the presentation were key to providing young people with the opportunity to have the confidence and skills to travel independently, to obtain employment and to live independently.
- A Member of the Panel suggested that answers to the four questions posed at the end of the presentation be discussed at a future Panel meeting and that this information be regularly monitored by the Panel.

### SEND Review Update

The Panel was provided with an update in relation to the current position regarding the national SEND review.

In 2014, as part of the Children and Families Act 2014, reforms to the SEND system had brought many positive changes including an increased expectation of greater joint working between education, health and care, and a focus on a child's journey from birth to 25, together with increased involvement of children, young people and their families. Whilst there was strong feeling that they were the right reforms, focusing on families having to tell their story only once without the need to repeat to all of the services involved with them, there was a question as to whether the timing had been right.

There were also questions as to whether the reforms had been adequately funded as all Councils had experienced a year on year increase in demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs)

and whether health partners were contributing effectively, for example, were all partners contributing equally to continuing care funding?

Decreasing levels of inclusion for SEND pupils in mainstream schools had resulted in increased use of special and independent settings which resulted in additional costs. Whilst it was recognised that there would be a proportion of children and young people whose needs could only be met within specialist or independent settings, for many young people this was not always in their best interests and perhaps mainstream education with appropriate support in place would be more appropriate.

As previously mentioned, a significant proportion of finances within the special needs sector was spent on home to school transport and also on tribunals. The ultimate question was who benefited from the tribunals and could that money be better spent on meeting the needs of the children.

The Panel was informed that the demand for EHCPs had increased from around 200,000 in 2014 to more than 450,000 in 2021.

In terms of funding, SEND was a major challenge for all Councils, with many being in significant deficit due to the High Needs Block (HNB). The HNB of the Direct Schools Grant was the money allocated to children with SEND. There was a total deficit across the country of approximately £970 million.

The DfE had committed to investing £2.5 billion between 2021/22 – 2022/23 into the High Needs Block and this was for funding special needs school places, although the finer detail was not yet available.

A 'Safety Valve' project was in place to support the Councils with the biggest Direct Schools Grant (DSG) deficits as a percentage of their entire DSG. The Safety Value would help Councils with their funding and would not appear on the Council's financial balance sheet as it was a statutory override, however, this was due to end in March 2023.

The Government recognised that despite the reforms, children and young people with SEND, and those educated in alternative provision, often felt unsupported, and their outcomes fell behind those of their peers. Many parents faced difficulties and delays in accessing support for their child.

Subsequently, in 2019, the Government commissioned the SEND Review to understand these challenges better and determine what would be required to establish a system that consistently delivers for children and young people with SEND.

It was proposed to establish a single national SEND and alternative provision system, setting out clear standards for provision that children and young people should expect to receive, the processes that should be in place to access it, irrespective of their need or where they lived.

The main aims of the review were to:-

- End the 'postcode lottery' facing children and young people with SEND.
- Increase mainstream inclusion.
- Align incentives and accountabilities.
- Clarify why demand for EHCPs continued to rise.
- Best use of resource and high quality outcomes.

The Review had been delayed due to Covid but the Green Paper was expected imminently. It was anticipated that the likely themes would include greater inclusion of children with SEND in mainstream provision that would be properly resourced, for example, teaching in smaller groups, in low-stimulus settings.

The Panel was informed that the LGA's lobbying priorities were as follows:-

- Clear local accountabilities – with Councils as system leaders.

- Joint decision making on use of resources – Council/schools/health.
- Reduction in the use of tribunals (consider value for money where they are used).
- Major reforms will take time – interim arrangements needed.
- Short and long term sufficiency of funding.
- Would a national approach raise expectations again?
- Links with Care Review and Education White Paper.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to the LGA lobbying Government in relation to funding and the deficits regarding the DSG and it was queried how Councillors could support best this.
- A Panel Member also made reference to the importance of examining mainstream provision, where appropriate, for children with SEND and expressed the opinion that more should be done to hold academies to account in this regard and would like to see Ofsted put more pressure on academies to focus on SEND provision. It was queried whether academies were spending an appropriate proportion of funding on SEND pupils and how the Council could ensure that academies were doing their fair share.
- In response, the Panel was informed that there were conversations taking place with the Regional Schools Commissioner who was responsible for those academies locally but that individual partnerships were vital in playing a part. The majority of multi-academy trusts would agree that they wanted to do a good job for children with SEND. In terms of continuing to lobby for adequate funding, Ofsted, as the regulator, had a role to play. ADSO and Regional Local Authority finance directors were also pushing hard for this to be recognised. Through Directors of Finance and potentially through local MPs continual lobbying will be helpful. It was on the radar of the Regional Schools Commissioners and the DfE that there was a need for this to be addressed.
- The Executive Director of Children's Services provided a brief response in a Middlesbrough context in relation to demand for EHCPs. It was stated that demand was extremely high and continued to grow which was putting extra pressure on the service. Additional staff had been brought in to cope with demand. The Executive Director advised that she chaired the Strategic Board, which had oversight of ongoing pressures. Middlesbrough did not currently qualify for the 'Safety Valve' project, however, was part of the 'Delivering Best Value' programme which sat underneath the Safety Valve project. Middlesbrough had a budget deficit in terms of spending on SEND and was to be offered a financial advisor to advise on SEND spending. Finally, the number of tribunals in Middlesbrough was low and there had not been any within the last two-and-a-half years.
- A Member commented that as many SEND children as possible needed to be integrated into mainstream school, where appropriate, as it also helped mainstream children to understand the various needs of others and to help support them.

The Chair thanked the LGA Children's Improvement Advisor for her attendance and the information provided.

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted.

#### **UPDATE – CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

The Executive Director of Children's Services provided the Panel with update on progress on the Children's Services Improvement Plan in the context of the most recent Ofsted monitoring visit to Children's Services in December 2021.

The second Ofsted Monitoring Visit since the full inspection in 2019, took place on 14 and 15 December 2021 and was undertaken by two inspectors following two weeks of preparation and liaison.

The focus of the visit was: Children in Need; Children in Need of Protection and Public Law Outline.

The Ofsted letter was published on 31 January 2022 and was circulated with the agenda prior to the meeting.

A summary of strengths was provided as follows:-

- No child was found to be at risk of immediate harm or in need of urgent action. (Significant progress from the 2019 inspection when more than 10 children were found to be at immediate risk).
- Senior Managers know their services well and had a realistic understanding of progress. (Again, significant progress as the 2019 inspection found a lack of awareness around being inadequate).
- There had been successful focus on improving the capacity of staff, decreasing caseloads and employing more permanent, qualified and experienced staff. (Recruitment and retention of staff (particularly recruitment) continued to be an issue. There was currently a £5,000 'welcome' payment to attract experienced, qualified Social Workers, however, it was having limited impact. Despite being valued, Middlesbrough continued to have a higher number of agency staff than it would like).
- Auditing was a particular strength – a wide in-depth coverage of the quality of the service with a robust moderation process.
- Successful focus on compliance.
- Appropriate focus on improving the quality of practice through increased training and learning opportunities.
- 'Some' examples of good practice. (Where planning (Smart plans) for children was good).
- Stronger practice where there were immediate safeguarding concerns and children on the edge of care.
- Social Workers:-
  - Knew their children and had enthusiasm and passion for improving their lives.
  - Felt supported during lockdowns.
  - Reported how Children's Services had improved and that they were better supported to do their work.

In terms of areas for development:-

- There was still a stubborn 20% of inadequate practice where concerns were not addressed and work was not progressing appropriately. However, in Early Help, all work was 'required improvement' or better. (Since the letter was published, this figure had reduced to around 10% in some areas of practice, but further work was required to reduce further).
- Plans and planning were not focused and lacked timescales relevant to the child. This led to delays in progressing plans so some children remained in situations where their needs were not met or risks sufficiently managed.
- Insufficient focus on the lived experience of the child. (Need to think more about what life is like for the child on a daily basis, such as are they going to school hungry? Is the home warm?).



- Social work tools not sufficiently used to focus on patterns of behaviour and cumulative risk. (Sometimes issues were looked at in isolation and consideration not always given to issues that had occurred in the past/patterns of behaviour).
- In the main, supervision was not sufficiently driving improvements, management recording of decision making was too limited. (One to ones with Social Workers were happening but not yet driving improvements in practice).
- Positive steps had been taken to improve pre-proceedings work but management oversight did not always identify what needed to change. (Need to be more explicit in telling families what specific changes were needed).
- Evidence of a risk averse culture.
  - Some families found themselves subject to statutory Child Protection planning when not needed, eg families who needed support but worked well with Social Workers and other agencies. (The Panel heard that this was based on evidence from only two cases).
  - Small number of Safety Plans were still in place when cases closed when other support packages would be more appropriate. (This had been worked on over the last few months).

In terms of the next steps, the Children's Services Improvement Plan would be revised to reflect Ofsted's findings.

The Panel was advised that Middlesbrough had been fortunate to secure grant funding of £330,000, from the DfE which had been used to bring in experienced Practice Leaders to support quality of practice.

The next Ofsted Monitoring visit would take place on 29/30<sup>th</sup> March 2022 and would focus on:-

- Court Work
- Children and young people who had been looked after for a year or more
- Permanence – moving children to their forever homes.

An Annual Engagement Meeting with Ofsted would take place in April. (Common to all authorities).

Work was continuing to ensure a more 'joined up' approach with partners and work was being undertaken to prepare for a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI).

There would be a further Monitoring Visit in June 2022 and it was possible that the full inspection would take place towards the end of the year.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Reference was made to the £5,000 welcome incentive for qualified Social Workers and it was queried whether there were conditions attached which might be acting as a deterrent to take up. The Executive Director stated that the incentive had not been in place for long, however, she had hoped for a quicker response, but felt it was generally attributable to a lack of experienced Social Workers which was a regional and national issue. The incentive was not open to newly qualified social workers as they were unable to take on complex work initially. It was highlighted that the only condition was that a proportion of the welcome payment must be repaid if they left within the first year. It was highlighted that a three-year retention allowance programme had been introduced which had been more successful.
- A Member acknowledged that £5,000 was a good incentive to attract Social Workers but queried how Middlesbrough compared with other Tees Valley authorities in terms of salary. The Executive Director responded that whilst Middlesbrough's was not the lowest salary in the

region, it was also not the highest which was one of the reasons that the recruitment and retention incentives had been introduced. It was also important to put Middlesbrough on the map and to continue improving practice to show people that Middlesbrough was a good place to live and work and it was possible that people were deterred by the fact that Middlesbrough was currently rated as an 'inadequate' authority as they could not see the improvements being made.

- Reference was made to the 20% inadequate practice and it was queried which areas were of most concern and what was being done to address it. The Executive Director responded that there was a variation across the directorates but the key to addressing inadequate practice was to carry out audits and improve through learning. Some audits were themed, for example, looking at visits by Social Workers and by trends. Training and development could be provided where appropriate or even support provided from the Practice Leaders. It was vital to use learning to improve practice – learning through audits, complaints, comments, scrutiny, corporate parenting, etc, and it had improved greatly in some areas. Transparency was also key to improving by understanding the current position.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director for her presentation.

**AGREED** that the information provided be noted.

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair provided the Panel with a verbal update in relation to the business conducted by the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 22 February 2022, namely:-

- Executive forward work programme.
- Executive Member Update – Councillor Hill, Executive Member for Culture and Communities (and previously Executive Member for Education).
- Chief Executive's Update.
- Scrutiny Panels' Chair's Updates.
- Revenue and Capital Budget – Projected Outturn as at Quarter 3 2021/22.
- Corporate Performance Update – Quarter 3 2021/22.
- Next OSB meeting – Wed, 23 March 2022 at 10.00am

### **DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled for Tuesday, 26 April 2022 at 4.00pm.

**MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL**

<p><b>DRAFT FINAL REPORT CHILDREN &amp; YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE &amp; SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL 26 APRIL 2022 LOCALITY WORKING FROM A CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERSPECTIVE</b></p>
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## **AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION**

1. The aim of the investigation was to examine what impact the locality working pilots in Newport and North Ormesby were having on Children's Services.

## **MAYOR'S/COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

2. The scrutiny of this topic fits within the following priorities of the Mayor and Council:-
  - People – Children and Young People: "We will show Middlesbrough's children that they matter and work to make our town safe and welcoming and to improve outcomes for all children and young people."
  - People – Vulnerability: "We will work to address the causes of vulnerability and inequalities in Middlesbrough and safeguard and support those made vulnerable."

## **COUNCIL'S THREE CORE AIMS**

3. The scrutiny of this topic aligns with the Council's three core aims as detailed in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024<sup>1</sup>:-
  - People – Working with communities and other public services in Middlesbrough to improve the lives of local people.
  - Place – Securing improvements in Middlesbrough's housing, infrastructure and attractiveness, improving the town's reputation, creating opportunities for local people and improving our finances.
  - Business – Promoting investment in Middlesbrough's economy and making sure we work as effectively as possible to support our ambitions for People and Place".

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE**

4. The terms of reference for the Scrutiny Panel's investigation were as follows:-
  - A) To examine how Locality Working operates and will be developed in the pilot areas.
  - B) To understand how the impact of Locality Working for Children's Services will be measured and how any future roll out of the model in other areas of the town will be determined.
  - C) To identify best practice from other local authorities where locality working for Children's Services is working well.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION/EVIDENCE GATHERED**

5. In line with the Terms of Reference, the Scrutiny Panel gathered a range of evidence in relation to the Locality Working pilot model currently operating in Newport and North Ormesby and its impact specifically in relation to Children's Services.

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<sup>1</sup> Middlesbrough Council's Strategic Plan 2021-24

## **The Place Based Approach/Locality Working**

6. A place based approach, or locality working, involves a system change to the current operational delivery model across Council services, with the aim of achieving joined-up systems and a multi-agency approach between statutory organisations, relevant partners and the community, and to develop collaborative approaches to address the underlying causes of community problems whilst building strength and resilience within the community.
7. Evidence shows that there are benefits in having multi-agency teams working together from one location. For example, in some instances, the need for referrals can be reduced as a simple conversation with a member of the team can identify the most appropriate course of action, and through better information sharing, there are opportunities to identify support needs early and, therefore, proactively intervene to prevent crisis.
8. Another benefit of Locality Working is improved access for the local community as they have a single point of referral via the locality team. Quite often, people in need of advice or help require more than one service and may need multiple services' support.

## **Locality Working in Middlesbrough**

9. On 8 October 2019, the Council's Executive approved proposals to implement two locality working pilot programmes, in Newport and North Ormesby, which would run for a period of two years.
10. Data gathered from a wide range of sources, including directly from the community and analysis on demand for Council services, supported the proposal for the pilot programmes to be implemented in the Newport and North Ormesby wards.
11. Through the pilot programmes there is an opportunity to 'make every contact count' and to focus on delivering services based on the service recipients and the communities in which they live.
12. In the context of Middlesbrough as a whole, 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.
13. 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.
14. 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%.
15. Levels of teenage pregnancy, GCSE attainment, breastfeeding and smoking in pregnancy are also worse than the England average.
16. Across Middlesbrough the rate for self-harm hospital admissions is worse than the average for England. This represents 486 admissions per year in Middlesbrough.

## **Background – Why Newport Ward?**

17. Newport Ward is the **fifth** most deprived ward in Middlesbrough (moving from the 123rd most deprived ward nationally in 2007 to the 38th most deprived ward nationally in 2015). In addition, Newport has:-

- The third highest number of recorded racially motivated crimes (with only Central and North Ormesby having more).
- The second highest rate of female victims of violent crime<sup>2</sup>.
- The third highest number of alcohol-related hospital admissions to James Cook University Hospital<sup>3</sup>.
- The third highest number of alcohol and substance related ambulance pick-ups<sup>4</sup>.
- High levels of anti-social behaviour.
- Second highest levels of fly-tipping<sup>5</sup>.

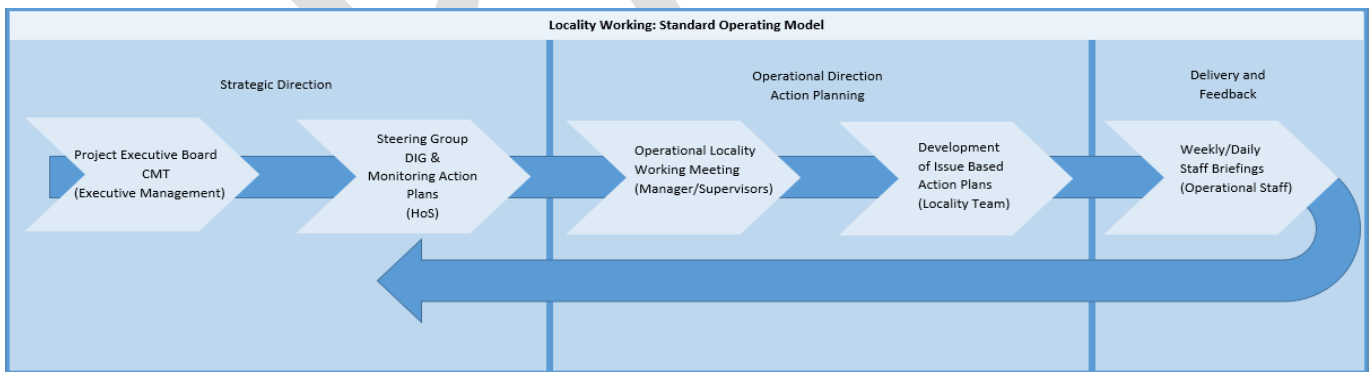
### **Background – Why North Ormesby Ward?**

18. North Ormesby is **the most** deprived ward in Middlesbrough and **second** most deprived ward in England. In addition, North Ormesby has:-

- The second highest number of recorded racially motivated crimes.
- The highest rate of female victims of violent crime<sup>6</sup>.
- The highest rate of male victims of violent crime<sup>7</sup>.
- The second highest number of alcohol and substance related ambulance pick-ups<sup>8</sup>.
- The highest level of anti-social behaviour<sup>9</sup>.
- Second highest levels of fly-tipping<sup>10</sup>.
- Highest number of Children Looked After (with unemployment levels more than six times the national average and more than 60% of children deemed to be living in poverty).

### **Locality Working – Governance Structure**

19. Below is a flow diagram showing the governance structure for the Locality Working standard operating model.



<sup>2</sup> Recorded 2018/19 per 1,000 population.

<sup>3</sup> Recorded admissions 2018/19.

<sup>4</sup> Recorded data 2018/19.

<sup>5</sup> Incidents reported to Middlesbrough Council in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Recorded 2018/19 per 1,000 population.

<sup>7</sup> Recorded 2018/19 per 1,000 population.

<sup>8</sup> Recorded data 2018/29

<sup>9</sup> Cleveland Police data 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2019.

<sup>10</sup> Incidents reported to Middlesbrough Council in 2019.

20. Strategic direction is provided by the Project Executive Board and Corporate Management Team made up of senior managers within the Council. A strategic Design and Implementation Group (DIG) was initially established until the pilots were up and running and a Steering Group to monitor all locality Action Plans remains in place. The strategic direction feeds into the operational direction and action planning via the Operational Locality Working meeting with Managers and Supervisors and the development of issue-based action plans within the locality teams. Finally, delivery and feedback is undertaken through the weekly or daily staff briefings with operational staff.
21. Meetings at an operational level are well attended by appropriate partner representatives in both Newport and North Ormesby. The meetings have been held virtually due to the Covid pandemic but this has enabled consistent communication with key partners. In addition, both Locality Neighbourhood Managers communicate on a regular basis and often attend each other's locality meetings in order to keep up to date with what is happening in each area.

### **Implementation of the Pilot Programmes**

22. On 18 February 2020, the Executive approved a phased approach to the implementation of the Locality Working Pilots in Newport and North Ormesby, together with the respective staffing resource allocations based on demand and need within the communities.
23. Staffing resources were initially set, with scope to adapt and develop over time as the pilots became more embedded. However, the aim of locality working is not to merge staff from existing teams together in a single team under one roof, but rather to work as a collective from within their own departments and organisations. Multi-agency liaison is taking place much more freely under the locality working model and designated bases – at the Co-operative Building, Linthorpe Road for the Newport Team and North Ormesby Hub, Derwent Street for the North Ormesby Team – are now established.
24. There are some differences between the two pilot programmes, mainly in terms of the partners involved and management of the two pilots.
25. The Panel heard that during the process of establishing the locality working pilot the Council was keen to ensure that the programme was not perceived as an exclusive Council project. Following discussions with Thirteen Housing and other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to ascertain whether there was interest in partnering with the Council to deliver the pilot, Thirteen Housing agreed to partner the Council and to part fund both of the locality Neighbourhood Manager posts.
26. North Ormesby already had an existing Neighbourhood Manager in post which was funded 50/50 by Thirteen Housing and Middlesbrough Council, therefore, this post was incorporated into the pilot model for North Ormesby. The post holder in North Ormesby has a Thirteen Housing contract of employment.
27. In Newport, the successful candidate for the post of Neighbourhood Manager was already employed by Middlesbrough Council, therefore, the post holder has a Middlesbrough Council contract of employment.
28. A series of priorities and objectives were established for both localities based on data analysis and a range of community engagement exercises and surveys to ascertain community priorities and aspirations. As a result, nine key themes were developed within both pilot localities, together with appropriate service leads. Individual multi-agency Action Plans were developed in respect of each of the thematic areas and these are reviewed on a monthly basis.

29. The nine themes are as follows (with the appropriate service lead identified in brackets):-
- Making people feel safe (Police)
  - Healthier population (Public Health)
  - Better economic outcomes (Education & Partnerships Team)
  - Better outcomes for children (Children's Social Care)
  - Improved environmental standards (Environment & Community Services)
  - Improved physical appearance (Environment & Community Services)
  - Improved customer experience (Stronger Communities)
  - Improved community capacity (Thirteen Housing)
  - Improved perceptions (Thirteen Housing)
30. All locality action plans have smart targets and actions and are linked to the Performance Management Framework (PMF) indicators. These indicators are also used to monitor impact and progress.

### **Who is involved in Locality Working?**

31. A wide range of Council services and partners are involved in working in the locality working pilot areas. Partnership involvement is crucial to the success of locality working in order to work in a collaborative way to improve outcomes for the people of Middlesbrough.
32. As each locality has its own priority issues, this determines the partners that need to be involved in that area and the level of engagement required, although many services and partners are common to both localities. Key partners include statutory services such as Police, Health, Housing providers, some specialist commissioned services, local voluntary and community organisations and further links to schools, GPs, pharmacies and other partners, and of course, residents.

### **General impact so far**

33. In terms of impact, it is difficult to put a figure on how many people the locality working pilots have reached as the outcomes the pilots aim to achieve may impact on people who do not necessarily engage with staff. For example, improvements in environmental standards – the 'flying squad' works across the full ward and everyone living near an area that has been improved will benefit from improvements, however, there may be no direct interaction with some of those residents. This does not mean that they have not been impacted by locality working. Another example of reaching the community through locality working is the numerous Covid vaccine pop up sites within both localities achieved through joint working particularly with Public Health colleagues. The locality teams aim to positively impact everyone living within the wards in some way.
34. The locality team also engages with residents and businesses across both areas, including schools, community groups, voluntary sector organisations and youth outreach. The teams regularly liaise with local business owners to ensure their views and concerns are included within the action planning process.
35. Resident surveys show that public perception has improved within both localities. Surveys were carried out with residents in Newport and North Ormesby, initially in September 2020, with further surveys linked to indicators undertaken in March and September 2021. The results of the surveys, in relation people feeling safe, are as follows:-



<b><u>Newport</u></b>	<b><u>September 2020</u></b>	<b><u>March 2021</u></b>	<b><u>September 2021</u></b>
Feeling safe during the day	31.18%	35.49%	68.65%
Feeling safe after dark	9.68%	12.9%	48.98%
<b><u>North Ormesby</u></b>			
Feeling safe during the day	32.61%	51.51%	77.14%
Feeling safe after dark	13.04%	21.21%	31.42%

36. This shows that there has already been a significant improvement in perceptions of safety in both localities.
37. In addition, surveys have also shown that the number of people indicating their intent to continue living in the area for longer has increased. On that note, in 2021, house prices in North Ormesby experienced the fastest increase than anywhere else in Teesside with an increase of 51% on the previous year<sup>11</sup>
38. Impact data more specific to Children's Services within the two localities is provided starting at paragraph 61.

#### **Better Outcomes for Children**

39. The 'Better Outcomes for Children' Action Plan has the key objectives of: creating stronger families; increasing educational attainment; reducing child sexual exploitation (CSE) and criminal exploitation and reducing the numbers of children looked after.
40. Staff from Children's Services have been in-situ virtually within the localities for some time, including dedicated Officers from Children's Social Care, Early Help and the Risk and Resilience teams. All attend weekly officer meetings and the Children and Families Working Group to look at key issues as they arise.
41. The Children's Services Action Plan is led by a Senior Social Worker and is reviewed on a monthly basis. Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF) indicators, whether negative or positive, are fed back to the Strategic group for further discussion/assistance and regular progress reports are produced for assurance purposes and for the Executive.

<sup>11</sup> Evening Gazette article 05/02/22 [The Teesside neighbourhoods with the fastest growing house prices - Teesside Live \(gazettelive.co.uk\)](https://www.gazettelive.co.uk)

## Children's Services in the Localities

42. In addition to staff from Early Help and Children's Social Care working across both localities for some time, the Risk and Resilience Team is leading on a multi-agency plan to tackle child exploitation and youth outreach work is delivered in both localities.

### Early Help

43. Stronger Families, or Early Help, currently have three dedicated Senior Practitioners allocated to the localities – two assigned to Newport and one assigned to North Ormesby.
44. Any referrals requiring Early Help support in Newport and North Ormesby are received via the Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH), the 'front door' of Children's Services (in the same way referrals are received across the whole of Middlesbrough) and are allocated immediately to the Practitioners working within the localities. Case allocations are made on a daily basis to ensure families receive a swift response, and families are contacted by the Practitioner within three days.
45. Sometimes cases are 'stepped down' to Early Help services from Social Work teams where social care intervention is no longer required, but some form of additional support is still needed.
46. When Early Help Practitioners within the localities have high caseloads, the cases are allocated to Practitioners across the wider service. Whilst Team Managers and Assistant Managers work hard to try to avoid this happening, this is not always possible as demand for early help services across Middlesbrough is high.

### Caseloads

47. As of November 2021, the caseloads open to Early Help Practitioners in both localities was as follows:-

	Senior Practitioner North Ormesby	Senior Practitioner (1) Newport	Senior Practitioner (2) Newport	Totals
No. of children on caseload	34	29	28	91
No. of families	14	14	13	41
Children whose cases are open for less than 6 months	22	16	20	58

48. It is worth noting, when looking at the above figures, that the number of families being worked with is significantly lower than the number of children being worked with. This is because Practitioners work with every child within each household and, therefore, work with multiple children per family.

49. The Panel heard that the ideal number of caseloads for an Early Help Practitioner is around 25-26 children. Whilst caseloads are slightly high, they are at a manageable level and have begun to reduce.

#### Children's Social Care (Social Work Teams)

50. Initially, one Social Worker was allocated to each of the localities but it was soon discovered that this was insufficient to cope with demand. Resources were subsequently increased to two dedicated Social Workers in Newport and three dedicated Social Workers in North Ormesby.
51. Referrals to Social Care (statutory interventions) are also made via the MACH by professionals working with children or by families. In instances where the family is new to Social Care and does not already have a Social Worker, they are assessed by the Assessment Service. Where it is identified that further work is needed the family is transferred to the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service. At this point, when case allocations are made, where the child/family live in Newport or North Ormesby, they will be allocated to a Social Worker assigned to those localities.
52. There are instances, however, where children from Newport or North Ormesby are allocated to Social Workers who are not assigned to the localities in order to avoid children having changes in Social Worker. As children's cases progress, there will be an eventual move towards stronger consistency of Social Workers within the locality model.
53. To improve consistency and alleviate pressures with case allocations and throughput, a single Social Work Team was established in November 2021. The dedicated team consists of a Team Manager and six Social Workers – five dedicated to working across both the Newport and North Ormesby localities and a sixth Social Worker for additional capacity when and if needed. It is now a priority to allocate Newport and North Ormesby families to this team.

#### Caseloads

54. All Social Workers within the statutory Social Care teams across the town are allocated no more than 25 children each. At the time the information was provided to the Panel (November 2021), some locality Social Workers continued to work with families outside of the localities, and some non-locality workers continued to work with families in the localities, therefore, it was not possible to provide a true breakdown of caseloads for social workers within the localities at this stage.

#### Benefits

55. Early Help and Social Care staff work closely together within the localities, and across Middlesbrough, to ensure that any 'step up' or 'step down' of services is seamless. Staff generally feel locality working is a positive step with real benefits, such as:-
- Joint visits with other professionals working in the same area
  - Families in the respective localities recognising staff when they are in the locality
  - Greater knowledge of the community and partners particularly with neighbourhood wardens and housing colleagues
  - Improved relationships with schools in the localities as practitioners are working with children attending the same few schools and can therefore build up stronger relationships
  - More effective use of professional time
  - A reduction in mileage

56. In terms of feedback from staff and service users, a quote provided from a Senior Early Help Practitioner in relation to their views on locality working, states:

- *"I do really think the concept works, or if I put it another way I really would not want to go back to Town Wide working."*

From families receiving support:

- *"It brought A out of himself and he is doing a lot better than he was, she was really nice to talk to."*
- *"The support has been well received and everything is going well."*
- *"This time last year I was so depressed, now I am working and have a nice house, I don't struggle to get out of bed anymore."*

#### What's Not Working so Well?

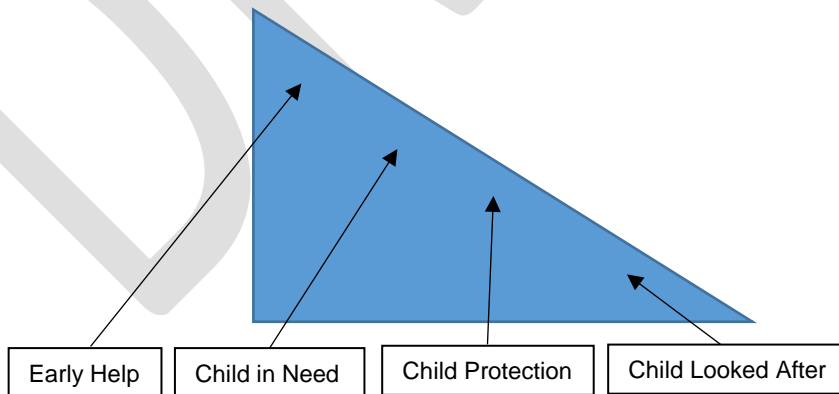
57. The impact of Covid and subsequent virtual working has made it more difficult to build working relationships between some partners, however, this is starting to improve now that there is a gradual return to a mix of office-based and virtual working arrangements.

58. Whilst Early Help services are operating successfully across Middlesbrough, staff feel that there are not sufficient numbers of Early Help Practitioners assigned to the two localities.

59. In general, there appears to be a lack of awareness of the pilot programmes with some services and partners.

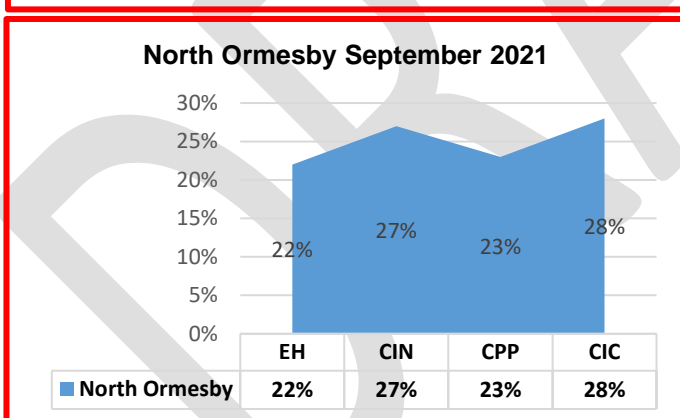
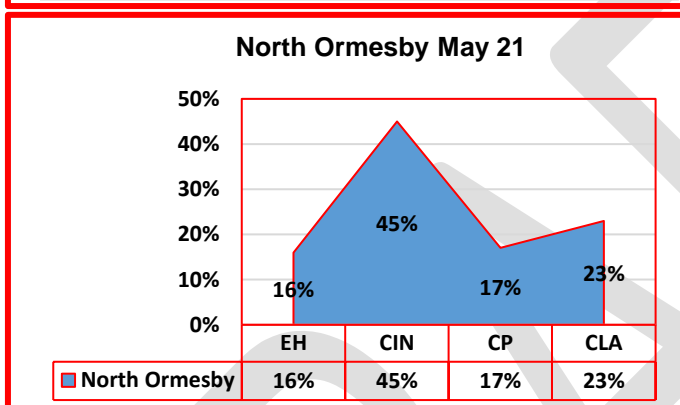
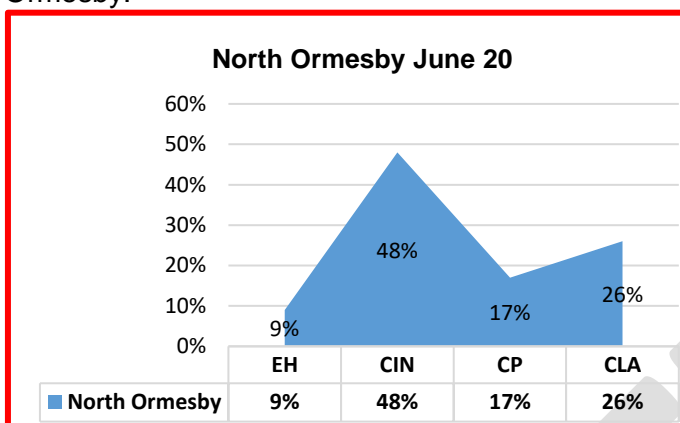
#### Impact so far

60. The Panel heard that the 'ideal shape' of service provision for Children's Social Care was to have the highest levels of provision in early help, meaning more children and families were being helped at an earlier stage with less statutory intervention being required. This was followed by support provision for children in need, child protection and finally children looked after – where the aim is to have the lowest number possible.

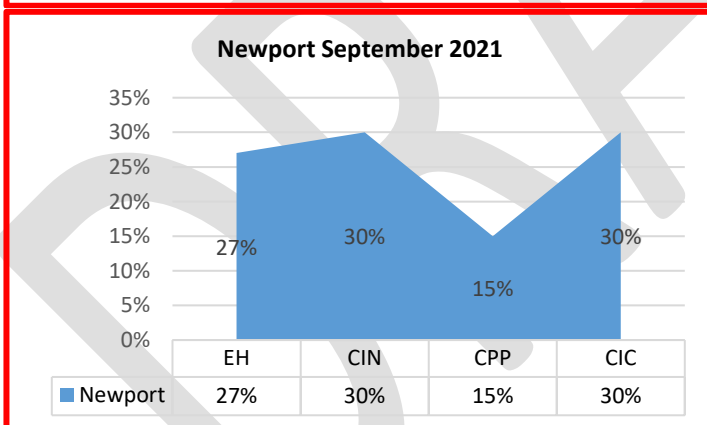
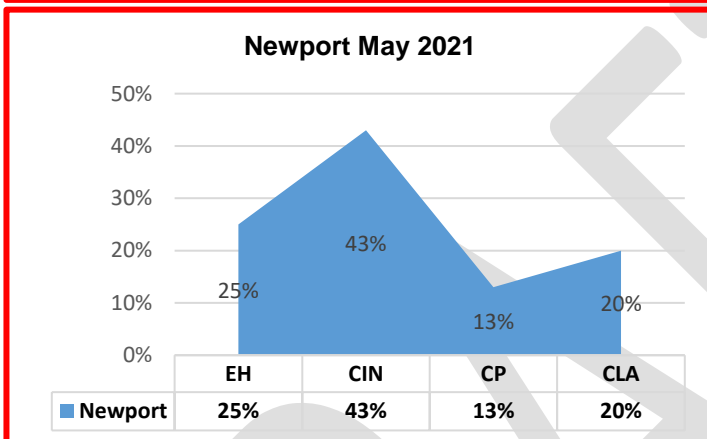
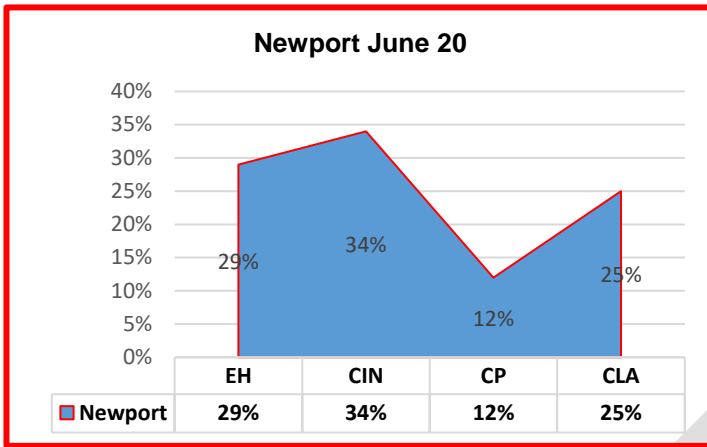


61. From the graphs below, it can be seen that in North Ormesby, in June 2020, there was little Early Help activity (9%); a high number of children in need (48%); less child protection cases (17%) but higher numbers of children looked after (26%). By May 2021, it can be seen that Early Help activity increased to 16%, however, children in need (45%) and children looked after (23%) remained high. By September 2021, Early Help had significantly increased (22%), children in need reduced to 27%

and child protection work increased to 23%. The number of children looked after remains high (28%), however, it shows positive progress in that more Early Help work is happening in North Ormesby.



62. Data in respect of Newport shows that in June 2020 levels of Early Help were already quite high at 29%, this reduced slightly in May 2021 (25%) but increased slightly by September 2021 to 27%, therefore, Early Help provision appears stable. Numbers of children in need remain quite high and the numbers of children looked after increased from 25% in June 2020 to 30% in September 2021. From the data, it would appear that locality working in Newport may not be working quite as successfully as in North Ormesby in terms of children's social care.



**Partner Services and Organisations**

63. As part of its review, over the course of several meetings, the Panel invited a number of representatives from a range of Council services and partner organisations to discuss their involvement in the locality working pilots in order to provide a better understanding of how a multi-agency approach is working to improve outcomes for children and families.

64. The following partners attended:-

- Early Help
- Children’s Social Care

- Public Health South Tees
- Selective Landlord Licensing/Public Protection
- Newport Primary School
- Newport Neighbourhood Police
- Youth Focus North East
- Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland
- North Ormesby Primary Academy
- North Ormesby Neighbourhood Police
- Children's Centre
- Community Safety/Street Wardens

65. Each of the represented partners was asked to provide information in relation to their service/organisation and explain their understanding of the locality working pilots; how their service/organisation works within the pilots and how they are working with partners to achieve better outcomes for children and families in the localities. A summary is provided below.

Selective Landlord Licensing/Public Protection

66. Selective Licensing is a scheme which aims to improve the standards of property management in the private rental housing sector. All private landlords operating within a designated Selective Landlord Licensing area are required to obtain a license from the Council for each property which is rented out. The conditions of the license ensure that the property is managed effectively, and license holders must demonstrate their compliance.
67. The Selective Landlord Licensing scheme currently runs in North Ormesby and part of Newport ward, to help improve standards of accommodation, and social and economic conditions. Evidence shows that significant and ongoing anti-social behaviour coupled with low demand for housing are linked to the private rental sector in North Ormesby and Newport.
68. The Selective Landlord Licensing Team sits within the Council's Public Protection Service. The wider Public Protection Service has always worked in an integrated way with Children's Services across the whole of Middlesbrough, however, locality working affords greater opportunities and a framework for such work to be carried out more collaboratively. This includes Trading Standards who deal with age-restricted products including alcohol and cigarette sales which can impact adversely on young people.
69. More specifically, the Selective Landlord Licensing Team works closely with Early Help services, for example, Early Help may be working with a family living in a property in state of poor disrepair. This would be brought to the attention of the Selective Landlord Licensing Team and a joint visit would be undertaken, often including officers from Environmental Health, to inspect the property and assess whether it met an acceptable living standard.
70. When inspection or post-tenancy visits are undertaken, a checklist is used to ascertain whether the family is working with any other services and asked whether they feel they require help/support from any other services.
71. The Selective Landlord Licensing Team attend child protection meetings which feed into support plans for children and families and regularly liaise with Social Workers to discuss whether families meet thresholds for Early Help support or safeguarding concerns in order to make referrals where appropriate. Whilst carrying out housing inspections, any concerns are raised with Early Help or Social Care teams where appropriate.

72. The Team also works in conjunction with the Neighbourhood Safety Team in relation to anti-social behaviour issues, including preparing anti-social behaviour contracts, and they liaise with Social Workers, where applicable. In instances where a child/young person is committing anti-social behaviour, a referral will be made.
73. With the aim of tackling anti-social behaviour in both localities, the Neighbourhood Safety Officer has established a fortnightly meeting with any Social Workers allocated to the young people involved to discuss ways forward and solutions.
74. The Selective Landlord Licensing Team can see the value of locality work and feels that the pilot projects are making good progress despite being hampered somewhat due to the Covid pandemic. *"There are real benefits in being located alongside partners to resolve issues more quickly"*.

#### Public Health

75. Public Health works with partners and local communities across Middlesbrough and beyond to promote, prevent and protect the health and well-being of local residents, of all ages with a particular focus on vulnerable people.
76. It works collaboratively to reduce mortality and morbidity from preventable causes by addressing lifestyle risk factors and is responsible for commissioning a variety of services such as sexual health services, drug and alcohol services, stop smoking services, school nursing and health visiting services. In addition, the service works with partners to address mental health and emotional wellbeing; obesity and nutrition; physical inactivity; workplace health; aging well; and diabetes and cardiovascular disease prevention.
77. The 'Live Well Centre', located in Dundas Arcade, Middlesbrough, is an integrated health and wellbeing hub, bringing together a range of externally contracted and internally delivered wellbeing services to holistically tackle some of the leading causes of health inequalities in Middlesbrough and support town-wide social regeneration.
78. Public Health has been involved in the locality working projects since inception, with two dedicated members of staff attached to the pilot projects – one in Newport and one in North Ormesby.
79. Public Health operates within the locality teams in its widest sense – to develop community engagement links; to ensure all services working within the locality teams are aware that they can approach public health with any concerns regarding health and wellbeing within the localities; signposting - directing people to services such as drug and alcohol services; helping with mental health and wellbeing.
80. In terms of the wider aspects of the project, Public Health staff regularly take part in community walkabouts and litter picks and make themselves known to local street wardens and residents to raise awareness about how they can help to improve health and wellbeing for families.
81. In terms of Public Health's involvement in the Children's Social Care agenda, within Newport, work has been undertaken in relation to improving the school environment, working with Middlesbrough Environment City, signposting regarding poverty and provision of quarterly data on child development and breast feeding rates in the area. Public Health wants to promote pro-active working with all other services and agencies to improve outcomes for people living in the area.



82. The Public Health Team considers that in some ways Covid has helped to raise its profile and the wide range of services it offers by showing that services can work differently to address people's needs. Indeed, different ways of working forced by the pandemic have been more effective than ever considered possible.
83. Public Health is always keen to join any new approaches where there is real co-ordination and partnership working as this is essential to supporting families. It is acknowledged that some partners working within the localities are not fully aware of the wide breadth of services offered through Public Health and this requires further promotion. The pandemic has hampered achieving some of the aims set out by locality working – particularly where cross-office conversations may be beneficial in order to build relationships - and it is hoped this will be regained in the near future when safe to do so.
84. Public Health is supportive of a multi-agency approach on a wider scale in the future and feels this is the best way to address all of the issues that can affect an individual's health and wellbeing.
85. In many ways, the vision is that locality working hubs will operate in a similar vein to the principle of the Live Well Centre – where an individual with multiple needs can attend the centre and engage with a 'Motivator' who will address all of their needs, either directly or by engaging them with the appropriate services, such as drug and alcohol services, welfare rights, sexual health, mental health resources, etc. The locality working hubs offer similar opportunities to link into already funded services, whether that be a Council service, a Voluntary or Community Service or a national organisation. The key is to work better with the services that already exist and to build on the 'making every contact count' approach to make it the strength behind locality working.
86. From a Public Health perspective, improvements in outcomes in both localities are being recognised.

#### Newport Primary School

87. Newport Primary School is located within Newport ward. Whilst the school is not a driver of the locality working project it does work with services that support its children and families and their delivery model has changed as a result of the locality working pilot.
88. The areas where locality working has impacted most positively on the school include Early Help and Neighbourhood Safety.
89. In terms of Early Help, a Senior Practitioner is allocated to Newport and this has been very positive for the school, allowing positive relationships to be forged with school staff, children and families.
90. The Practitioner regularly attends the school to meet children and families and works with a range of agencies to help address multi-faceted issues and problems that families may be experiencing. For example, families may have problems with inadequate housing or difficulties with neighbours, which can impact children within the household. The Practitioner is knowledgeable about which agencies to contact to provide support to the family.
91. In relation to caseloads, due to the large numbers of families requiring support from the Early Help Practitioner, it is not possible for her to carry all of the caseloads alone. Whilst the Practitioner supports the majority of families with children attending the school, some cases have to be allocated to other practitioners, but even then the school is complimentary of the professional approach and attitude of all Early Help Practitioners.

92. The Panel also heard that the Neighbourhood Safety Team has made a significant difference to families within the school. It is often the case that many issues faced by families lay outside of the education framework but still impact on children. For example, poor housing conditions, noisy neighbours, children not sleeping, etc. The school is now able to contact the Neighbourhood Manager or one of the locality team to report the issues and will be quickly signposted to the correct services for support. This saves time for school staff and ensures families are helped in the best way possible.

#### Newport Neighbourhood Policing Team

93. The Newport Neighbourhood Policing Team works alongside the Locality hub in Newport, linking with various services across a range of issues, including regular multi-agency days and weeks of action. The Panel heard that services are working much more closely than they had in the past and that this is continuing to strengthen.
94. Regular Neighbourhood Safety drop-in sessions are held at Newport Community Hub and Streets Ahead for Information where residents are able to speak to officers from Neighbourhood Safety and Cleveland Police, in confidence, to report issues or to seek advice and support.
95. A programme of work with young people in the area is underway and a dedicated PCSO engages specifically with young people at Newport Hub in a range of activities including the Middlesbrough Foundation kick about. The dedicated PCSO is well-known and respected within the community which is helping to build relationships between young people in the area and the neighbourhood policing team.
96. Some of the barriers to building relationships include language and cultural barriers, however, these are beginning to be broken down.
97. The Newport Neighbourhood Policing Team feels that the multi-agency approach is beginning to work and progress is being made. It provides an opportunity for the Police to link to a range of services through the Newport Neighbourhood Manager and the locality team which assists greatly with tackling crime in the area. The most recent crime figures for Newport show a reduction – partly attributable to successful joint operations between the Police and the Council to close down problem houses/tenants. Once more serious crime reduces, there is increased opportunity for lower level issues to be dealt with.
98. The neighbourhood police regularly attend Newport Primary School to chat with parents and children at drop off and pick up times and consider that working with children from a young age helps to build relationships.

#### Youth Focus North East

99. Youth Focus North East (YFNE) is a young people's charity covering the north east, particularly East Middlesbrough, including North Ormesby. YFNE is currently funded through the Big Local lotto-funded initiative and is approximately half way through a 10-year funded period.
100. Youth provision is delivered in areas where none, or very little, exists. Young people in the area are initially consulted with to discover their aspirations and to encourage and instil that they are capable of achieving amazing things.

101. Youth provision is delivered on Mondays and Thursdays at North Ormesby Hub, Derwent Street, for young people aged 10 – 18 years and includes activities such as cooking healthy meals from scratch that they can take home and share with their families; arts-based activities, sports and, where appropriate, intervention-based work such as substance misuse and sexual health.
102. YFNE participate in the weekly North Ormesby locality team meetings which are key to enabling young people's voices to be heard and to help take forward their ideas to improve their community. For example, YFNE is funded to create social action projects, focussing on ideas that will benefit the community and make it a nicer place to live.
103. YFNE is working with the North Ormesby Locality Team in order to implement some of those ideas – such as recent community litter picks undertaken by young people and an art project where young people had created decorative boards to cover void property frontages within North Ormesby to improve their appearance. This work was undertaken in conjunction with the Council and Thirteen Housing. In addition, in conjunction with the Locality Team, a Community Awards event was organised to celebrate people within the community and a similar event was also held in Newport.
104. YFNE has excellent engagement with the local community, with many of its staff living within the locality, and has found it beneficial to work with other organisations to strive for shared aims and objectives on a larger scale.
105. YFNE is funded from external sources and is not directly funded by the Council which can sometimes result in the organisation being left out of the loop in terms of information sharing. For example, where other services are involved with young people and families in the community, YFNE are not always made aware of this involvement at the start despite the fact that they may already be engaging with those young people on a twice weekly basis. Issues being experienced by the individual might have been resolved more quickly had the information from other services been brought to the attention of YFNE much earlier, allowing collaborative working and less duplication.
106. YFNE attend some of the Children's Social Care locality meetings and have found this very beneficial as it provides an opportunity to share issues or concerns regarding young people they are engaging with, allowing liaison with the young person's social worker in order to determine whether any additional support could be provided to that young person by YFNE. This also helps to avoid duplication of provision.
107. In general, YFNE considers the locality working pilot in North Ormesby to be working well with good oversight provided by the North Ormesby Neighbourhood Manager and that the team focusing on the North Ormesby area is doing the best they can to achieve positive outcomes for the community.

#### Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland

108. Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland (TM&C) was launched by the Archbishop of York in December 2012 as an expression of the Church Urban Fund (CUF) in the Diocese of York. Its work is shaped by local people, churches and organisations to help strengthen communities.
109. TM&C aims to address a range of social issues and its key areas of work are: children and families, loneliness and isolation, homelessness, mental health and wellbeing, food insecurity and asylum seekers.
110. As one of the partners involved in the locality working pilot projects, TM&C representatives attend both locality meetings in Newport and North Ormesby on a weekly basis. This provides an excellent

opportunity to inform other partners of TM&C's activities and to be kept informed of all activities delivered by partners in the localities.

111. One of TM&C's key initiatives in relation to supporting children and families is the 'Feast of Fun'. TM&C is responsible for co-ordinating the Feast of Fun programme of fun activities and provision of healthy meals across Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland during school holiday periods. The aim of the project is to combat hunger during school holidays for vulnerable families who struggle to provide the cost of additional meals and entertainment for children outside of term time.
112. Funding for Feast of Fun provision is raised from external sources by TM&C each year. In turn TM&C supports around 40 churches and community organisations in order to deliver Feast of Fun within their own communities via small grants.
113. Whilst it is becoming increasingly difficult to access funding streams, one of the Feast of Fun's largest funding partners - Break, Meals and More – works closely with TM&C on an annual basis to ensure that the amount of funding available across Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland is identified at the start of each year.
114. Additional resources are also secured for other organisations that TM&C works with, such as Feast of Fun branding in order for organisations/groups to promote their activities in the community and co-ordinating and disseminating additional resources for groups to access, such as coach hire, free entry to tourist attractions, children's books, workshop providers, entertainers and healthy food ingredients. Some of the organisations TM&C works in partnership with include:-
  - Newport Hub
  - Streets Ahead for Information
  - Youth Focus North East
  - Linx
  - Trinity Young People and Children's Project
  - Local Schools
115. The Locality Team meetings, as referenced earlier, provide TM&C with the opportunity to share information in relation to Feast of Fun delivery periods, which organisations may wish to be involved in and identifying possible funding streams.
116. Locality Working facilitates discussion around specific families that may be in desperate need of support during the holidays. Families requiring support are identified by schools, or an organisation working with a school or organisation working with TM&C. They can apply to TM&C for funding in order to support those families. Locality Working allows all of the agencies to liaise with each other in order to identify the right support and requirements for the family so that they receive the most appropriate support.
117. In terms of impact, during 2019, the organisations that participated in Feast of Fun, delivered **13,000** meals to children at a cost of **£34,000**. During 2020, Feast of Fun became Feast of Fun at Home due to the pandemic and **86,000** meals were delivered, costing around **£82,000**. During 2021, the provision was delivered both remotely and face to face and the number of meals delivered again increased to **117,000**, requiring funding in the region of **£117,000**. Alongside those meals, organisations delivered activity packs during periods of lockdown.
118. During 2021 in Newport and North Ormesby, through the Feast of Fun, **1,292** children and young people were supported; **398** adults were supported and **10,441** meals were provided, as well as enrichment activities.

119. The Panel heard that in 2021 the Holiday Activities Fund (HAF) was introduced and funded by the Council. The HAF provision is very similar to Feast of Fun, however, it is only available to children in receipt of free school meals within school during one week of each of the Christmas and Easter holidays and for four weeks during the summer holidays. This differs from the Feast of Fun provision which is available during all school holiday periods throughout the year and can support any family, which is beneficial as many families are on the borderline of receiving support. This places additional demand on Feast of Fun provision when it is delivered at times when HAF provision is not delivered. It is, therefore, crucial for planning and co-ordination of HAF and Feast of Fun delivery to take place when they are running in parallel to avoid duplication and ensure every young person has access to provision where needed.
120. Here are some examples of the feedback provided by families who have accessed Feast of Fun provision highlighting how valuable the support is for them and the impact it has:-
- *“I was in tears when I knew I had a pack coming its made a huge difference.”*
  - *“This year on furlough has been hard, there is just so much stress trying to cover everything I need and not knowing how to get through the holidays. We don’t qualify for support but our outgoings are the same as they were on full pay.”*
  - *“I was made redundant and just didn’t know how I was going to get through the school holidays.”*
  - *“We lost income, but being self-employed there is nothing much we can claim, thanks for helping out.”*
  - *“The whole area is just buzzing, a real feel good feeling of kids and families getting outside and having a great day.”*

#### North Ormesby Primary Academy

121. North Ormesby Primary Academy currently has 278 children on roll, with approximately 20% of those children receiving level four Children’s Services (children subject to statutory Social Work intervention due to acute/severe needs)<sup>12</sup> as well as many more children engaging at levels two (children with additional needs requiring Early Help support from one agency) and three (children with complex needs requiring Early Help support from multiple agencies).
122. The Panel was disappointed to learn from the Designated Safeguarding Lead, North Ormesby Primary Academy, that, whilst she was aware of some fantastic work going on within North Ormesby, she had not had any involvement in the Locality Working pilot and had not been invited to attend any of the locality area meetings. This has resulted in a lack of awareness of the range of services/organisations that families within the school community could be referred to for help.
123. This issue was rectified immediately following the Panel’s meeting with the Designated Safeguarding Lead and contact details were exchanged to ensure that the school is fully aware of, and involved in, the locality working team, ongoing work in the area and an opportunity to attend appropriate multi-agency meetings within North Ormesby.
124. The Panel heard that the Holiday Activity Fund was delivered from the school during the Christmas holidays but this had been the first time that children at the school were able to access this provision. It was stated that the provision had been primarily for children in receipt of free school meals and

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<sup>12</sup> Defined by the South Tees Safeguarding Children’s Partnership Interim Threshold of Need Document, Mar 2020.

those able to pay to attend. There is a large proportion of the community who are not able to access public funds or claim free school meals but lived on low incomes and would welcome such provision.

#### North Ormesby Neighbourhood Policing Team

125. North Ormesby Neighbourhood Policing Team, works alongside the Locality Team in North Ormesby.
126. In broad terms, the Neighbourhood Policing model operates across Middlesbrough on a similar basis to the locality working teams. In North Ormesby, the Locality Working Team and Neighbourhood Police Team complement each other and working relationships are enhanced by locality working.
127. The Panel heard a recent success story of how a multi-agency approach has had a positive impact on reducing anti-social behaviour in North Ormesby.
128. Between June and August 2021, North Ormesby witnessed a spike in incidents of anti-social behaviour - a rise from approximately 35 per month to 50 incidents per month. This increase was due to a particular group of youths causing anti-social behaviour, disorder and criminal damage. The response through the Locality Team, predominantly working in conjunction with Selective Landlord Licensing and Neighbourhood Safety Officers, enabled greater information sharing and action, demonstrating a joint approach.
129. Police and Council Officers jointly issued anti-social behaviour contracts and warnings to perpetrators, highlighting that Police, PCSOs and Street Wardens are communicating and working together, presenting as a united team. The Council had led on the Anti-Social Behaviour Contracts which enabled Police to concentrate on pursuing the offenders for crime, leading to prosecutions and ultimately banning the ring-leader of the group from North Ormesby. This resulted in anti-social behaviour incidents reducing from a peak of 50 events in June/July/August 2021, to single figures by January 2022.
130. Of the residents that the Police engage with, feedback has been very positive, including parents of youths that had engaged in lower level anti-social behaviour, who commented that the area was a much nicer place to live. This is as a result of the action being taken through working within the locality model approach.
131. As part of the locality working approach, young people who had been involved in low level anti-social behaviour are invited to attend a presentation by youth workers to discourage them from engaging in such behaviours and to highlight the impact of their behaviour on others. This initiative is carried out in conjunction with the youth offending service. As part of the prevention work in the area, the 'mini police' programme in primary schools allows Police Officers work with the schools to identify the children that would benefit most from taking part.
132. In addition, the Council has commissioned youth work at both universal and targeted levels with Linx, The Junction and Middlesbrough Football Club Foundation. The Youth Offending Service now has a preventative arm and is becoming more involved in prevention work around anti-social behaviour.
133. The Panel heard that, when dealing with anti-social behaviour, improvements have been made in identifying vulnerability and linking in with Social Services. Issues are flagged between all partners, for example, to look at why a child might be behaving in that way, were there issues at home?

134. Protecting young people from drugs is also a priority and identifying the potential of being vulnerable to criminal exploitation. This is an area where the Police have made improvements in the last 3-5 years.
135. In broader terms, the Police has a successful working relationship with the Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH) (front door to Children's Services) with good information sharing processes in place. A profile compiled by the Police covering the Cleveland Police area identifies Organised Crime Groups and Anti-Social Behaviour groups which is a useful tool when multi-agency meetings are held to discuss young people who are at significant risk of exploitation.
136. The Police are leaders of the 'making people feel safe' Action Plan. Anti-social behaviour plays a big part in feeling unsafe, as did drugs. Mirroring the locality team, regular Multi Agency Response to Serious and Organised Crime (MARSOC) meetings are held to discuss intelligence and actions and how each of the partners can contribute to tackling serious and organised crime.
137. In addition, Police School Liaison Officers attended both primary schools in North Ormesby to deliver a six-week programme called 'Mini Police'. This includes various activities, culminating in delivering an assembly to the whole school reinforcing messages around responsibility and not taking part in anti-social behaviour. The programme provides a good opportunity for children to be introduced to the Neighbourhood Policing Team in order to build good relationships.
138. The Neighbourhood Policing Team has experienced some challenges over the last 18 months, including the impact of Covid and extensive challenges with staffing cuts, however, officer numbers are slowly beginning to increase. There are a high proportion of probationary officers coming through but they need to be supported.
139. The Panel heard that the North Ormesby Neighbourhood Policing Team had also experienced challenges during the summer – tying in with the peak of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage issues in North Ormesby – when officers had often been deployed elsewhere. However, those officers were now returning to the team and figures for anti-social behaviour and crime were relatively low. Whilst there are areas of Middlesbrough with higher demand, it is essential for Officers to remain on duty in North Ormesby in order to build relationships in the community and to continue the positive work in the area, including prevention work.
140. Neighbourhood Policing aims to reduce and prevent crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour by use of targeted patrols; community engagement and problem solving. On a local level, the Policing Team's presence in North Ormesby needs to be highly visible to have a high impact.
141. The North Ormesby Neighbourhood Policing Team feel that there are fantastic working relationships with all partners in the locality team, particularly Selective Landlord Licensing, Street Wardens and Neighbourhood Support Officers. Personal working relationships are strong and good results are being achieved and built on.

#### Children's Centre/School Readiness

142. The School Readiness team works with families with children aged (pre-birth) 0 – 5 years. They link with midwifery, health and other partners to ensure that expectant parents, parents/carers and children get the best support possible to improve a child's life opportunities and outcomes.
143. The Team helps to prepare children to be ready for nursery and primary school via a number of means, including Children's Centre universal activities such as baby play, stay and play, healthy

child clinic's and parenting workshops. It also offers advice to all families working with Early Help services on how best to support their child/children's development through the key early year's stages.

144. Support is available to parents/carers to access good quality childcare, including free early education for two, three and four year olds (achieving two year olds, nursery education grant and 30 hour entitlement).
145. The Children's Centres offer all families (with children aged under five years) a range of services, information and support within their local community. The main aim of Children's Centres is to improve outcomes for all young children, by encouraging them to learn and advising parents how they can support this at home.
146. Once parents/carers register with the Centres they can be signposted to information, advice and guidance. Registered families become part of the Children's Centre's universal provision, including eligibility advice around free education for two, three and four year olds, healthy vitamins programme and 'best start' pathway (for 0-2 year olds).
147. Targeted interventions are delivered to identified families, for example, Chat, Play, Read, Sing is a literacy support programme, also Play and Learn Together (when children had completed their two-year-old health review) delivers key messages around supporting good home learning and reinforcing that family members are key educators.
148. Regular monitoring and follow-up is carried out with families to ensure they are aware of the services available to them and to advise them in relation to eligibility for free child care and also helping them to identify and access childcare settings.
149. The Children's Centres work in partnership with the locality teams in both Newport and North Ormesby and considers the impact of locality working on school readiness predominantly relates to better information sharing to ensure families are aware of available provision and how to access it, as well as providing good networking opportunities to raise awareness of local issues and to break down cultural barriers within the community.
150. The Panel heard that examples of working in a locality-minded way included working with colleagues from other services such as Selective Landlord Licensing and Neighbourhood Safety Teams and when colleagues have their own agenda for visiting families, wherever possible, the Children's Centres liaise with those colleagues to ensure opportunities are not missed to identify under-fives who may not be registered with the Children's Centre in order to ensure families did not miss out on information advice and guidance and to encourage and help families to understand the benefits of their children accessing education from a young age.
151. Children's Centres also work closely with Health Visiting colleagues and have shared pathways. Statutory contacts are actively followed up to focus on the learning and development of the child and supporting the parents in doing this.
152. During the Covid pandemic, the Children's Centres continued to offer an increased amount of support within Newport and North Ormesby. The Children's Centre covering Newport is physically based at Whinney Banks, West Middlesbrough. Pre-covid there were many activities taking place in the Centre but it was difficult for some families to get there. Since Covid the majority of provision is delivered digitally and families are being contacted by telephone, WhatsApp and other platforms to increase accessibility and this is was working well.



153. In terms of impact, reach data for Children's Centres that families from North Ormesby and Newport access is as follows:-

CHILDREN'S CENTRE	TOTAL NUMBER OF FAMILIES REACHED		TOTAL NUMBER OF CONTACTS	
	2020	2021	2020	2021
North Ormesby	181	245	5,700	5,983
West Middlesbrough	628	878	3,335	3,345
Abingdon	462	758	5,464	10,493

154. This data shows a significant increase in the number of families reached from 2020 to 2021 across all three children's centres.

155. In relation to the take up of nursery places, settings that offer funded childcare to two, three and four year olds (universal and extended provision), is shown below (as at Autumn term 2021):-

North Ormesby ward

SETTING	A2YO	UNIVERSAL 3&4 YRS	EXTENDED 3&4 YRS
Dimples	45	21	9
The Pavillion	4	4	0
St. Pius School	0	1	0
*Minnows	32	7	0
*Top Corner	13	14	3
*School House	4	10	6

\*These figures may include children attending who live outside of North Ormesby ward.

### Newport ward

<b>SETTING</b>	<b>A2YO</b>	<b>UNIVERSAL 3&amp;4 YRS</b>	<b>EXTENDED 3&amp;4 YRS</b>
Ayresome School	29	0	0
*Archibald School	27	0	0
*Great Expectations	21	15	3
*Little Treasures	4	6	0
*Teacher Time Linthorpe	40	44	3
*Zizus	5	5	2

\* These figures may include children attending who live outside of Newport ward.

156. Schools also offer universal 15 hours provision, increasing to 30 hours for eligible families of three and four year olds, but this data is not available.
157. The key challenges in terms of school readiness include cultural barriers, for example, for some families it is not the cultural 'norm' to use childcare for two year olds. Both localities also have high numbers of transient families. However, locality working, enables networking with colleagues who, in turn, are supporting information sharing regarding the Children's Centres and assisting with families whose first language is not English in order to raise awareness about the services available to them and potential eligibility for nursery places.

### Neighbourhood Safety/Street Wardens

158. The Neighbourhood Safety Team works with partners and local people across Middlesbrough, as well as the two locality teams, to prevent and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour including vandalism, graffiti, deliberate damage to property or vehicles, groups of teenagers hanging around on the streets, fly tipping/littering, drug dealing/use, drunk or rowdy behaviour and chaotic families.
159. Attached to the Neighbourhood Safety Team, Street Wardens work within the locality model to support partners and colleagues, including colleagues in Children's Services.
160. Street Wardens have assisted with colleagues by carrying out 'door knocking', this included supporting the work of the Children's Centres.
161. As a whole, the Neighbourhood Safety Team, has an excellent relationship with Children's Services and works closely with them right across the town, however, this is enhanced by locality working.
162. Street Wardens regularly support partners with intelligence gathering within the community and are the eyes and ears on the ground, gaining information/intelligence which other services are not otherwise privy to.
163. Street Wardens assist Children's Services and Police to trace vulnerable/at risk young people who go missing. Daily Police briefings are held within the localities to discuss all incidents that had occurred within the last 24 hours, including vulnerable young people considered to be at risk of harm

who go missing on a regular basis. Key information is distributed amongst the Street Wardens together with photographs which allow the Wardens to gather information on contacts and properties visited by those young people and to report back to appropriate partners. This flags up risks with partners so that appropriate actions and interventions can be put in place.

164. In addition, Street Wardens regularly attend joint home visits with Children's Services and Neighbourhood Safety Officers to provide protection to staff and to develop relationships with young people and families to help keep them safe in the community.
165. The Street Wardens regularly attend organised youth groups across Middlesbrough but particularly in Newport and North Ormesby where there has been a great deal of targeted outreach work to help divert young people away from crime and disorder.
166. Wardens use the locality hubs on a daily basis whilst on operational patrol and are able to feed information and intelligence directly to partners in real-time and can act on task directions from partners in response to this. Locality working helps to speed up responses to the community's needs.
167. Street Wardens are also involved in a range of projects developed through the locality teams such as litter picks, back alley makeovers, weeks of action in relation to organised crime and drug activity whereby information is passed to Police for action.
168. From a community safety perspective, locality working has had a significant impact in both localities and has enhanced relationships by bringing together operational staff on a regular basis for key information sharing and development of action plans. This allows a more targeted and focussed service to be delivered in the community.

### **Next Steps**

169. The Panel heard that the locality pilot projects will be evaluated using various methods including community surveys, data analysis and case studies.
170. An evaluation report of the pilots is being prepared and it is anticipated that it will be submitted to the Executive in June 2022 for consideration.
171. Outcomes and learning from the two pilot projects will inform whether the operating model should continue in Newport and North Ormesby and whether the programme should be rolled out to other areas of the town in some way.

**TERM OF REFERENCE C - To identify best practice from other local authorities where locality working for Children's Services is working well.**

172. As mentioned at the beginning of this report, the placed based partnership approach (or locality working as it has become known in Middlesbrough), seeks to achieve a joined up system change, centring on recognising the need to reconfigure relationships between statutory organisations, voluntary sector, the private sector, including businesses and residents in order to achieve change by developing collaborative approaches to address the underlying causes of community problems.
173. Part of the purpose of place based approaches is to build capacity within the community in order for residents to take charge of their own futures, to have a strong voice and to build social capital and connections within the community.
174. Several local authorities have sought to redefine relationships with their residents in different ways with focus on varying priorities.
175. Research undertaken by Think Local, Act Personal (Social Care Institute of Excellence (SCiE))<sup>13</sup> looks at the evolving model of asset-based approaches and provides good practice examples where Councils and other organisations are taking practical steps to shift in the direction of an asset-based area.
176. An asset based approach firstly looks for the strengths, capabilities, resources and creativity within community and aims to co-produce all of an area's plans and services to address the needs and challenges of the community. Public sector bodies and their partners, volunteers and potential service users need to meet as equals to identify what is needed, and what the shared goals are for the area, and the best ways to achieve them together.
177. Three key components to achieving a whole system change are identified as:-
- Co-production, partnership and power sharing
  - Diversifying workforces and building local enterprise
  - A strategic approach to being asset-based.
178. There are several examples of local areas putting asset based actions into practice, all of which differ in form and scope but demonstrate imagination and commitment to make better places for and with people. These include:-
- City of York Council
179. The City of York Council has been using the original version of the asset-based area framework over several years to re-write relationships between the Council, citizens and the community. The Council's Head of Commissioning states : *"it has acted as a catalyst for change, creating conditions for success, informed by shared values and stories of impact."*
- Camden Council
180. The 'Camden Mile' (pre-pandemic), encouraged Council staff to regularly go out into the local area to talk to local people, organisations and businesses with a view to finding community assets where

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<sup>13</sup> 'Think Local, Act Personal' SCiE – 'Ten Actions for an Asset Based Area' December 2021, by Alex Fox OBE.

they may not have looked before. Taking a wider view of what counts as an asset can reveal abundance where state resources are scarce and over-stretched.

181. With loneliness reaching epidemic proportions for older people, and growing amongst all age groups, affordable housing for younger people is scarce.
182. Homeshare programmes take these two groups of people with problems and brings them together to provide solutions.
183. After careful vetting, recruitment and preparation, an older person looking for companionship and low-level practical help is matched with a younger person seeking somewhere affordable to live who provides them with help rather than rent. They provide companionship and learn from one another.

#### Leeds City Council

184. Leeds City Council has committed to working together with people to find out what they want to achieve and the best way to do this is by building on their own strengths, as well as the strengths of their family, friends and local community. The aim is to enable people to achieve their goals, reach their potential and reduce reliance upon traditional services. Social workers will build relationships directly with people replacing a traditional care management approach.
185. A lengthy assessment has been reduced to a two page conversational record helping drive change from 'What's Wrong?' to 'What's Strong', through conversations about what matters to people rather than what matters to organisations. The 'front doors' that the Council offers people are organised around 13 Neighbourhood Teams. These 'Talking points' are organised to have a useful conversation quickly at a local hub then acting on them.
186. Shared Lives is one of the schemes in operation in Leeds to address people's needs in the community. An adult or young person in need of long term support is carefully matched with an approved Shared Lives Carer for day or respite care support which can include help to prepare meals and medication or companionship and getting out and about.

#### Swindon Borough Council

187. Swindon Borough Council has developed a programme focusing on community groups with a local parish council at the centre. The National Development Team for Inclusion is supporting the Pinehurst Community led Support Programme to shape a 'Talking Point' programme where a social care, health or housing officer can be found at a community centre to offer advice to people in their local community space.

#### Kirklees Council

188. Ward Councillors at Kirklees Council have their own devolved budget which they make available to organisations and groups to support local people in their wards. The democracy services department supports councillors to manage this funding which is intended to connect democracy with community development.

#### Wigan Council

189. The most radical and notable example of an asset or place based approach is Wigan Council, and Middlesbrough's locality model is more closely based on this example.

190. Wigan Council developed its 'Deal for the Future', now known as 'The Wigan Deal 2030'<sup>14</sup>, in conjunction with residents, community organisations, businesses and public sector bodies over a five-year period. [The Deal 2030 \(wigan.gov.uk\)](http://wigan.gov.uk)
191. This ambitious plan was created following 'The Big Listening Project' – listening to 6,000, in 83 locations, sharing 10,000 ideas. Analysis of all those views and ideas resulted in **ten** key priorities for the borough:-
1. Ensure the Best Start in Life
  2. Happy, Healthy People
  3. Communities that Care for Each Other
  4. Vibrant Town Centres for All
  5. An Environment to be proud of
  6. Embracing Culture, Sport and Heritage
  7. Economic Growth that benefits everyone
  8. Confidently digital
  9. A well connected place
  10. A home for all
192. Each priority has an 'Our Part' (the borough's public sector organisations and partners) and a 'Your Part' (residents), so that 'The Deal's' principles of working together to achieve their ambitions continues and everyone knows what to do to play their part.



193. The Deal is about empowering communities, focusing on their strengths and talents and what makes them happy. It is also about delivering public services in a new way with staff that are positive, accountable and have the courage to do things differently.

<sup>14</sup> Wigan Council – The Deal 2030 document

194. The Deal has pioneered a unique approach and has set a new course for working with people, public services, businesses and communities to make a better future for all.

DRAFT

## **CONCLUSIONS**

195. Based on the evidence provided throughout the investigation, the Panel's conclusions are as follows:-
- a) The Panel feels that, despite some delays mainly due to the pandemic, the locality working pilot programmes in Newport and North Ormesby are working well and are making good progress.
  - b) It notes that the locality model has had a positive impact in both areas, including:-
    - a reduction in anti-social behaviour and crime.
    - a significant increase in the number of residents who report feeling safer, both during the day and at night.
    - an increase in the number of people who state they intend to continue living in the area for longer
    - Noticeable improvements in the physical environment.
  - c) During its review, the Panel spoke to a wide range of services and organisations involved in locality working. It appears that the concept of locality working is having a positive impact in general and more specifically on children and families living in the localities. The majority of partners feel that the multi-agency approach is beneficial and has improved working relationships and dialogue between partners and the community resulting in positive outcomes. However, the Panel found some instances where partners are less aware of the locality model and did not have full awareness of all the partners involved. For example, a mixed report from primary schools in the areas – with Newport reporting a positive impact through locality working - particularly in relation to Early Help and Neighbourhood Safety – and North Ormesby reporting a lack of awareness of the model. The Panel has since received reassurance from the Director of Children's Services that awareness of the model in North Ormesby has been improved.
  - d) Both Newport and North Ormesby have some of the highest rates in Middlesbrough for self-harm and drug and alcohol related hospital admissions and ambulance pick-ups, high levels of racially motivated crime, violent crime and anti-social behaviour. All of these issues can impact on the health and wellbeing of children, young people and their families. Whilst, the Panel acknowledges that Public Health colleagues form part of the locality model and play a vital role, it feels stronger links need to be made with the Primary Care Network (particularly local GP surgeries in the areas) and acute health services such as mental health providers, midwife and health visiting services, to ensure two-way communication of information.
  - e) The Panel is encouraged to hear all of the positive work ongoing within both localities and welcomes the involvement of external voluntary and community organisations and feels that they should be kept fully informed and invited to appropriate locality meetings within the areas. All partners should ensure that the right support is available to those who need it, without duplication.
  - f) The Panel welcomes the concept of locality based working and supports its continuation within Newport and North Ormesby and is supportive of the locality working model being rolled out to other areas of the town where it is identified there is a priority need based on analysis of demand and community consultation.
  - g) There are good governance structures in place with regular operational and strategic level meetings to discuss issues and progress which are well attended by relevant representatives



and actioned appropriately.

- h) A range of relevant Action Plans have been established in both localities, including for Children's Services, and these are monitored appropriately. Each Action Plan has smart targets linked to the Performance Management Framework indicators which are used to monitor impact and progress on a regular basis.
- i) The Panel recognises that the needs of each locality are, and will be, different and that this may result in involvement of various different organisations to suit the needs of each particular locality, however, it considers that all statutory partners are constant and have a vital role to play in any locality and should be fully involved in any locality working programmes.
- j) With specific regard to Children's Services, the Panel feels reassured that Social Worker capacity has been increased via the establishment of a single team of Social Workers who will be allocated cases from the two localities.
- k) Whilst Early Help Practitioners are positive about locality working and feel that the concept works, they have stated they do not feel there are sufficient numbers of Practitioners assigned to the localities to cope with demand.
- l) The Panel notes that between June 2020 and September 2021, Early Help work in North Ormesby increased significantly and this is to be welcomed as it means more families are being helped at an earlier stage - before statutory interventions are required. During the same period, Children in Need cases reduced significantly, Child Protection cases have increased slightly, as have the number of Children Looked After, but are relatively stable. In Newport, in June 2020 levels of Early Help support were quite high, reducing slightly by September 2021, showing Early Help is relatively stable in Newport. Between June 2020 and September 2021, the numbers of Children in Need remain quite high and there was a 5% increase in the numbers of children becoming looked after. Based on the information provided to the Panel, this suggests that Early Help is working well across both localities but in terms of children's social care, this appears to be working more successfully in North Ormesby.
- m) In terms of school readiness, impact data provided to the Panel shows that, through a multi-agency approach, the number of families reached has significantly increased from 2020 to 2021 across all three children's centres accessible to families within Newport and North Ormesby.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

196. Based on the evidence gathered during the investigation, and the conclusions above, the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel makes the following recommendations for consideration by the Executive:-
- a) The Panel supports the continuation of Locality Working in both Newport and North Ormesby and further supports the roll-out of the model to other areas of the town based on priority need, to be determined through demand analysis, community surveys and led by the evaluation report for consideration by the Executive.
  - b) In supporting the Locality Working model in Middlesbrough, the Panel recommends that discussions with senior managers and directors of finance within all public sector partner organisations takes place with a view to appropriately and proportionately funding each locality working area to ensure sufficient staffing allocations to meet demand. The Panel would further recommend that appropriate core structures are in place within the locality teams to ensure that Neighbourhood Managers are fully supported and deputised for during periods of absence/holidays.
  - c) The Panel acknowledges the high numbers of early help cases in both Newport and North Ormesby and notes the views of the Early Help Practitioners that they feel there are not enough practitioners to meet demand. The Panel therefore recommends that, subject to further analysis, consideration be given to the number of Early Help workers allocated to each area.
  - d) The Panel notes the impact data in respect of Children's Social Care Services within the localities and that the number of children looked after remains high. The Panel acknowledges that, whilst social workers have been in place for some time in the locality areas, they have only fairly recently been moved into one team to ensure consistency of approach and management oversight. The Panel, therefore, recommends that impact continues to be monitored and reported to the Panel in six months' time.
  - e) That Early Help Practitioners and the Social Workers be introduced to appropriate staff within each of the areas' schools to build up relationships and discuss children/families requiring support through regular dialogue and that the work of the locality teams is promoted and regularly discussed with school leadership teams.
  - f) That school readiness and children's centre registrations continue to be monitored and promoted in a range of languages to maximise reach and take up of nursery places to ensure that children are ready for school to optimise their learning potential.
  - g) That relevant community and voluntary organisations, including schools, are equally involved in the locality teams and that appropriate information sharing takes place to ensure:
    - i) That access to a 'signposting directory' of all services and organisations available to support families within the localities is available to all partners via the Neighbourhood Manager/a designated co-ordinator.
    - ii) That programmes of activities and events designed to support children and families are planned, discussed and co-ordinated in advance between partners within the localities to avoid unnecessary duplication and ensure those who need help and support receive it. (For example, that the Holiday Activity Fund (HAF) provision is co-ordinated in conjunction with Feast of Fun activity to maximise appropriate take-up and avoid duplication).

- h) That stronger links are made, through Public Health colleagues if and where appropriate, between primary care and acute care providers including GPs, mental health provision, midwife and health visiting services with improved referral pathways to Early Help and Children's Social Care Services where appropriate.
- i) Ensure that all partners are familiar with Middlesbrough's threshold of need document when making referrals to children's social care to improve the quality of referrals and ensure that the correct level of support can be determined and provided as quickly as possible and that the document be readily accessible via the Neighbourhood Manager/designated Co-ordinator.
- j) The Panel considers that Locality Working in Middlesbrough should be better promoted and clearly branded to ensure that all partners, and the community, are aware of how it operates, who is involved and how to make contact. The Wigan Deal is a good example of this where each priority area has an 'our part' (the borough's public sector organisations and partners) and a 'your part' (residents) so that the principles of working together to achieve joint ambitions is realised with each partner aware of what is expected of them.

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Geoff Field	Director of Environment and Communities
Marion Walker	Head of Stronger Communities
Adam Parkinson	Newport Neighbourhood Manager
Lindsay Coe	North Ormesby Neighbourhood Manager
Sue Butcher	Executive Director of Children's Services
Rachel Farnham	Director of Children's Care
Gail Earl	Head of Prevention
Hazel Clark	Early Help Team Manager
Angela Hill	Social Care Team Manager
Lynn Blagg	Assistant Team Manager, Education & Partnerships
Joanne Tickle	Assistant Team Manager, Education & Partnerships
Stacey Carlisle	Deputy Head, Newport Primary School
Katrina Jackson	Advanced Public Health Practitioner
Louise Kelly	Selective Landlord Licensing Manager
Julie Pearce	Community Safety Manager
Sergeant John Sproson	North Ormesby Neighbourhood Police
Sergeant Steve Pattison	Newport Neighbourhood Police
Heather Insull	Youth Focus North East
Karen Deen	Together Middlesbrough and Cleveland
Cassie Williams	Designated Safeguarding Lead, North Ormesby Primary Academy

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following sources were used/referred to in the preparation of this report:-

Reports to, and minutes of, the Children & Young People's Social Care & Services Scrutiny Panel meetings: 21 September, 25 October, 22 November, 13 December 2021, 25 January & 21 February 2022.

Reports to the Executive: 8 October 2019, 18 February 2020.

Think Local, Act Personal' SCIE – 'Ten Actions for an Asset Based Area' December 2021, by Alex Fox OBE

Wigan Council website and 'The Deal' document.

**COUNCILLOR D DAVISON**

**CHAIR, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**The Membership of the Panel: Councillors: T Mawston (Vice Chair), A Hellaoui, T Higgins, M Nugent, M Storey, Z Uddin, J Walker and G Wilson.**

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## MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

<p><b>DRAFT FINAL REPORT</b>  <b>CHILDREN &amp; YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE &amp;</b>  <b>SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL</b>  <b>26 APRIL 2022</b>  <b>SUFFICIENCY &amp; PERMANENCY (PERCEPTIONS OF</b>  <b>CHILDREN IN CARE)</b></p>
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## AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION

1. Children's Services in Middlesbrough has faced considerable challenges in recent times, more generally attributed to the numbers of children, young people and families requiring intervention. These challenges and pressures intensified following the Ofsted inspection of November and December 2019 and the Covid Pandemic.
2. Given such challenging circumstances the Panel was keen to examine placement availability, local sufficiency, permanency outcomes and how perceptions of children in care can be improved.

## COUNCIL'S/MAYOR'S PRIORITIES

3. The scrutiny of this topic fits within the following priorities of the Council and Mayor:-
  - People – Children and Young People: "We will show Middlesbrough children that they matter and work to make our town safe and welcoming and to improve outcomes for all children and young people."
  - People – Vulnerability: "We will work to address the causes of vulnerability and inequalities in Middlesbrough and safeguard and support those made vulnerable."

## COUNCIL'S THREE CORE AIMS

4. The scrutiny of this topic aligns with the Council's three core aims as detailed in the Strategic Plan 2020-2024<sup>1</sup>:-
  - People – "Working with communities and other public services to improve the lives of our residents".
  - Place – "Securing improvements in Middlesbrough's housing, infrastructure and attractiveness, improving the town's reputation, creating opportunities for local people and improving our finances".
  - Business – "Promoting investment in Middlesbrough's economy and making sure we work as effectively as possible to support our ambitions for People and Place".

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

5. The terms of reference for the Scrutiny Panel's investigation were as follows:-
  - a) **Children Looked After:-**
    - i) To examine and compare the profile of Middlesbrough's Children Looked After population against national and statistical neighbours.
    - ii) To examine placement types and performance.
  - b) **Foster Care:-**
    - i) To establish a profile of Middlesbrough's foster carers, including current recruitment and retention initiatives.
    - ii) To examine the availability of placements for Children Looked After in Middlesbrough.

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<sup>1</sup> Middlesbrough Council's Strategic Plan 2020-24

- c) **Permanency:-**
  - i) To investigate the issues around permanency, including adoption, and
  - ii) To examine any initiatives and areas of best practice.
- d) **Perception:-**
  - i) To challenge people's perceptions of children in care.
  - ii) To create a better understanding of Children Looked After for everyone involved in the process.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 6. It is worth noting that the Scrutiny Panel's review took place over the course of the full Municipal Year 2020-21. Data within Children's Services is constantly changing but the information provided within the report was correct at the time it was provided. Whilst it is acknowledged that data has evolved since it was received by the Panel, the themes of the review remain the same.
- 7. Children and young people are taken into the care of the Local Authority when it is unsafe for them to remain in the family home or because their parents are unable to look after them due to a variety of reasons.
- 8. Statutory Guidance, "Working Together to Safeguard Children"<sup>2</sup> sets out the core legal requirements for Local Authorities and partner agencies and what they must do to keep children safe. The Statutory Framework<sup>3</sup> sets out the legislation relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children. This includes:-
  - The Children Act 2004
  - The Children Act 1989
  - The Children and Social Work Act 2017
  - Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
  - Childcare Act 2006
  - Crime and Disorder Act 1998
  - Housing Act 1996
- 9. In addition, the Children and Social Work Act 2017 states that when a child or young person comes into care, the local authority becomes their 'corporate parent'. In short, this means that the local authority should:-
  - act in the best interests of the child - promoting health and wellbeing
  - encourage them to express their views and feelings and try to secure the best possible outcomes
  - ensure they have access to services
  - ensure they are safe, have stable homes, relationships and are in education/work
  - prepare them for adulthood and independent living.

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<sup>2</sup> HM Government - Working Together to Safeguard Children (A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) July 2018, updated December 2020.

<sup>3</sup> HM Government – Working Together to Safeguard Children (Statutory Framework – legislation relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children) July 2018.



10. As Corporate Parents, all Councillors have a responsibility to ensure that the Council is meeting these duties towards all children in its care and care leavers.
11. Throughout this report, a number of terms are used to describe the different types of care provided to children. Here is a summary of what the terms mean:-
- **Children Looked After** – A child is ‘looked after’ by a local authority if they are provided with accommodation for a continuous period of more than 24 hours; are subject to a care order or are subject to a placement order.
  - **Child in Need** - Defined under section 17 of the Children Act 1989 as ‘a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of children’s social care services, or the child is disabled’.
  - **Child Protection Plan** – A child becomes the subject of a child protection plan if they are assessed as being at risk of harm at an initial child protection conference. (Their plan should be reviewed within the first 3 months and then at intervals of not more than 6 months).
  - **Adoption** - The legal process of a child becoming a permanent member of a new family. Once an adoption order has been made, the child is no longer legally related to their birth family and parental responsibility passes to the adopter. This can only happen if a court orders it.
  - **Care Order** - An order granted by a court under section 31 of the Children Act 1989, placing a child in the care of a local authority. This requires the local authority to provide accommodation for the child, to maintain and safeguard them, to promote their welfare and to act in accordance with the other welfare responsibilities set out in the Children Act 1989. It gives the local authority parental responsibility for the child.
  - **Special Guardianship Order** - An order appointing one or more individuals to be a child’s ‘special guardian’. It is a private law order made under the Children Act 1989 and is intended for those children who cannot live with their birth parents and who would benefit from a legally secure placement.
  - **Supervision Order** - An order granted under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 placing the child under the supervision of a local authority. Under the order, the local authority must advise, assist and befriend the child. A supervision order can be made for a period of up to a year. This can be extended for any period not exceeding 3 years in total from the date of the first order.

#### Independent Review of Children’s Social Care

12. During the course of the Scrutiny Panel’s review, an Independent Review of Children’s Social Care was launched, led by Josh MacAlister.
13. The Panel heard that the over-arching question the review aimed to cover was “How can we ensure that children grow up in loving, safe and stable families and, where that is not possible, that care provides the same foundations?” Details on the scope of the review were provided, together with details of the themes and questions being addressed within the review. Panel Members were also

informed of the ways in which they could contribute to the Calls for Advice and Calls for Evidence as part of the Review.

14. The Independent Review published its 'Case for Change' in June 2021 The Case for Change. The review document is a summary of the key issues in children's social care as it currently stands. Its key headings are:-
  - (a) we need to do more to help families;
  - (b) we need more effective support and decisive action that keeps children safe;
  - (c) the care system must build, not break, relationships; and
  - (d) change will not happen without addressing system causes.
15. Further feedback was sought in relation to the case for change and a summary of the responses was produced in October 2021 covering the main themes of the responses received.
16. Engagement events and consultation are continuing prior to the publication of the final report, which is expected to be published in 2022.

## SUMMARY OF EVIDENCE GATHERED DURING THE REVIEW

### TERM OF REFERENCE A – CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

- a) To examine and compare the profile of Middlesbrough’s Children Looked After population against national and statistical neighbours

#### The National Picture - Latest Headline Information – 2019-2020<sup>4</sup>

17. The latest figures available from the Department for Education Statistics for Children Looked After in England spanned the period 31 March 2019 to 31 March 2020. As at 31 March 2020 the **number of children looked after** in England was **80,080** – this figure has increased by 2% on the previous year (year ending 31 March 2019). In total **30,970** children started being looked after in the year ending 31 March 2020 – down 3% on the previous year and **29,590** children ceased to be looked after in the year ending 31 March 2020 – similar to the previous year. The number of children who ceased to be looked after because they were adopted was **3,440** at year ending 31 March 2020. This was down 4% on the previous year. The rate per 10,000 children, aged 18 and under, who were looked after as at 31 March 2020 was **67**. This has increased from **65 per 10,000** the previous year.
18. The figures in England as at 31 March 2020 also show:-
- Almost half of children in care were aged 10-18 years old.
  - Around one-third of children coming into the care system were aged four or under.
  - Three in four children in care lived with foster carers.
  - One in ten children in foster care had three or more placements in a year.
  - Every year, approximately 12,500 young people leave care, aged 16 or above, to move into independence or semi-independence.

#### A Profile of Middlesbrough’s Children Looked After Population

19. The following information was provided in October 2020, as part of the Panel’s evidence gathering during the review.
20. In October 2020, Middlesbrough had **689** children looked after – equating to **210.1 per 10,000** population - which is the highest rate in the North East and the second highest rate nationally.
21. A breakdown of the numbers of children in Middlesbrough known to Children’s Services, by category, as at September/October 2020 is provided below:-

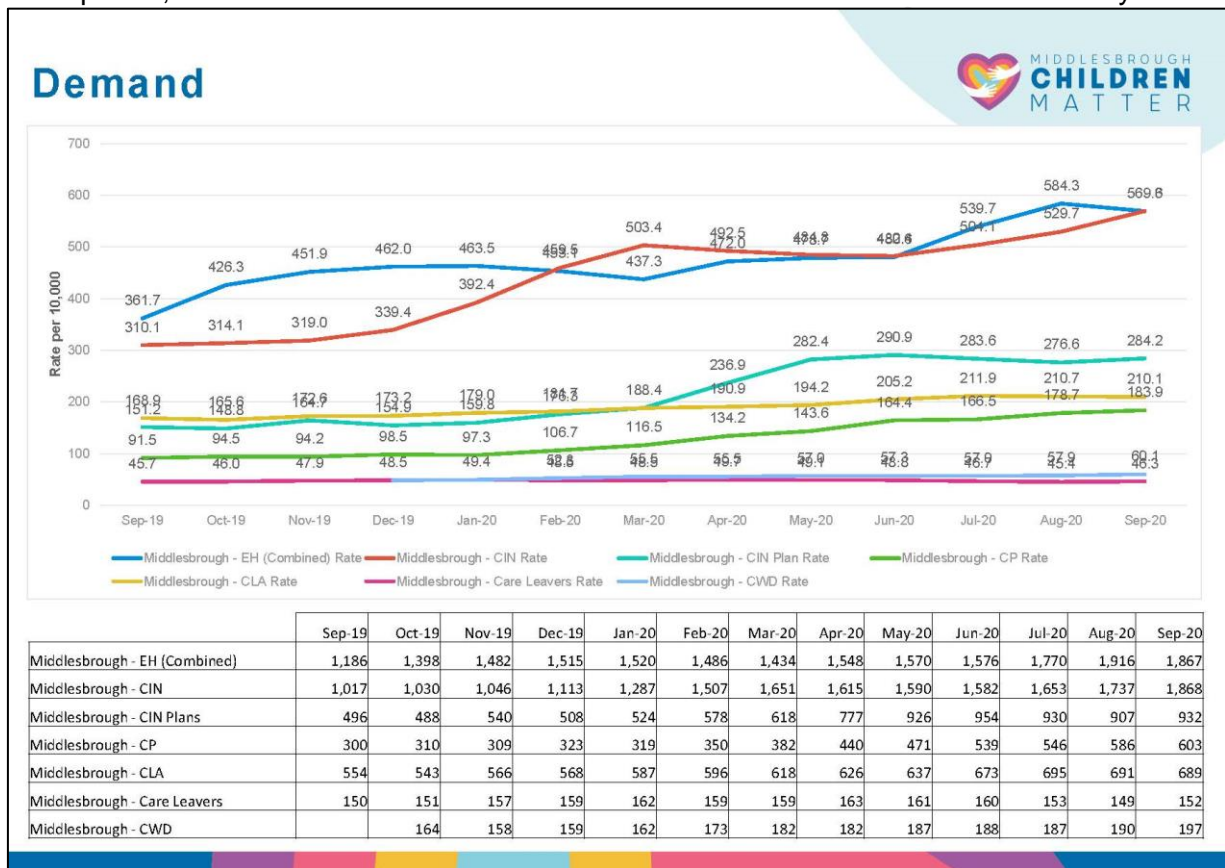
	September 2019	September 2020	% Change
Early Help (Combined)	1,186	<b>1,867</b>	↑ <b>57%</b>
Children in Need (CiN)	1,017	<b>1,868</b>	↑ <b>84%</b>
CiN Plans	496	<b>932</b>	↑ <b>88%</b>
Child Protection	300	<b>603</b>	↑ <b>101%</b>
Children Looked After	554	<b>689</b>	↑ <b>24%</b>
Care Leavers	150	<b>152</b>	↑ <b>1%</b>

<sup>4</sup> DfE Statistics for Children Looked After in England year end 31 March 2020.

Children with Disabilities	* 164 (* October 2019)	<b>197</b>	↑ <b>20%</b>
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22. The graphic below illustrates the rates of children per 10,000 in Middlesbrough, who received various social care interventions between **September 2019 and September 2020**.

23. It shows that Early Help and Child in Need interventions had the highest rates per 10,000 and that rates of **Children Looked After** had risen from **168.9 to 210.1 per 10,000** during the one year period, whilst the rate of care leavers and children with disabilities remained fairly static.

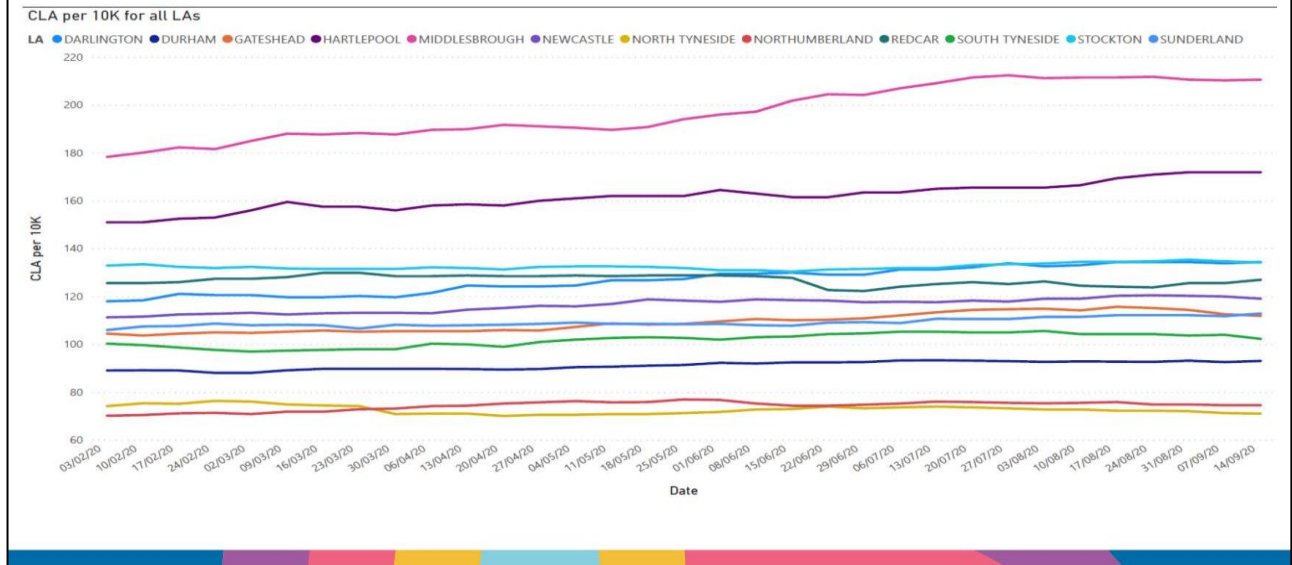


24. When compared with **regional statistical neighbours**, as at September 2020, Middlesbrough had:-

- the **highest** rate of children looked after (aged under 18) per 10,000;
- the **highest** rate of looked after children in the previous quarter;
- the **highest** rate of children (per 10,000) ceasing to be looked after;
- and the **lowest** rate of children looked after that moved to adoption.

25. The graphic below shows the numbers, per 10,000, of children looked after by each of the north east local authorities. Between 3 February and 14 September 2020, Middlesbrough had the highest rates.

## Demand (4)



26. A regional comparison between the 12 north east local authorities of the rates of children looked after as at week commencing 16 March 2020 (start of the first lockdown) and the week commencing 5 October 2020 showed that only North Tyneside and Redcar and Cleveland had noted reductions in the number of children becoming looked after, per 10,000 population (14 and 8 children respectively). Whilst all authorities experienced an increase, Middlesbrough experienced the highest increase of 75 children.

### Who are the children in Middlesbrough's care?

27. A profile of the 689 children classified as being looked after in Middlesbrough (as at October 2020), is set out below:-

Middlesbrough has 689 CLA (Oct 2020). This is a rate of 210.1 per 10,000 - the highest rate in the North East and the second highest rate nationally.

#### Age

The current ages of our CLA are:-

- 5.6% are aged under 1 year
- 21.4% are aged 1-4 years
- 23% are aged 5 to 9 years
- 35.4% are aged 10-15 years
- 14.5% are aged 16 years and over.
- 20 young people (3%) in care started their care episodes when they were 16 +
- 55 (8%) children in care over 10 years were brought into care when they were 5 years old or younger.
- 15.1% of children who become looked after are new-born, i.e. aged 0-1. (Greater than national trends).

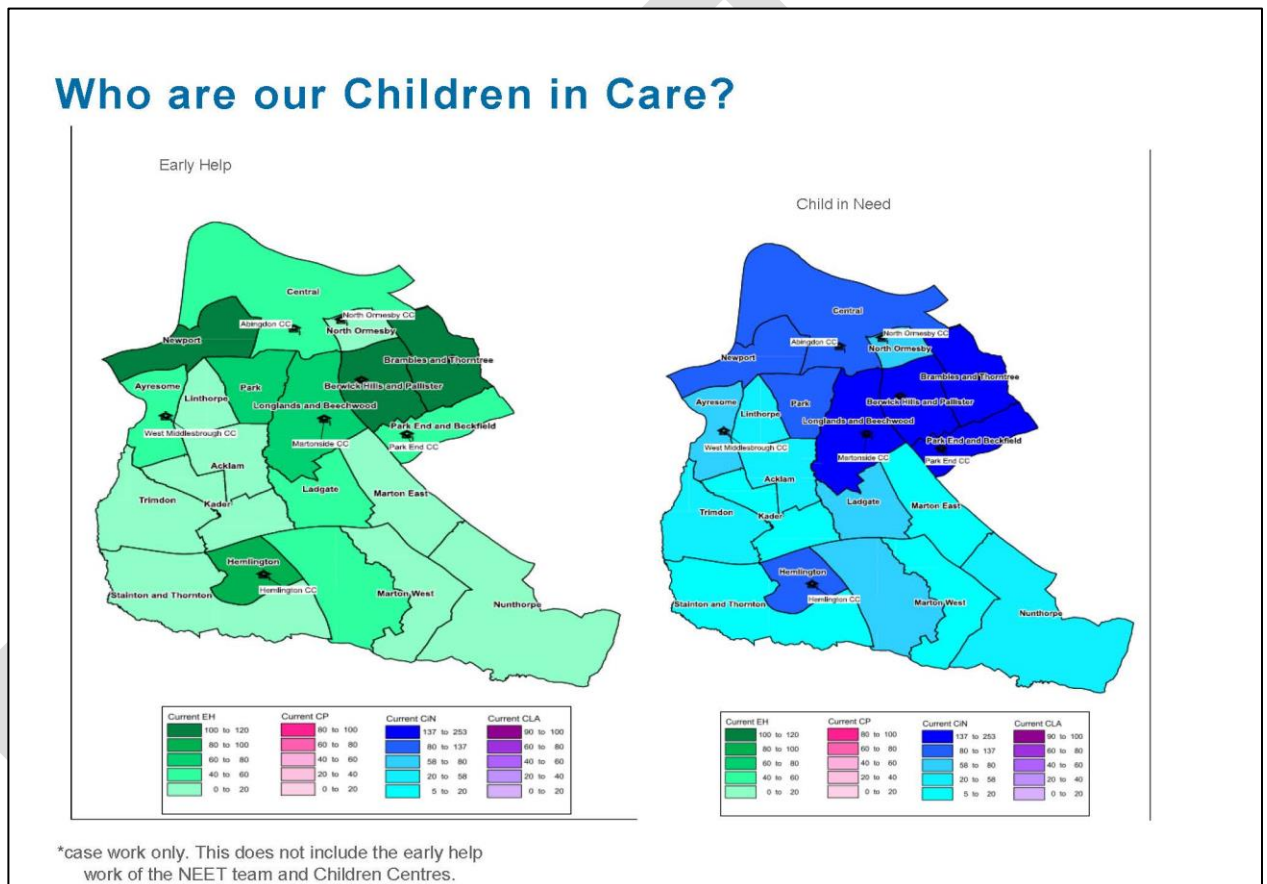
#### Ethnicity

- 84.9 % of current CLA are White. This is an **over representation** against the school population at 78%.
- 6.1 % are mixed ethnicity in line with the school population (6%)
- 2.3 % are Asian. This is an **under representation** against the school population of 11%.
- 5.0 % are Black. This is an **over representation** against the school population of 2%.
- 0.9% are 'Other'. This is an **under representation** from the school population of 4%.

#### Geography

- We have greater numbers of CLA from some of our wards. Although deprivation is a key factor in understanding our demand the way we work and safeguard in certain communities could also be a driver in understanding demand.
- 1 in 15 children are CLA in North Ormesby. Proportionately we do not work with families at a Child Protection threshold to the same level. Similar for Newport.
- North Ormesby: 3.9 children CLA for every child on a CP Plan.
  - Brambles and Thorntree 1.3 children CLA for every child on a CP Plan.

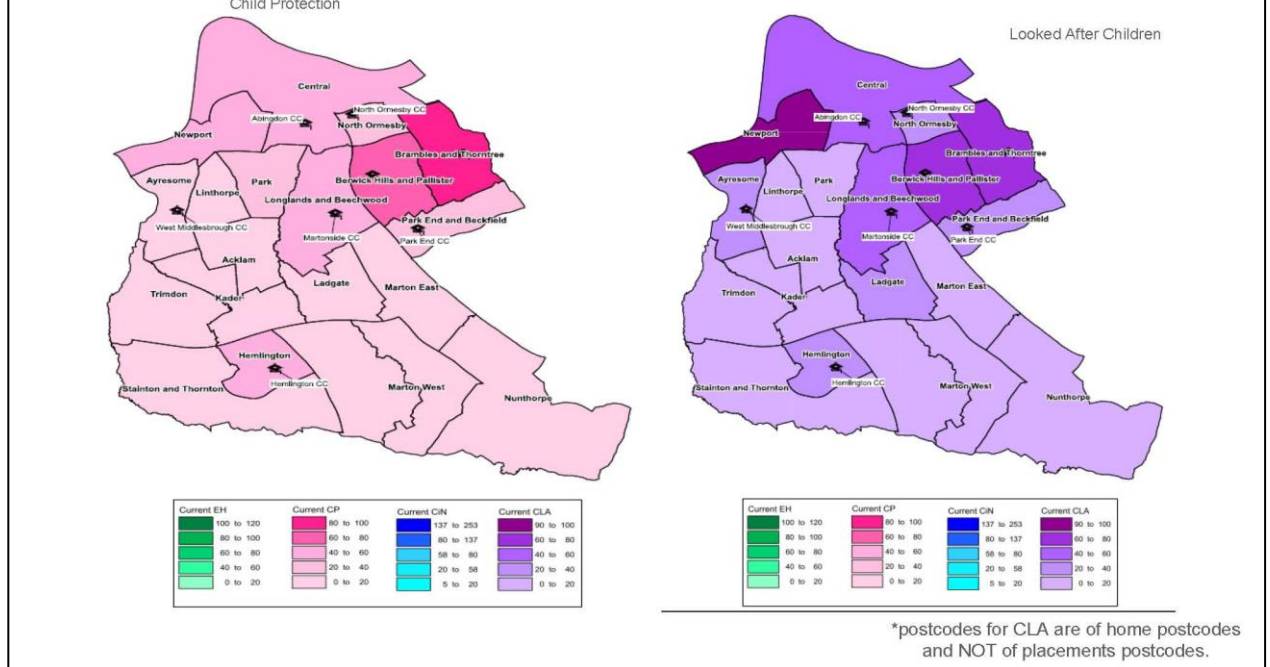
28. Between October 2019 and October 2020, 59 unborn children were the subject of Child Protection plans, all of whom went on to become looked after during the same period (between the ages 0-1 year).
29. Between April and October 2020, 27 out of 28 unborn children who were the subject of Child Protection Plans went on to become looked after started being looked after within the same six-month period, aged 0-1 year.
30. This initial data requires further analysis work but shows a significant proportion of children subject to pre-birth Child Protection Plans go on to become looked after between birth and one year. Around 20% of the children looked after cohort are aged one year and under. This figure appears **high** compared to regional and statistical comparators.



31. The maps above show a high level of need in Brambles and Thorntree as well as Berwick Hills and Pallister Wards. The nature of that need focusses around Early Help and Child in Need activity rather than Children Looked After activity.



## Who are our children in care?

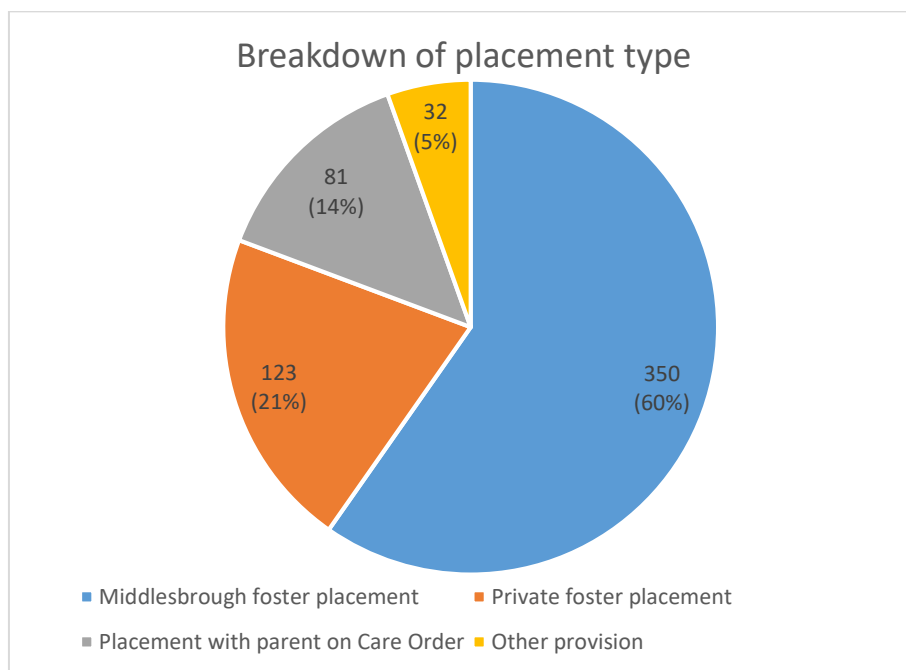


32. The area with highest Children Looked After interventions is Newport Ward which, conversely, is ranked fifth highest for Child Protection and Child in Need interventions.
31. Interestingly the maps show a gap in Child Protection provision in the more ethnically diverse Wards.
32. The Panel heard that of all Wards in Middlesbrough, North Ormesby - the most deprived Ward in Middlesbrough - has the greatest proportion of social work intervention per head of population for children. Indeed, around one in 17 children is Looked After.
33. Despite this, the local authority is doing comparatively little Early Help case work in North Ormesby. Identifying why this is the case requires further analysis, but it has been hypothesised that families arriving in North Ormesby are already at crisis point – with their level of need being too great for Early Help interventions.

## **TERM OF REFERENCE A - Children Looked After**

### **b) Examine placement type and performance**

34. As at October 2020, of the 689 children looked after in Middlesbrough, 505 were placed in foster placements and 81 lived at home with parents on a Full or Interim Care Order.

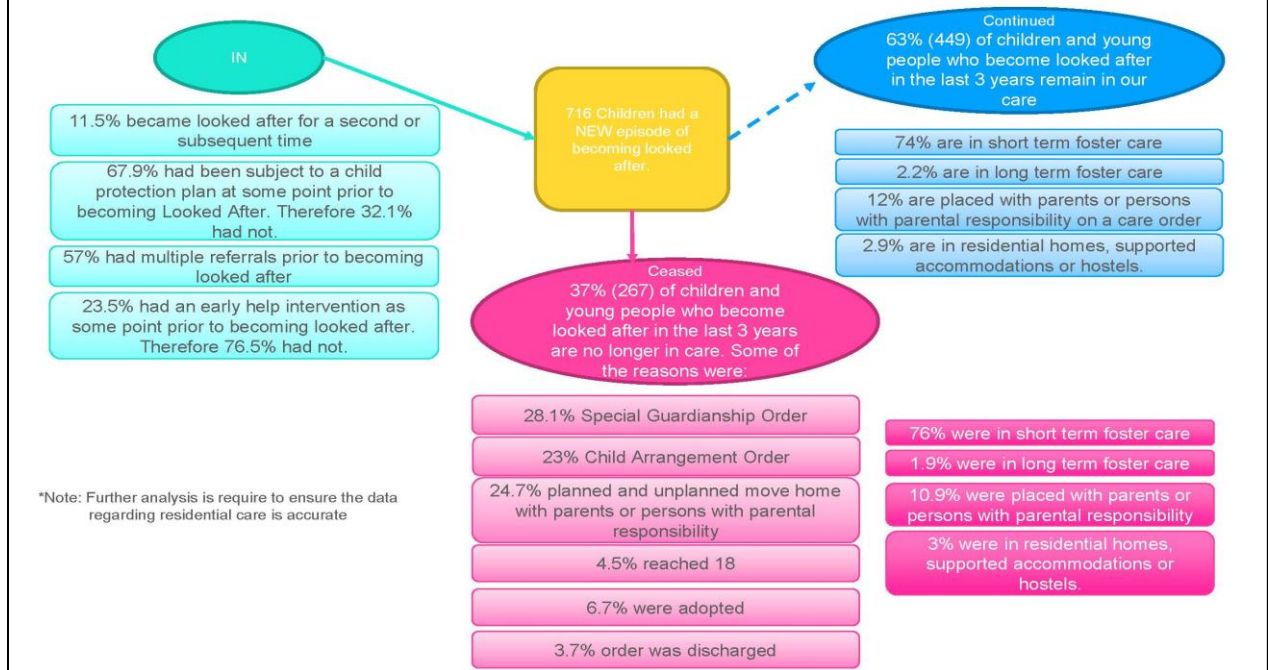


35. Those children living with parents on a Full Care Order are visited in the same way as a child subject to a Child Protection Plan, with oversight by the Court. Those subject to an Interim Care Order are kept under regular review and monitoring by the Court whilst the appropriate support and interventions are provided by Children's Services.
36. The graphic below aims to provide some understanding of the journey of 716 Middlesbrough children and young people who had a new episode of becoming looked after, and their individual outcomes, over a three-year period from April 2017 to June 2020.



## Placements and planning

**What is the journey of children and young people to care and where do they go?**  
*An analysis spanning 3 years of children who became looked after*



37. The Panel heard that in the six-month period up to October 2020, 70 children had ceased to be looked after. 41 of the 70 children were aged five and over, and six children achieved permanency through adoption.
38. Middlesbrough has improved performance in achieving permanence through adoption over the last five years, although the figure has reduced slightly over the last six month period.
39. During 2017-18 and 2018-19, Middlesbrough was similar to the England national average for adoption and also to statistical neighbours.
40. Further information in relation to adoption can be found at paragraph 67 of the report.

### Placement Stability & Breakdowns

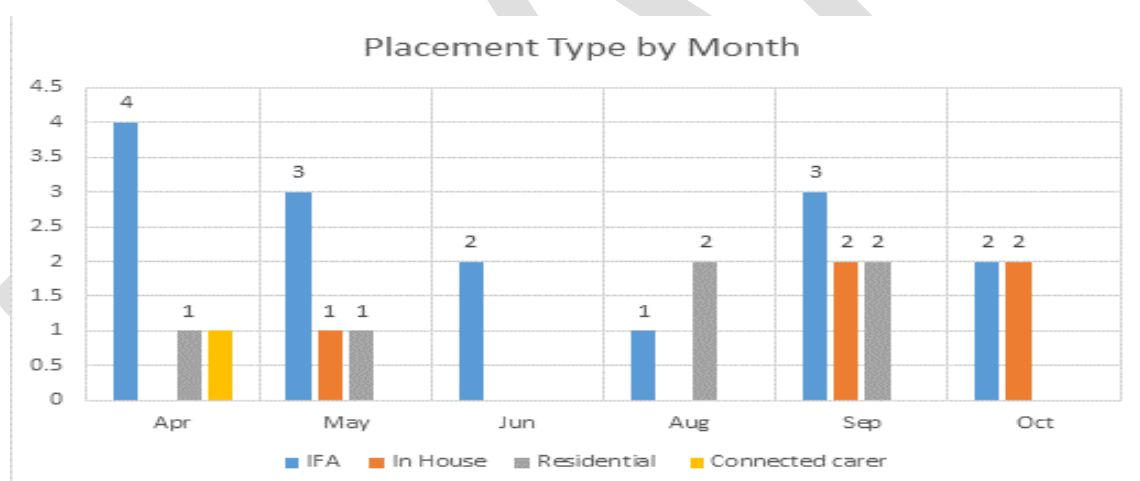
41. In terms of placement type and provision, data provided in November 2020 showed that 73% of Children Looked After in Middlesbrough lived in a foster placement, this included connected persons (kinship care) placements. This had increased from 69% the previous year (2018-19) and compared with 72% nationally and 71% with statistical neighbours.
42. There were 343 placements (52%) with in-house foster carers. This had increased from 42% the previous year (2018-19) and compared with 50% nationally and 59% with statistical neighbours. There were 125 private placements.
43. The Panel also heard that whilst recently published data showed 51% of Middlesbrough children were placed outside of the town, as at October 2020, 82% were placed within 20 miles of Middlesbrough with 18% being placed more than 20 miles away.

44. Placement stability is higher than the national average and statistical neighbours, with 64% (123) of children that had been looked after for two and a half years or more remaining in the same placement for two or more years. Although placements moves are sometimes due to a placement breaking down, there are also positive reasons for a move - such as a child being moved to an adoptive placement.

45. During the period October 2019 to October 2020:-

- 469 of Middlesbrough’s Children Looked After were in their first and only placement
- 147 children had experienced two placement moves
- 49 had three placements
- seven children had four placements
- eight children had five placements
- three children had six placements; and
- no children had seven or more.

46. The graph below shows the numbers of placements, and placement type, that broke down during the period April to October 2020. In October, two in-house foster placements had broken down and two independent (external) foster placements had broken down. There was one connected persons placement breakdown during this six-month period.



47. Work to prevent placement breakdowns and improve placement stability included focussing on the support offer to fragile placements, the introduction of a placement disruption procedure, analysing data to understand the reasons why placements had ended, the LCS transformation to support improved performance reporting and social work practice, collaboration with Futures for Families, Innovate Teams and the implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

## TERM OF REFERENCE B – Foster Care

a) To establish a profile of Middlesbrough’s foster carers, including current recruitment and retention initiatives

b) to examine the availability of placements for Children Looked After in Middlesbrough.

48. All Local Authority Fostering Services and Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) are required to provide an annual dataset to Ofsted in relation to the numbers of approved foster carers and placements it has and also data relating to the types of foster care, registrations, de-registrations and a range of other subjects.
49. Government statistics<sup>5</sup> for the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, shows that IFAs have seen a net increase in capacity due to an additional **330** fostering households, creating **560** placements. In contrast, Local Authorities have seen a slight decrease in capacity with an additional **230** fostering households and **490** places.
50. Other key headlines in the national statistics for fostering in England 2019/20 are as follows (as at 31 March 2020):-
- It is estimated that there has been a 3% increase in the number of filled fostering places and a 13% decrease in the number of vacant places.
  - Of the total 71,150 approved foster carers, 65% were aged over 50 – with 25% being aged over 60.
  - Carers aged 20–39 had 67% of available places with children in them, whilst carers aged 55 and over had 62%. It would, therefore, appear that the older the carer, it was more likely that there would be a greater proportion of ‘not available’ places.
  - There were 14,995 fostering households registered within the IFA sector. Around half of these (7,652) are registered with IFAs that are owned by the six largest providers of IFA places in England. Therefore, the top six providers account for 51% of all IFA households, and 18% of fostering households nationally.
51. In 2019/20, the annual data return for Middlesbrough showed it had **141** approved foster carers offering **267** placements. By autumn 2020, the number of approved Foster Carers increased to **156**, however, the number of available placements decreased to **263**.
52. Whilst this indicates a net increase in approved foster carers, there is no increase in the number of placements available. Therefore, it is crucial to utilise placements as effectively as possible, with careful matching of children to placements.
53. The 156 approved foster carers are broken down into the following approval categories:-
- 89 - short term foster carers
  - 38 – fully approved connected persons carers
  - 17 - long term foster carers
  - 11 – respite care
  - 1 – fostering to adopt

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<sup>5</sup> Government Statistics - Fostering in England 2019/20 (main findings)

54. During 2019/20, a total of 41 new foster carers were approved in Middlesbrough. By September 2020, a further 22 new foster carers were approved. This supports the information regarding good conversion rates in Middlesbrough from the point of initial enquiry to approval.
55. In 2019/20, a total of 24 foster carers were de-registered (16 mainstream and 8 fully approved connected persons). This means that an approved foster carer resigned. Reasons for this included retirement, ill health, and other work commitments. By September 2020, a total of six foster carers were de-registered (two mainstream and four connected persons).
56. It is noted that during 2020 and January 2021, just one approved foster carer had been de-registered in order to take up fostering with an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), however, during the same period, four IFA foster carers had deregistered with their IFA and were subsequently approved as Middlesbrough foster carers, citing the main reason for doing so as improved practice in Middlesbrough.
57. In 2019/20, **163** children were placed with in-house Middlesbrough foster carers. By September 2020, this number increased to **174**. This indicates that initiatives such as Innovate, bringing children from external placements back to Middlesbrough, and fostering recruitment drives were beginning to work.
58. As of September 2020, there was a total of 56 places not available for use. The figure was comparable with figures for 2019/20. Reasons for unavailable placements included: foster carers taking a break from fostering (such as ill health/personal reasons); needs of another child currently in placement; placement only available to sibling groups.
59. By January 2021, the number of 'on hold' foster carers increased to 22. This equated to 41 children not being able to be placed with in-house foster carers.
60. The Panel heard that 'on hold' carers are offered support back into fostering if they wish to continue and the support offer includes improved training and development, regular monthly consultation meetings and a foster carers Facebook page.
61. Feedback from foster carers leaving Middlesbrough's fostering service is sought via a Satisfaction Survey, although the Service acknowledges that further development of the survey is required.

### Recruitment and Retention

62. During 2019/20, Middlesbrough received 123 initial enquiries in relation to fostering. This figure significantly reduced to 48 enquiries between April 2020 and January 2021. The reason for the reduction is understood to be predominantly due to Covid, however, Middlesbrough received a steady rate of enquiries regarding fostering that was comparable to most IFAs. The conversion rate from initial enquiry to the stage two assessment process is generally around 20% in Middlesbrough which is comparable or higher than other local authorities.
63. Of those 48 initial enquiries: 14 households (29%) were not progressed as the enquirer/applicant was deemed unsuitable by the Fostering Service; 20 (46%) households did not progress further due to enquirer/applicant's own choice and 14 (29%) households were open to the recruitment team.

64. The Fostering Service acknowledges that IFAs are at the forefront of recruitment strategies and is trying to utilise tried and tested practices such as the use of Google ads, various social media platforms and word of mouth to attract people to fostering in Middlesbrough.
65. In relation to gaps in Middlesbrough's fostering provision, the Panel heard that several areas had been identified, including: Parent and child placements; Sibling group placements and Teenage (11 plus) placements.
66. A recruitment campaign was set to go live in early 2021 which would attempt to appeal to potential carers who may be able to fill those gaps. In addition, a team of Independent Social Workers has been recruited in order to specifically complete Form F assessments of foster carer applicants that would hopefully be generated by the campaign.

DRAFT

## TERM OF REFERENCE C– PERMANENCY

### a) To investigate the issues around permanency, including adoption.

67. Permanence is defined in the statutory guidance that accompanies the Children's Act 1989 as providing children with "a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging ... with a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond."<sup>6</sup>
68. Permanency for children can be achieved in a number of ways:-
- **Long Term Fostering** – Where a child is placed permanently with foster carers. The child is subject to a Care Order. Birth parents retain parental responsibility together with the local authority, however, the local authority's parental responsibility carries greater weight than that of the birth parents. Foster carers do not have parental responsibility.
  - **Adoption** – A Court Order. Parental responsibility is removed from the birth parents and transferred to the adoptive parents.
  - **Special Guardianship Order** – A Court Order. Birth parents share parental responsibility with the special guardian and the special guardian's parental responsibility carries greater weight than that of the birth parents.
  - **Child Arrangement Order** – An Order stating where, and with whom, a child will live, who they will spend time with and who they will have contact with. The decisions are made in the best interests of each child on an individual basis.
  - **Long Term Residential** – Where a young person is placed permanently in a children's residential home. The young person may be subject to a Care Order (or a 'Section 20' agreement), where the birth parents have parental responsibility but the local authority does not.
  - **Return/Remain at Home** – When a child or young person returns home where it is safe to do so, or is able to remain at home with birth parents.
69. Ofsted's report<sup>7</sup> following its inspection of Middlesbrough's Children's Services in November/December 2019 stated:-
- *'Early permanence is not prioritised for children in Middlesbrough and there is a lack of parallel planning which creates delay in achieving stability'. (Para 15).*
  - *'The lack of parallel planning creates delay for most children in achieving permanence'. (Para 14).*
  - *'Delays in achieving permanence are not sufficiently challenged by Independent Reviewing Officers' (Para 19).*
  - *'Some children, including very young children, have experienced too many changes in placement before their permanent placement is identified. (Para 23).*
  - *'Children experience significant delay in securing permanence through adoption. Currently there are not enough adopters for children who are waiting' (Para 25).*

### Sufficiency of Placements

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<sup>6</sup> The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Vol. 2 – June 2015 - DfE

<sup>7</sup> Ofsted Inspection on Middlesbrough Children's Social Care Services 25/11/19 – 06/12/19 (published 24/01/20)

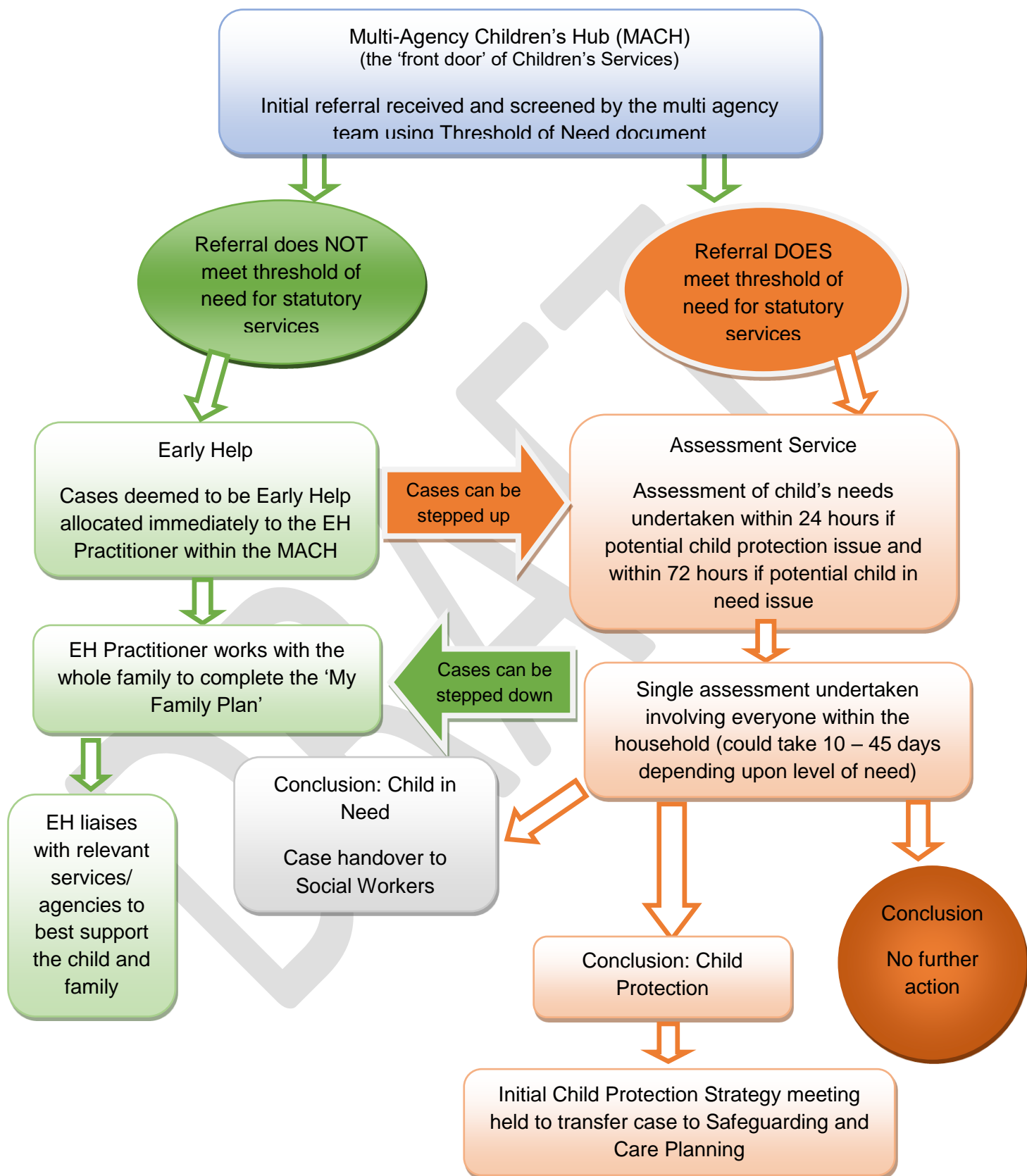
70. The issue relating to placement sufficiency is whether or not Middlesbrough has enough placements, or access to enough placements, to meet the individual needs of the children and young people in Middlesbrough's care and if not what is being done to meet their needs.
71. The definition of 'sufficiency' in the Oxford English Dictionary is 'the condition or quality of being adequate or sufficient'; 'an adequate amount of something, especially of something essential'.
72. In 2010, the Government published statutory guidance<sup>8</sup>: "Sufficiency – Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children". This document sought to improve outcomes for children looked after and young people by providing guidance on the implementation of section 22G of the Children Act 1989 ('the 1989 Act') – requiring local authorities to take reasonably practicable steps to secure sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of those children and within their area (the 'sufficiency duty').
73. The Ofsted inspection report highlighted:-
- 'The large number of older children and adolescents in care has reduced placement choice. (Para 14).*
74. The Panel heard that Children's Services planned to reduce the numbers of high cost external placements by shifting the balance to more preventative and edge of care work, whilst strengthening commissioning of placements and support for children and young people. Another essential strand to improving sufficiency is to improve social work and permanency practice.

#### Understanding the Child's Journey - A Pathway through Care

75. In order to gain a better understanding of the care system and processes from the child's perspective, the Panel received a presentation from the Directors and Heads of Service within Children's Services who used a fictitious family as an example case study, detailing each stage of the process from the point of initial referral up to leaving care.
76. A flow chart is provided below to demonstrate a summary of this process and details of each part of the service are provided at Appendix 1.

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<sup>8</sup> Sufficiency – Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (March 2010)





## Adoption

77. Adoption Tees Valley (ATV) was established in 2018, in line with the Government's aim to see all local authorities with adoption responsibilities participate in Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) by 2020. The key drivers for this were that children were waiting too long to be adopted and to improve adoption support and outcomes for adopted children, whilst increasing the 'pool' of available adopters at regional levels.
78. ATV is the Regional Adoption Agency for the five Tees Valley Local Authorities of Middlesbrough, Stockton, Hartlepool, Darlington and Redcar and Cleveland and is responsible for: the recruitment, assessment and approval of adoptive families; receiving referrals of children for adoption; family finding; matching and placing the children with suitable, approved adopters; provision of adoption support; facilitating letterbox contact between adopted children and their birth families; life story books; step parent adoptions.

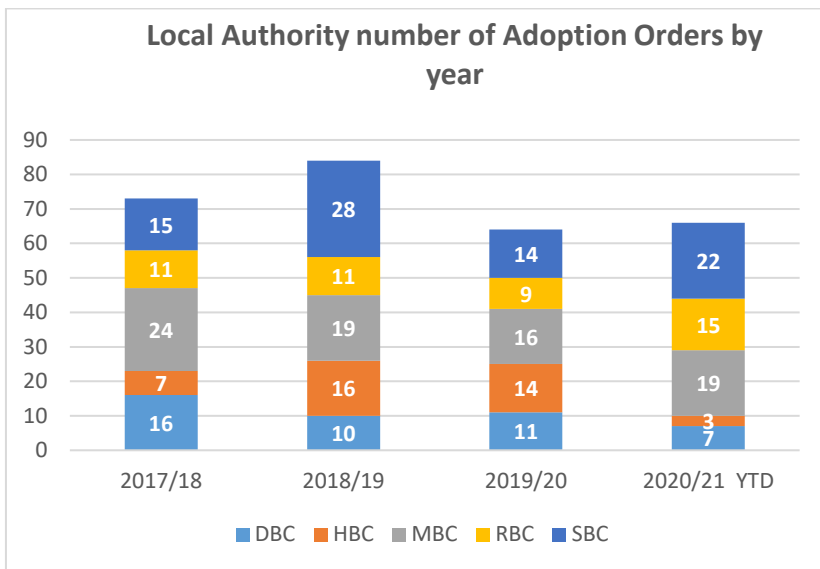
### Recruitment of adopters

79. The recruitment process, from the point of initial enquiry to formal notification to proceed with an application, takes an average of 101 days with ATV. Whilst this first stage exceeds ATV's own target of 60 days, it is shorter than the England average of 112 days.
80. The second stage of the process includes thorough assessments of potential adopters being undertaken by ATV Adoption Social Workers and, if deemed suitable, presentation to the ATV Family Placement Panel for a recommendation as to their suitability to adopt. The recommendation is then presented to the Agency Decision Maker for a final decision. Timescales for the second stage take, on average, an additional 129 days – slightly longer than ATV's target of 121 days, but shorter than the England average of 140 days. There is a fast-track process for applicants who have previously adopted, or who are already approved foster carers, with the whole process taking around 121 days (four months) in total.
81. During 2019/20 a total of 50 adopters were approved and as at the end of December 2020, an additional 45 adopters were approved, with a further 39 in the process of being assessed.
82. 71% of ATV approved adopters waited at least three months from the point of approval to being matched with a child which indicates that a relatively high number of adopters are matched quickly.
83. ATV has a dedicated Marketing Officer to support recruitment of adoptive parents. There is an ongoing social media presence as this method, together with anonymised profiling of children, has been identified as being a successful mechanism for recruitment. ATV has a significant social media reach, with over 7,000 facebook followers.
84. ATV works closely with the National Adoption Recruitment Steering Group and national campaigns. This group is centrally funded by DfE to impact on the numbers of children who are waiting to be adopted.
85. In 2020 ATV's recruitment campaign specifically focussed on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) children, who are identified as waiting the longest, and undertook regional work to promote national messaging, with profiles of its BAME adopters and social workers who presented as "the face of ATV". This resulted in ATV recruiting two further BAME families.
86. Additionally, ATV is undertaking work to promote the need for adopters of siblings as this is one of the biggest areas of need for the adoption service in the Tees Valley.

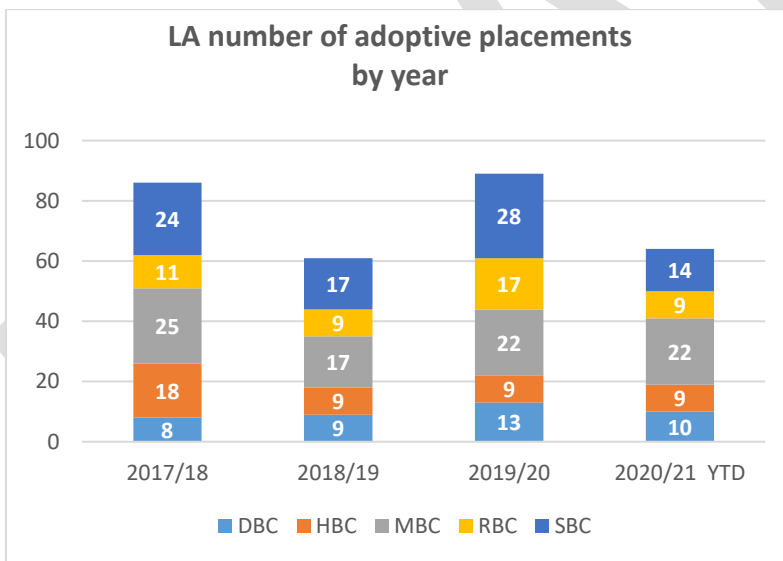
87. To support sufficiency, ATV has engaged in regional collaborative work with Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs) and there is now a Regional protocol which is supported and signed up to by regional VAA's and RAA's. This aims for regionally approved adopters to be available to regional RAA's. As of the end of quarter 3 in 2020/21, ATV placed 15 children with regional VAA's, where external placements were required.

### Children and Placements

88. In terms of timescales for children who are waiting to be adopted, the Panel heard that the Government target from the point of a child entering care to having their plan for adoption approved is **183** days. This target is not being met nationally. As at Q3 2020/21 the national average is **245** days, however, all of the Tees Valley local authorities, including Middlesbrough (**217** days) are performing better than the national average (based on data provided by the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB)).
89. Once a Placement Order (PO) is achieved, the Government sets a target of **121** days from granting of a PO to matching a child with adopters. This is a particularly challenging timescale influenced by the matching characteristics and needs of the child and the numbers of available adopters.
90. In Middlesbrough the PO to match timescale averages **192** days and was better than the national average (**216** days) and the RRA average of **217** days. Middlesbrough's figure has reduced over several months up to April 2021. This improvement is partly attributed to Middlesbrough establishing a tighter performance monitoring system for social workers and introducing a monthly Permanence Monitoring Group, chaired by a senior manager, making decisions more quickly to reduce delay.
91. In addition, practice is improving in providing information to ATV to assist with family finding for children as good information sharing processes are critical to the timely achievement of a placement. Early permanence has been promoted through strategic work between ATV and Middlesbrough, including:-
- The appointment of a Permanence Champion by ATV – responsible for tracking and monitoring all cases from early notification onwards. Sharing of better quality information in a timely way enables ATV to potentially identify a suitable adoptive family, pre-Placement Order, so that the match can be scheduled and progressed quickly following the grant of a PO by the Court.
  - Workforce development to provide a better understanding of how to create an adoption plan. ATV supported this through a dedicated early permanence training workshop to Middlesbrough Social Workers and through further workshops at Middlesbrough's Practice Week.
92. Once the child is placed for adoption, the Placement to adoption order (AO) granted date is better than the Government target, and is better than the England average, and RAA average, based on the current data return.
93. The graph below shows that the number of Adoption Orders across the ATV region increased from a total of **64** in 2019/20 to **66** as at the end of Quarter 3 in 2020/21 and was expected to increase further to the end of the year. Middlesbrough's Adoption Orders increased from **16** in 2019/20 to **22** as at end of quarter 3 2020/21. This is reflective of increased focus within Middlesbrough on progressing permanency plans for children.



94. The graph below shows that in 2019/20, a total of **89** children were placed with adopters across the ATV region and **64** were placed with adopters as at the end of Q3 2020/21. The numbers of Middlesbrough children placed in adoptive placements is rising, from the lowest number – **17** - in 2018/19, to **22** in 2019/20 and **22** as at the end of Q3 2020/21. This shows improvement on the numbers of children being placed for adoption, and improved focus on permanency planning.



95. Timescales in respect of placements, from the point of the child coming into the care of the local authority, to being placed with their adoptive family, averaged **455** days nationally in 2019/20 and **498** days across ATV in 2019/20. Middlesbrough has a higher figure than the other Tees Valley Local Authorities which is reflective of Middlesbrough having more children who had waited longer to be placed. This included sibling groups and older children who tended to wait longer to be matched with adoptive families.
96. The national trend in 2019/20 saw a drop in the numbers of children being adopted, however, across the ATV region, numbers had increased – with **91** children being adopted. The reasons for this could be that the ATV region has a higher rate of children looked after, with a regional average of

150.5 per 10,000 population compared with 67 per 10,000 England average. As at the end of quarter three in 2020/21, Middlesbrough's average was 189 per 10,000.

97. As at quarter three 2020/21, the numbers of children across the Tees Valley with and agreed plan of adoption and with a Placement Order had significantly reduced year on year from 2019/20. However, up to Q3 2020/21 placement numbers are slightly lower than previous years – which was also the national picture - and Adoption Orders are comparable.
98. Active tracking of children progressing through care planning indicates that there continues to be a higher number of children for whom the local authority is planning adoption.
99. Published data from the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB) up to Q3 2020/21 (over a 12 month period rolling average), shows that of **69** children adopted during this period, **51** are identified as being in the harder to place category. This includes: Being part of a sibling group; Being age 5+; Being a child with a disability; BAME. 73% of children placed via ATV and adopted in this period are deemed “hard to place.”
100. As at April 2021, Middlesbrough had five children - aged 5 and over - and five sibling groups adopted within the last year, including two sibling groups of three. 15 out of 25 children adopted in the 12 months (April 2020 to April 2021) were considered to be in the ‘hard to place’ category.
101. Some children, especially those who are older, will require more time to be prepared for adoption. It is important for family finding to select the right family who are well-prepared for taking that child/children.
102. The Panel heard that some of the key challenges for ATV are:-
  - Sufficiency of adopters for children with more complex needs (including siblings, older children and BAME children).
  - Volume of life-story work and obtaining information to produce meaningful life story books.
  - Waiting times for post-adoption support.
  - Volume and management of the post-box adoption contact service.
  - Step parent adoptions.

## **TERM OF REFERENCE C – PERMANENCY**

### **b) To examine any initiatives and areas of best practice.**

103. Various workstreams are ongoing to address the issue of placement sufficiency and to strengthen permanency. Below, is an overview of some of that work:-

#### **Corporate Parenting Strategy – Permanency and Sufficiency Strategies**

104. On 16 March 2021, the Council's Executive ratified the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Strategy sets out the Council's vision and action plan for how the Council and its partners will support the children in its care, and care leavers, to achieve the best possible outcomes in their lives.
105. Both the Permanency and Sufficiency Strategies have been revised and now sit within the overarching Corporate Parenting Strategy. Each element was shaped by the voice and participation of children and young people in Middlesbrough.
106. The main purpose of the Permanency Strategy is to “ensure that all children and young people in our care are growing up in stable, secure, safe and nurturing living arrangements, and are supported in a positive transition to independence and adult life. This is reflected in our social work practice, and in our systems, processes and partnerships for permanency. The provocations (strong prompts) from our Futures for Families programme provide a critical reference point for us as we strive to improve the quality and impact of our permanence arrangements for children and young people in Middlesbrough.”
107. The purpose of the Sufficiency Strategy, or Sufficiency Plan, is to “set out a clear framework of for how we will work with our partners across Middlesbrough and the surrounding area to secure the best possible range of placement opportunities and support services for our children in care and our care leavers.”
108. The Corporate Parenting Strategy recognises the progressive increase in the proportionate balance of spend on support for children in care, and the increasing proportion of children presenting with acute and complex needs illustrates the scale of challenge as children's services forward-plans and forecasts. To meet this business-critical challenge a clear three-pronged approach was established:-
- To improve social work and permanency practice
  - To strengthen the coherence and impact of sufficiency and commissioning arrangements
  - To progressively rebalance resources towards prevention and support for children and young people on the edge of care.

#### **Improving Social Work Practice**

109. The Panel heard that improving Social Work practice is central to supporting better outcomes for children and young people and securing permanency outcomes. Subsequently, Middlesbrough has developed a Social Work Practice Model, in conjunction with the workforce – ‘Children and Relationships First’. The practice model is a key component of the improvement journey and builds on regional and national innovation in Children's Services.
110. Children's Services has introduced a new Centre for Practice Excellence which supports the practice model as well as a co-ordinated approach to driving innovation and best practice across

the whole system of support for children and young people, including permanence arrangements. It offers tools and resources to support the practice model, workforce development to ensure staff have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver commitments to local children and young people and quality assurance arrangements and opportunities to share and develop best practice.

111. The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out, in detail, the social work practice pathway for achieving permanence in Middlesbrough, providing a reference point for professional practice and decision-making. In summary, by considering the most appropriate options available via Early Help, Entry to Care, Forever Families and Futures for Families, a clear pathway to achieving permanence for children and young people is considered, as follows:-
- Where safe and achievable, every attempt will be made to support the child to remain at home with their family – the Futures for Families Programme will drive innovation and best practice in this area of work.
  - Where it is necessary for a child or young person to leave home, the first consideration will be to find suitable accommodation with family or close adult friends.
  - A child or young person will only ever remain in care for the shortest possible period needed in order to manage a safe return home.
  - If safe to do so, a robust plan will be put in place with the child/young person and their family to support a return home.
  - If it is not possible to return home, early plans will be made for a suitable alternative placement.
  - Permanence will always be secured through the most appropriate legal order to meet the child/young person's needs.
  - Where it is not possible/appropriate for the child/young person to remain within their family network, alternative permanent carers will be identified. This may be through Adoption, Long-Term Foster Care, Child Arrangement Order or a Special Guardianship Order.
  - If an older child wants to live independently, and assessments suggest this is suitable, a plan to achieve this will be developed with the young person.

#### Initiatives/Best Practice

112. Some of the ways in which the local authority is trying to address the numbers of children coming into care and to ensure that those in care were placed locally were through the following initiatives.

#### Futures for Families

113. In 2019, the Government announced that, as part of its 'Strengthening Families Protecting Children Programme' (SFPC), it would be investing £84 million over five years to support 20 local authorities to improve work with families and reduce the number of children entering care.
114. The Programme would support the selected local authorities to deliver one of three children's social care innovation programme projects in their own area.
115. Middlesbrough was subsequently successful in being selected as the Trailblazer authority for the 'No Wrong Door' programme and awarded funding to deliver the programme in Middlesbrough, in partnership with North Yorkshire.
116. No Wrong Door had operated successfully in North Yorkshire offering an integrated service approach to support adolescents with complex needs. Working in hubs, it brings together a range of housing options, services and outreach support under one management team, meaning that a young person's needs can be addressed within a single team.

117. North Yorkshire had worked with Middlesbrough to develop a bespoke Service which was launched in September 2020 in Middlesbrough as Futures for Families.
118. Based on North Yorkshire's 'No Wrong Door' model, and with assistance from North Yorkshire Children's Services, Middlesbrough developed its own bespoke service - 'Futures for Families' - which launched in September 2020.
119. Operationally, *Futures for Families* operates from Thorntree Hub, providing rapid response to children and families in crisis who need support to prevent family breakdown. The multi-disciplinary team based at the Hub offers 'edge of care' support to prevent a young person at risk of coming into care, and also provides support to children and families in 'fragile' placements via specific planned work and residential respite, where needed. The aim is to help families stay together, safely, and to provide positive futures for young people.
120. From its launch in September 2020 up to the start of December 2020, Futures for Families was providing edge of care support to a total of 39 young people in fragile placements and regular in-reach support to a total of 15 young people.
121. An initial impact study carried out by Innovate and North Yorkshire Council, based on the care experiences of 40 young people – showed that many of the young people identified that they had struggled with the transition from primary to secondary school. This has resulted in Futures for Families offering support for children aged 11-25 rather than 12-25 in order to provide school transition support. The outcomes of the study have helped to inform improved practice across Social Work Teams.
122. Of the total number of young people accessing support from Futures for Families:-
- 75% receive support from the Life Coach, either directly or indirectly.
  - 92% had no previously identified need.
  - 32.5% had a previously undiagnosed speech and language difficulty – 95% of which were male.
123. Data activity on each type of intervention shows that building relationships and emotional and mental health support are the highest support provision streams.
124. Futures for Families also supports young people who go missing from care. Between November 2020 and November 2021, 94 recorded missing episodes were attributed to 11 young, however, due to targeted outreach work, there was a reduction of between 50 and 100% in missing episodes and 36% had experienced no further missing episodes since receiving support from Futures for Families.
125. As at December 2020, Futures for Families was supporting nine young people to return to their families or a connected persons/foster placement from expensive residential placements.

### Innovate

126. Placement data has shown that long term permanence is not achieved quickly enough; too many children are placed on Care Orders with parents; too many children were in residential care and not enough were placed with Middlesbrough Council employed foster carers; Special Guardianship Orders were not used often enough as a permanency option; and not enough children are being adopted.

127. In response to some of these issues, a managed team of Social Workers – Innovate – was commissioned in July 2020 in order to progress 90 children subject to Care Orders. The aim is to improve outcomes for children and to reduce the numbers of children looked after in Middlesbrough by providing permanence; placement stability and support from residential placements back into family life.
128. The Team works with four key cohorts:-
- Children in residential placements.
  - Children placed with parents where the discharge of a Care Order is required.
  - Children living with a Connected Persons Foster Carer where the plan is to progress to a Special Guardianship Order.
  - Children living with a Foster Carer where support is needed to prevent the placement breaking down and a future move.
129. During a relatively short period of time, from July 2020 to December 2020, the impact of the work undertaken by the Innovate Team is notable. For example, of 19 children in external residential placements, 17 were assessed as suitable to be moved (having had their assessments and care plans fully reviewed). Six of the 17 children were moved closer to Middlesbrough – either rehabilitated back home (3) or in foster care placements (3) and the remaining 11 had either a definite or anticipated moving date<sup>9</sup>.
130. Ten children were subject to Care Orders whilst placed with parents, all of which were subject to court proceedings. However, the work of Innovate meant that as at December 2020 three had their Care Orders revoked with the remainder expected to be revoked imminently. In all cases the children cease to be 'looked after' once the Care Order is discharged.
131. Intensive intervention was also undertaken with 16 children in fragile placements where a breakdown would have resulted in a further move or an escalation to residential care. However, all 16 are being successfully maintained in their current placements.
132. 45 of the cohort of 90 children were placed in Connected Persons Foster Care placements. The Innovate Team had assessed and worked with those children and families to achieve the following outcomes:-
- Three children rehabilitated back home and a further six were in the process of being rehabilitated back home due to sustained changes made by parents.
  - 22 children were actively moving down the Special Guardianship Order pathway.
  - 14 children were subject to further negotiations and planning with possible guardians, with nearly all expected to go ahead.
133. There are also financial benefits to the Innovate Team's work. In terms of moving young people closer to Middlesbrough and within the Council's Foster Care network approximate cost reductions of £797,000 per year, based on four young people, were realised whereas preventing a move to residential care resulted in a cost avoidance of approximately £2,881 per child. Reductions in the

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<sup>9</sup> The remaining two children in external residential placements were in their final year of secondary school and it was considered not appropriate to move them whilst in their GCSE year.



length of time spent in care resulted in a cost avoidance of approximately £189 per child per week.

## PAUSE

134. Pause is a national charity that works with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeat removals of children from their care. Through an intensive programme of support, it aims to break the cycle of repeat removals and give women the opportunity to reflect, tackle destructive patterns of behaviour and to develop new skills and responses that can help them create a more positive future. Pause aims to prevent the damaging consequences of thousands more children being taken into care.
135. The North East Pause project has been running successfully in the Tyne and Wear region since 2016 and recently extended into Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton (with contracts in place in Middlesbrough since August 2020).
136. Nationally, Pause operates 30 practices across 39 local authorities and works with around 344 women who have had 1,052 children removed collectively. On average, each woman receiving support has had between three and four children removed, although this is much higher in some cases.
137. Details of the work undertaken by Pause can be found on their website (<https://www.pause.org.uk/>), but in general terms Pause Practitioners typically work with six to eight women, building a secure, consistent relationship which helps to focus on each woman's needs and encourages them to work towards a more positive future. They do this using a range of group activities, day trips and drop in sessions on matters including healthy cooking on a budget and crafts.
138. Such activities help to build self-esteem, reduce social isolation, and manage loss through reducing the stigma of child removal through peer support, shared experience, and role modelling positive behaviours and trying new things.
139. Following an initial 16-week engagement phase, women are asked to commit to a pause in pregnancy should they choose to commence the Pause Programme, with appropriate support mechanisms and services in place.
140. During the course of this review, Pause found 162 women were eligible for support in Middlesbrough and the details of 18 women considered at risk of repeat pregnancies, and subsequent removal of the child, were forwarded by Children's Services.
141. Pause is commissioned to work with **10** women in Middlesbrough, who have had a total of **28** children removed from their care (an average of three children per woman). The women range in age from **23 to 41 years** (the average age being 28 years). **22%** of the women have **care experience**. Further details of the women engaged with Pause can be found at Appendix 2.
142. To enhance their service, Pause is continuing to build effective partnerships with a range of organisations including:-
  - Impact Teesside (grief and loss group for women on the Pause programme due to start in August 2021)
  - My Sister's Place

- Virgin Care Sexual Health Services
  - Adoption Tees Valley (frontline partnership working)
  - Middlesbrough Adult Safeguarding (frontline partnership working)
143. The effectiveness of the Pause Programme was reviewed by the Department for Education following an evaluation carried out by the University of Sussex, Research in Practice and Ipsos Mori. The evaluation's findings, published in November 2020, found:-
- “The Pause Programme is effective in making a positive difference in women’s lives, improving their relationships with children, reducing rates of infant care entry in local areas and delivering cost savings for local areas.”*
144. The evaluation also found that, across five sites over a three-year period, the number of infants entering care reduced by 14.4 per local authority area – equating to 215 children in total.
145. Financially, the estimated benefit to cost ratios associated with these effects are £4.50 per £1 spent on Pause over 4 years and £7.61 per £1 spent over 18 years.
146. More locally, the benefits of the Pause Programme were highlighted when 17 women across Stockton, Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough were asked to self-report over a six month period on a range of areas using scaling questions (1 being worst and 10 being best). Using these metrics Pause found the women reported relationships improving with children from just above 4 to almost an 8.
147. The women also reported a significant improvement in their emotional and mental health with just 3% describing their emotional and mental health as being ‘good’ at the start of the programme increasing to 60%.
148. Pause’s work in Middlesbrough is at an early stage, so its impact is still being learned, however, both Pause and Middlesbrough’s Children’s Services work together to refer cases when required.

#### ‘Green Shoots’

149. In December 2020, the Panel heard how ‘green shoots’ had been identified since the Ofsted inspection, due to the work of Futures for Families and Innovate.

#### Connected Persons Carers

150. 30% of Middlesbrough’s children looked after were placed in a connected carer placement (family members or friends and the child subject of a Care Order). This was the most prevalent placement type.
151. In the 12 months up to December 2020, 167 children ceased to be looked after and almost half of those exited a connected care placement. This meant that Children’s Services is better at moving children into permanence via a Special Guardianship Order or back home than from any other placement type.
152. Between July and October 2020 more connected carer placements had ceased (33) than had started (31). Encouragingly, forecasts show that, based on a three month average, there was a decline in the use of connected carer placements which was partly driven by improved throughput of care case work and a shift in care planning as greater exploration of placements that best suited

the child's needs was being undertaken. Progress was being made but this was still an area that required improvement.

### Placement with Parent

153. 'Placement with Parent' occurs when a child is subject to a Care Order (looked after by the local authority) but lives with a parent. Such placements should be short term, temporary, arrangements.
154. Traditionally, Middlesbrough has a high number of placements of this nature partly attributed to a legacy of poor social work practice. This has resulted in the Courts lacking confidence in the process resulting in Care Orders being put in place to provide additional oversight.
155. However, audits suggest such Care Orders have not improved social care oversight meaning many families remain on Care Orders for long periods. The result is that either Care Orders should have been discharged much earlier or, in some cases, a child is left in neglectful situations for too long, resulting in them being taken into care. The Panel heard that relationships between Children's Services and the Courts were being strengthened to try and mitigate these occurrences.
156. It was reported that as of the end of October 2020, 87 children were in placements with parents, which had increased by 20% since October 2019. Such placements had increased by 13% in the last six months but reduced by 1% in the last three months. On average, children subject to Care Orders spent 16 months in their placement with parents. 36 of those children were placed with parents for longer than one year; 21 were placed for more than two years; and 10 were placed for more than three years.
157. Data shows that, in the three months up to December 2020, for the first time ever, more children ceased to be looked after in placements with parents (16 children) than those that started being looked after in this placement type (12 children).

### External, Residential and Fostering Placements

158. Foster care provides children and young people with stable, loving homes when their own families are unable to do so. In-house fostering refers to foster carers who are approved and registered with Middlesbrough Council and Independent foster carers are those who are approved and registered with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), external to Middlesbrough Council. Carers can provide a range of placements including respite, short term and long term care. Long term foster care can be a suitable permanency option for many children. Indeed, as at 31 March 2019, 28% of children looked after in England were recorded as being in long term foster homes.
159. Residential care refers to children's homes and can placements can be provided within Middlesbrough Council-run homes (in-house) or by private providers (external residential).
160. As part of a concerted effort to make best use of all available capacity in the system, Middlesbrough had a total of **177** in-house foster care placements (as of December 2020) with the intention of increasing this number to meet national averages. Initiatives to enhance the provision of in-house fostering included a recruitment drive, strengthening of foster care management and the broadening of approval criteria in order to use resources more widely. Also, as of December 2020, there were **154** Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements.
161. Between June and December 2020, there was a reduction of 4% in the use of external residential placements and an increase in the use of in-house foster carers by 14%, allowing Social Workers to maintain children in local foster care placements and to reduce the cost of external placements.

## Forecasting and Target Setting

162. On 28 July 2021, Children's Services provided information to the Overview and Scrutiny Board in relation to forecasting and target setting within the Service.
163. Children's Services has developed a set of seven proxy-indicators with indicative targets based on statistical neighbour averages. The indicators aim to support LMT decision-making and scrutiny by providing a clear framework for understanding the progressive impact of Children's Services improvements on combined Council resources.
164. Building on progress over the last 12 months, Children's Services has set an ambition to achieve the statistical neighbour average for the overall rate of children looked after over the next three years. This would bring Middlesbrough's rates of children looked after in line with: Rochdale, Stoke-on-Trent, Tameside, Salford, Knowsley, Blackpool, Hull, Hartlepool, Halton and South Tyneside.
165. The target setting was evidence led and based on moving progressively from Middlesbrough's current children looked after population towards the statistical neighbour average over three years; forecasting future placement distribution based on established trends between 2020-21; and would be modified to take account of in-depth modelling of projected additional reductions in external residential and increases in internal fostering numbers resulting from improvement plan initiatives.
166. Identified risks in progress included unknown and emerging modifying factors (eg Covid, placement sufficiency); slow down rate of improvement and ongoing practice legacy issues; increases in national/regional/statistical neighbour looked after children averages.
167. See the table below for the indicators:-

Indicator	Polarity	June 2020 (baseline Jan 2021)	June 2021	Target 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Target Detail
1. Number of substantive posts filled with agency social workers	Lower is better	64	50	48	30	23	Reduce to national average of 23%
2. Number of children in care (No/rate)	Lower is better	670 (202.2)	545 (164.5)	502	459	416 (125.5)	Reduce to SN average
3. Number of children placed in external residential placements	Lower is better	74	58	47	37	35	Reduce to modelled Boro target
4. Number of children placed in in-house residential provision	Higher is better	9	19	21	22	23	Increase to modelled Boro target
5. Number of children placed with in-house foster carers	Higher is better	160	170	169	175	185	Increase to modelled Boro target
6. Number of children placed with IFA carers	Lower is better	168	164	159	143	121	Reduce to modelled Boro target

7. Proportion of placement moves in the reporting period which have incurred less cost (excludes same cost movements)	Higher is better	64.6% (Q1 20-21)	66.7% (Q1 21-22)	68.8%	70.9%	73.0%	Incremental year on year increase
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## **TERM OF REFERENCE D – PERMANENCY**

### **To challenge people's perceptions of children in care and to create a better understanding of Children Looked After for everyone involved in the process**

168. Given the high numbers of children looked after in Middlesbrough, the Panel also wished to explore perceptions of children in care and how negative perceptions and stigma around the care system could be challenged and better understood.
169. Whilst exploring the issue of challenging negative perceptions, the Panel was able to draw on first-hand experience of one of its Members who had experienced the care system as a young person. This provided the Panel with some insight into how a young person might feel and their thoughts prior to, and during, becoming a looked after child and when leaving care.
170. The Member advised that, in his own case, he was placed with several different family members but this was not necessarily the best course of action as this placed tremendous pressure on those family members and ultimately led to additional moves to placements with foster carers. The Panel also heard how, in the Member's experience, there was a perception, because of his age, that he was the problem as he was viewed as being too old to be fostered long term.
171. It is this instability, and constant movement, that can lead to negative perceptions of children in care. The example provided to the Panel demonstrated that having far fewer material possessions prior to being taken into care could impact negatively on appearance in this case a lack of suitable clothing. Importantly, there are also perceptions of young people that can be unrepresentative and unfair. For example, as heard by the Panel, young people being referred to as a 'gang' or 'group of jobs' was particularly misleading. For example, some young people in care gathered together as they were in similar circumstances and did this in order to feel secure and to feel that they belonged to something. Sometimes the groups could appear rowdy but they were not trying to intimidate people or intending to be loud but this was often the only way their voice would be heard.
172. The Panel heard how increased sense of empathy towards children in care and for others to adopt a more child centric approach could make a child's pathway through the care system much easier. Fortunately, in the example provided to the Panel, the Member recalled that due to several Social Workers, Teachers and Foster Carers adopting a more child centred, empathetic and non-judgemental approach, helped both he and his sibling in being successful in their chosen careers.
173. Whilst perceptions of children in care are somewhat entrenched, and not always complementary, there is work being carried out to change those perceptions. Such work is wide ranging through internal and external initiatives.
174. For example, the Panel Member with first-hand experience of the care system welcomed the transition to work placements for young people in care and care leavers – as referred to under 'Community Learning' at Appendix 1 – as this provides additional support to young people in care, or care leavers, to assist them in gaining apprenticeships and employment.
175. Externally, organisations such as 'Become Charity' work with a range of stakeholders to change perceptions of children in care.

## Become Charity

176. Become Charity is a national, independent charity for children in care and young care leavers, providing advice and support to care experienced children and young people in several ways including:-
- A dedicated Care Advice Line – Confidential phone line or email service providing advice to any child or young person in care or care leaver.
  - Coaching - For ages 16-27: help to identify and achieve goals and overcome barriers.
  - Weekly Link Up meetings – Virtual hang out for children and young people to chat, take part in activities and quizzes.
  - Propel – website for care leavers providing information on the support available in higher education settings.
  - Care Factsheets – provision of free factsheets on various subjects designed to help children in care and care leavers.
177. Become also provides support and training for professionals working with care experienced children and young people.
178. One of Become's strategic aims is to change attitudes towards care experienced children and young people in society and the Panel heard about specific work the Charity has undertaken in respect of this.
179. In 2017, Become undertook specific research – 'Perceptions of Care' [[Become - Perceptions of Care \(2017\) \(becomecharity.org.uk\)](#)] with children in care to explore how they felt they were perceived by others in society, including teachers, social workers and their peers.
180. The work involved dialogue and feedback with focus groups and an online survey. The key statistics that resulted from the study are highlighted as follows:-
- 50% of children in care and 51% of care leavers agreed that "People think it is the children's fault that they are in care."
  - 39% of children in care and 43% of care leavers disagreed with the statement "Other children's parents do not treat children in care differently to other children."
  - 30% of children in care and 42% of care leavers agreed with the statement that "Where I live, people would not like it if someone opened a children's home."
181. Many young people in care feel that there are many assumptions and stereotypes made with regard to children in care and the care system and stigma can be difficult to identify, however, ill-founded perceptions could be attributed to a lack of knowledge and education about the care system.
182. Here are some of the views expressed by the young people who took part in the study:-
- Children who are in care are trouble makers or cause anti-social behaviour.
  - Children are in care because they (the child) have done something wrong.
  - Often young people in care are expected to fail due to low aspirations set by professionals.
  - Young people who had encountered the Police for the first time often felt they were treated like criminals even when they had done nothing wrong and that incorrect assumptions were often made about them being involved in anti-social behaviour or drug taking for example.
  - Young people did not want others to feel sorry for them or treated as if they were more fragile than their peers.

- Young people did not want to be labelled as ‘children in care’, they just wanted to be children. This was a particular concern of children in school – they did not want to be ‘singled out’. They did not want to be treated differently to their peers – whether that be in a negative way or sometimes in an overly-sympathetic way to compensate for them being in care.

"We are expected to fail and it is a stigma. I hated telling people I was in care because it feels like people judge you."

183. During recent discussions with young people in relation to what it meant to be a care leaver, Become found that many young care leavers spoke about being socially intelligent and able to navigate bureaucracy well. Reference was also made to the use of the word resilience when referring to children in care and care leavers and in such contexts it was something that was celebrated, however, many of the young people found this uncomfortable as they considered resilience not to be a choice.
184. Become also found that consistently care leavers appeared to be more aware than those in care of differences in how they are portrayed compared to their peers.
185. A follow up study was undertaken in 2018 – ‘Teachers Who Care’ [[Become - Teachers Who Care \(2018\) \(becomecharity.org.uk\)](#)] – which looked at teacher training and supporting children in care in schools.
186. The study aimed to find out whether teachers had heard similar views expressed as those highlighted by children in care, and included a series of questions in relation to knowledge, attitudes and stigma around children in care and were answered by more than 450 teachers.
187. The study found that **87%** of respondents had heard at least one colleague express a negative generalisation about children in care and **37%** of respondents had heard such views often.
188. The Teachers Who Care 2018 report made nine recommendations (which can be viewed in the link to the document in para194) to schools, training providers, Government and Local Authorities, including a call for the introduction of mandatory training on working with children in care in all schools for all teachers both before and after they qualified.
189. The findings of the report were developed into a resource, “I Wish You Knew” [[Become - I Wish You Knew \(2019\) \(becomecharity.org.uk\)](#)], highlighting the six key things children in care wished their teachers to know about their experience:-
1. What being in care really means.
  2. We all have potential.
  3. I don’t want to be treated differently.
  4. No child in care is the same.
  5. It’s not because we are not trying.
  6. What a big difference you can make.
190. The Panel also considered how the use of language and dialogue in and around the care system could amplify people’s responses. For example, ‘myth-busting’ often had the opposite effect in practice, either reinforcing existing stereotypes or introducing stereotypes to people who were previously unaware.



191. In addition, Become provides secretariat support for the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for children looked after and care leavers. This is a cross-parliamentary group of MPs and Peers that have an interest in improving the care system and promoting good quality government policy-making. Become launched a spotlight inquiry particularly exploring themes around care and community around the country. This included holding a series of evidence gathering sessions and reaching out to young people to find out how they had been supported to feel part of their local or wider communities and how local communities had been supported to respect and better understand the care experienced members.

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## **CONCLUSIONS**

192. Based on the evidence provided throughout the investigation, the Panel's conclusions are as follows:-

- a) The Panel wishes to acknowledge that due to the need for Children's Services to improve with urgency and pace, significant progress has been made since the Panel commenced its review. This is supported by the Department for Education's Children's Commissioner recommending that Children's Services in Middlesbrough no longer required oversight by the Commissioner and was endorsed by the Minister for Children and Families in July 2021.
- b) The Panel also acknowledges that improvements were made despite significant demand on services coupled with the Covid pandemic which called for alternative and inventive ways of working.
- c) The Panel recognises that whilst the number of children looked after in Middlesbrough remains high, it has significantly reduced – with a 19.5% reduction during the period November 2020 to November 2021.
- d) The Panel feels reassured that since the start of its review, significant improvements have been made across Children's Services in Middlesbrough, with the following areas most recently noted as having improved by Ofsted:-
  - Senior managers are realistic and know their service – they are aware of progress and areas that still require improvement.
  - Social Worker caseloads have begun to reduce.
  - There is stronger practice in relation to immediate safeguarding concerns and in support provision for children in need where serious concerns exist and they are on the 'edge of care'.
  - Social Workers are enthusiastic and know their children and families well and are committed to improving their lives.
- e) The Panel also notes positive progress has been made in the following areas:-
  - An increase in the numbers of children being adopted, where it is in their best interests, with more Middlesbrough children being adopted than from any other Tees Valley local authority in the last 12 months up to December 2021. Parallel planning has been improved between Middlesbrough's fostering service and Adoption Tees Valley. In addition, Adoption Tees Valley continues to promote interest in adopting through continuous recruitment events managed by a dedicated Marketing Officer.
  - A significant reduction in the number of children living in connected carer placements and an increase in the number of children whose permanency has been secured via Special Guardianship orders.
  - A 50% reduction in the number of children residing in Placements with Parents during the 12 month period to August 2021.
  - A significant reduction in external residential placements in the six months up to December 2021.

- An increase in young people being placed in Middlesbrough residential provision.
  - An increase in the use of in-house foster care placements as opposed to Independent Foster Agency placements.
- f) The Panel is aware that there are areas of the service that require further development and is keen to ensure it is kept updated on progress.
- g) The Panel heard that Children's Services has implemented a sophisticated data analysis package to monitor demand, impact and trends and to support improved performance reporting and social work practice. A raft of Performance Management Framework indicators are in place and appropriate scorecards are being developed by the Service Area and Children's Services Improvement Advisor, with input from the relevant Chairs, for use by this Scrutiny Panel, the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel and Corporate Parenting Board for governance and assurance purposes. The Service has also developed a set of seven proxy indicators with indicative targets based on statistical neighbour averages with the ambition of achieving the statistical neighbour average for children looked after over the next three years.
- h) The Panel recognises that the Futures for Families Service has been successful in providing support for young people on the edge of care and has prevented 37 young people becoming looked after. The service also provides support to fragile placements and placement stability has improved.
- i) The Panel notes that there have been improvements in practice with consistently high numbers of children looked after being seen by social workers; improved management oversight of cases; consistently high (99%) numbers of children looked after having a recorded Personal Education Plan and more than 90% of children looked after health assessments being carried out. The Panel notes that an area for improvement is dental assessments where 66% of children looked after have had an assessment in the last 12 months, however, this has also been impacted by Covid.
- j) The Panel is aware of the need to increase the number of Middlesbrough foster carers in order to provide sufficient local placements for Middlesbrough children and acknowledges that in-house capacity has been increased due to continued foster carer recruitment drives and a range of initiatives including managed social work teams (Innovate) specifically working to: bring children from expensive external placements back to Middlesbrough; reduce the number of children placed with parents on care orders (where safe to do so); progressing plans for Special Guardianship where children live with a connected persons carer; and ensuring support is provided for children living with foster carers where the placement is at risk of breaking down. This work has realised significant cost reductions. The Panel acknowledges that there are specific groups of young people for whom more specialised carers/placements are required including older children/teens, parent and baby placements, sibling groups, children with complex needs and/or disabilities, children from minority ethnic groups and that these children can wait longer for permanent homes.
- k) A Corporate Parenting Strategy has been devised and adopted which includes a Permanency Strategy and Sufficiency Strategic sitting within it. Each strategy was shaped by input from children and young people in Middlesbrough.

- l) The Panel heard that Children's Services had developed a social work practice model 'Children and Relationships First', developed with the workforce. This was supported by the recently established Centre for Practice Excellence which, as well as supporting the practice model, provides co-ordination to driving innovation and best practice across the whole system of support for children and young people and offers tools and resources to support the practice model, workforce development, quality assurance arrangements and opportunities to share and develop best practice.
- m) The Panel recognises the excellent work being undertaken by Pause, a national charity working with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeat removals of children from their care. Pause offers an intensive support programme with the aim of breaking the cycle of repeat removals by supporting women to tackle destructive patterns of behaviour and to develop new skills and responses to create a positive future. Pause is currently working with 11 women in Middlesbrough.
- n) In terms of improving perceptions of children in care, the Panel is encouraged to learn that increased engagement is taking place with children in care and care leavers through Participation People and is supportive of this being developed going forward.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

193. Based on the evidence gathered during the investigation, and the conclusions above, the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel makes the following recommendations for consideration by the Executive:-
- a) The Panel supports the sustained efforts being made to reduce the number of children looked after in Middlesbrough in line with our regional statistical neighbours and that the performance scorecard being reported to LMT on a six-weekly basis in relation to this indicator be shared with the Panel on a quarterly basis.
  - b) The Panel notes the high percentage of children (15.1%) who become looked after at birth and recommends that a specific piece of work be undertaken to establish why this is the case and that this work includes performance information and exploration of whether further interventions can be put in place to reduce this figure. If appropriate, a set of performance indicators should be identified to monitor improvement over the next year in the first instance.
  - c) That analysis be undertaken to identify any potential gaps in child protection provision in the more ethnically diverse wards and further work be undertaken to provide assurance that the statistical under representation/over representation of children of different ethnicities being looked after by the local authority aligns with the level of need amongst these groups.
  - d) That work is undertaken to identify how the provision of Early Help can be increased in North Ormesby, (subject to further analysis and if this remains appropriate), and that the recommendations put forward by this Panel in its Final Report on 'Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective' regarding further assessment of demand and the number of Early Help workers assigned to the areas, be taken forward.
  - e) That the sustained efforts to increase the number of children being placed in an in-house foster placement be continued and that the targets established remain a key priority indicator for the service and performance be regularly reported to the Panel.
  - f) The Panel appreciates the challenges faced by the service in relation to the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers and the continuous efforts being made to increase in-house Foster Carer provision. It is recommended that additional feedback is sought from Foster Carers leaving Middlesbrough's Fostering Service to ensure that the information gained through the satisfaction surveys is fully utilised to focus on continuing improvement in this area.
  - g) The Panel notes that there is currently very little advertising across the town to indicate that Middlesbrough Council needs and wants more people to become in-house foster carers. The Panel recommends that the work to increase the number of carers continues with pace and focus on additional advertising and marketing which should be analysed to improve awareness of the continuous need for more people to become in-house foster carers.
  - h) The Panel appreciates that an essential strand to improving sufficiency is to continue to improve social work practice. It is acknowledged that numerous initiatives have been put in place to achieve this including the introduction of a Social Work Practice Model, a new Centre for Practice Excellence, the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the work undertaken by the Future for Families Team, the commissioning of Innovate Teams and the effectiveness of the PAUSE project. However, whilst the Panel acknowledges improvements in the reduction of the use of Connected Carer Placements and Placements with Parents, it remains an area for

improvement, and it is recommended that performance data is regularly presented to the panel in respect of these elements.

- i) The Panel recognises that particular progress has been made in strengthening the auditing process which provides a wide and in-depth coverage of the quality of services, however, a small proportion of social work practice continues to be identified as 'inadequate' through the audits. Whilst the Panel notes the continuing reduction in 'inadequate' practice, it recommends that increased focus is placed on addressing poor quality practice through increased management oversight, support, guidance and training identified as appropriate for individuals, as set out in the Children's Services improvement plan.
- j) The Panel would also reinforce that the day to day lived experience of the child should be at the heart of all social work practice and that this should be a key feature of learning and development to improve practice and a key part of the auditing process.
- k) That the improvement in the number of children being placed for adoption over the period 2018/19 (17) to 2020/21 (22) be continued alongside the improved focus on permanency planning.
- l) That progress against the set of seven proxy indicators with indicative targets based on statistical neighbour averages be reported to the panel and OSB on a quarterly basis.
- m) That mandatory training to provide a basic awareness of the Children's Social Care system, including information regarding key terms and phrases, be provided to all Council staff and Elected Members through the Middlesbrough Learns platform and that this be completed on an annual basis.
- n) That the local authority considers the use of certain terminology and acronyms that can be perceived as negative in relation to children in care/care leavers and that this be considered in conjunction with the young people themselves via the Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Forum and other participation routes.
- o) That the Participation Officer be asked to undertake a piece of work with children in care and care leavers through the various forums that have been established, to obtain their views around their experiences of the care system, what works well, what does not work well and to present their findings to the Panel and the Corporate Parenting Board.
- p) That opportunities are maximised to continually gather the views of children and young people in care, care leavers and their carers that can be used to shape and drive service improvement within the system.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Victoria Banks	Head of the Virtual School
Caroline Cannon	Head of SEN & Vulnerable Learners
Kay Dargue	Head of Partnerships
Trevor Dunn	Head of Access to Education
Gail Earl	Head of Prevention
Claire Kemp	Community Learning & Employability Manager
Amanda Richardson-Roe	Head of Referral & Assessment
Paula Jemson	Head of Corporate Parenting & Performance
Paul Rudd	Residential Care Service Manager
Rob Hamer	Futures for Families Service Manager
Bill Robinson	Children's Services Programme Manager
Jenny Rowan	Team Manager, Children's Care
Sam Turner	Policy & Participation Manager, Become
Vicky Davison-Boyd	Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following sources were used/referred to in the preparation of this report:-

Reports to, and minutes of, the Children & Young People's Social Care & Services Scrutiny Panel meetings: 14 September, 12 October, 9 November, 7 December 2020, 18 January, 15 February & 22 March 2021.

HM Government - Working Together to Safeguard Children (A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) July 2018, updated December 2020.

HM Government – Working Together to Safeguard Children (Statutory Framework – legislation relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children) July 2018.

Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

DfE Statistics for Children Looked After in England year end 31 March 2020.

Government Statistics - Fostering in England 2019/20 (main findings).

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Vol. 2 – June 2015 – DfE.

Ofsted Inspection on Middlesbrough Children's Social Care Services 25/11/19 – 06/12/19 (published 24/01/20).

Sufficiency – Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (March 2010).

PAUSE website and correspondence

Become Charity website & reports

**COUNCILLOR D DAVISON  
CHAIR, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**The Membership of the Panel: Councillors: T Mawston (Vice Chair), A Hellaoui, T Higgins,  
M Nugent, M Storey, Z Uddin, J Walker and G Wilson.**

**(During the course of the review, the Panel Membership was as follows: Councillors: L Garvey (Chair), C Dodds (Vice Chair), C Cooke, B Cooper, S Hill, M Saunders, Z Uddin, J Walker, G Wilson & C Wright).**

## **Children's Services – Supporting Children and Families**

All of the Services outlined below make up the support mechanisms within Children's Services to support children looked after, those on the edge of care, and their families.

### **Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH)**

The Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH) is the first point of contact for referrals regarding the welfare or safety of a child/young person. The experienced Social Work Team, headed up by a Team Manager and two Assistant Team Managers, works in conjunction with professionals from Health, Education and Police and other key agencies including CAMHS, Domestic Abuse Services and Missing Co-ordinators.

Each referral into the MACH is screened using the Threshold of Need document in order to determine whether further action is needed and, if so, where the referral should be directed.

Where the referral does not meet the Threshold of Need for statutory intervention, it is directed to the Early Help service. An Early Help Practitioner forms part of the multi-agency team within the MACH and will initially pick up referrals deemed as requiring Early Help. The Practitioner liaises with the relevant Early Help team and the case is allocated to a Practitioner within one of the teams who completes a 'My Family Plan' with the family.

Each member of the household is involved in completing the My Family Plan – including direct work with each child to establish how life is for them on a daily basis - and consideration is then given to decide which services should be engaged to help and support the family.

All professionals involved with the family then meet around every eight weeks to review progress, discuss any concerns and to ensure support is in place for the whole family. If it is felt that Early Help is not working and the family require additional support to that being offered, the family will be stepped up to the Assessment Service.

### **Assessment Service**

Cases allocated to the Assessment Service, or stepped up from Early Help, are prioritised and children within the household are seen within 24 hours where there is thought to be a child protection issue, or within 72 hours where there is thought to be Child in Need issue. A Single Assessment is undertaken, taking between 10 – 45 days depending upon the level of need. The purpose of the Single Assessment is to gather information and consider the needs of the child/young person and/or their family, to decide whether they require any support or whether they have been harmed, or are believed to be at risk of significant harm. The assessment needs to be carried out within 45 days from the point of referral and will generally require a social worker; During the assessment, everyone within the household is spoken to, including direct work undertaken with children.

Social Workers engage with children in an age-appropriate and variety of ways, including drawing, playing games, taking them to the park, to help put them at ease in order to gain an overview of daily life within the household. This is done over the course of several visits in order to build up a relationship with the child.

The Social Worker produces a genogram with the family showing their support network which might include extended family members, friends, etc. and sometimes a Family Group Conference (FGC) is held bringing



everyone together to look at ways they might be able to support the family. One of the issues highlighted in the Ofsted inspection findings was that more should be done to include 'absent fathers' in this process.

An individual assessment, including safety plans and Covid planning, is completed for each child and the Assessing Social Worker consults with other colleagues where appropriate, depending on need, to determine whether the child requires support from a specialist team, such as the Children with Disabilities Team.

Once the single assessment is complete, the Social Worker makes a recommendation as to which service is best placed to support the family. The outcomes from the Single Assessment could be:

- The child is deemed not to be 'In Need', therefore no further action will be taken, other than to provide advice regarding universal services that are available OR, a referral to Early Help
- The child (or children) within the household is deemed to be 'In Need' but is not suffering, or considered likely to suffer, significant harm. In this case, Children's Services will draw up a 'Child In Need' plan with the family, to identify the support they require
- The child (or children) within the household is deemed to be 'In Need' and there are concerns that the child is suffering, or considered likely to suffer, significant harm. In such cases, Children's Services will hold a multi-agency Strategy Discussion to determine whether a child protection investigation (section 47 enquiry) is needed; and consider whether any immediate protection is also required to ensure that the child/young person is safe; for example there are occasions that a child/young person may need to move to live with another family member on a temporary basis or become looked after by the Local Authority.

Where it is decided that a child requires continued involvement with Children's Care, the case is then transferred to one of the Safeguarding and Care Planning Teams (either Child in Need or Child Protection Teams).

### Safeguarding and Care Planning

Where a single assessment concludes that further work is required around safeguarding, the case would transition to the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service.

Where child protection concerns are identified, a multi-agency Child Protection Conference is held and the child/children are made subject to a Child Protection Plan. The Plan is in respect of each individual child and focuses on each child's day to day life. Improvement is measured and monitored within set timescales with regular reviews.

In some instances it will be considered necessary to step up cases to a Public Law Outline (PLO) legal framework meeting to consider the local authority's duties when thinking about taking a case to Court to obtain a Care Order in respect of a child. This is used for long term fostering, residential care, etc. The Team works with the family to avoid care proceedings, however, if the children are unable to remain safe in the care of the parents, the authority examines whether they could live safely with another family member or friend, known as a connected persons placement, or with foster carers.

### Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting

When a decision is made to remove a child/children from the birth family, the Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting service endeavour to identify forever homes for the child/children that will meet their needs on a long term basis. At this stage in the process, all decision making is required to be extremely thorough, with robust assessments.

Accommodating children in their forever homes can be achieved in a number of ways including:-

- Connected Persons carers (extended family members or close friends);
- Special Guardians;
- Long Term Foster Carers;
- Long Term residential provision. (This is not a preferred option and is only used where a child has very complex needs).
- Adoption.

The Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting Team works closely with the children and birth parents and considers whether it is appropriate for all the children within the household to be placed together or individually. It is always preferable to keep siblings together unless there is a justified reason for separating them and it is deemed not to be in the children's best interests to be placed together. It is essential for the Looked After Children Team to physically see children on a regular basis and to see them alone to undertake direct work with them. This helps build stable relationships with professionals in order for them to protect children and promote their welfare. The child's Social Worker should always promote independent advocacy for the children which is particularly important for older children.

The Team works closely with the Independent Reviewing Officer and CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service) who provide support to the children and birth parents throughout care proceedings. The child's Social Worker will make a recommendation in relation to the plan for the child/children but it is the Court that makes the final decision.

Care planning needs to be timely and robust and the Independent Reviewing Officer has an important role to play.

The Team is responsible for finding permanent ('forever homes') for children and young people. Prospective carers are carefully assessed in a timely way with a suitable match being made as swiftly as possible.

In its 2019 inspection findings, Ofsted identified that children had not been moved to their forever homes quickly enough and that there had been delays particularly in the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service and improvement work is ongoing in this area.

#### Residential, Fostering and Futures for Families

In some scenarios, a young person may be referred to Middlesbrough's new service, Futures for Families, prior to becoming looked after. Futures for Families was launched in August 2020 and is an edge of care service working with young people to prevent them from being taken into care. The Department for Education (DfE) provided funding for Middlesbrough to develop the service, based on North Yorkshire's 'No Wrong Door' model. It provides a whole system approach with a multi-agency team and a residential component to support young people and their families.

In some instances, a child's needs are best met with residential provision. Middlesbrough has some in-house residential provision, however, this must often be purchased from a private sector provider.

Middlesbrough's in-house residential provision, includes a respite offer at Gleneagles for children with disabilities.

Where it is decided that a child's care plan is for fostering, careful matching with appropriate foster carers takes place.

Middlesbrough foster carers undergo a rigorous assessment process prior to their application being submitted to the Family Placement Panel where a recommendation is subsequently made regarding their suitability. The Panel's recommendation is put forward to the Agency Decision Maker, in this case the Director of Children's Care, for a final decision as to whether the prospective carers have been successful. Carers can be approved to care for varying numbers and age ranges of children depending on the carer's circumstances, for example the provision of short term care, long term care (up to age 18 and beyond), respite care, specialist provision such as mother and baby placements, or specialising in moving children on to adoptive placements which is a very valuable resource.

#### Youth Offending Service/Vulnerable, Exploited, Missing, Trafficked (VEMT)

The YOS/VEMT service may become involved with families and/or liaise with the Teams described above, where a child/young person is known to be frequently missing from home or where the child/young person has been arrested.

The South Tees Youth Offending Service is a multi-agency partnership serving both serves both Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland local authority areas. The service is made up of professionals from both Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland's Children's Services, Public Health, Cleveland Police and the National Probation Service.

Where a young person has been arrested, they are brought to the attention of the Youth Offending Service. A separate assessment is undertaken in respect of the young person - the outcome of which will determine the help that is subsequently offered.

The Youth Offending Service works closely with Children's Social Care and follows joint procedures and assessments.

The Service receives daily information from the Police in relation to young people who are missing and each is given a risk management rating of low, medium or high. A 'Missing' Team Manager is located within the MACH and screens cases received into the MACH on a daily basis alongside the Early Help Practitioner.

Every missing young person is offered a Return Home interview which is shared with the child's Social Worker and aims to build up a picture around the young person. Where a young person is repeatedly missing, this is discussed at the VEMT multi-agency Forum, which examines issues around exploitation and shares information with partners. Additional support is provided where appropriate. Children who are missing from education are also discussed at VEMT.

Those young people in VEMT that are deemed to be very high risk, and where professionals feel that concerns need to be escalated to Director level, are assessed and considered by the Risk Management Group. This group is chaired by the Executive Director of Children's Services and considers those young people where very significant concerns exist and those considered to be at high risk of death. The Executive Director takes responsibility for the young people being discussed at this group and they are invited to attend to give their views as to whether they agree that they should be discussed at such a high level and to tell the group about the issues they face.

## SEND/Children with Disabilities

The SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Service provides appropriate support to ensure improved outcomes for young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and those regarded as vulnerable learners, within the statutory framework.

The SEND Assessment Team identifies, assesses and makes provision for children and young people 0-25 with SEND via the Education, Health and Care assessment process as young people progress towards adulthood. The Team also carries out annual reviews of Statements of SEN and EHCPs (Education Health and Care Plan) and provides advice and support to professionals and settings regarding support required for children and young people.

### Access to Education

Access to Education encompasses several teams including the Virtual School, School Exclusions and Children Missing from Education.

The Officers within these teams examine issues carefully on a continual basis in conjunction with all schools, including senior leaders, SENCOs, designated teachers and safeguarding leads. Communication between professionals takes place daily in order to pool intelligence on children. Where children are permanently excluded from school the team ensures that legal processes are followed correctly and that schools are compliant.

Where children and/or families went missing, the Team worked with the Police, Home Office and Benefit Agencies to track them down, although it can be difficult to track families who have returned to a foreign country.

### Virtual School

The Virtual School is made up of a team of professionals who work closely with carers, parents, schools, social workers and other agencies to help ensure children looked after achieve the best outcomes possible at school.

The team track and monitor attendance, achievement, progress and outcomes, and provide various support and interventions when a child looked after experiences problems at school or falls behind with their learning.

The Virtual School has a team of Personal Education Plan Advisors who work closely with staff in all of the schools which children looked after attend to ensure that they each have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which is of high quality and can be used by all professionals and agencies involved with the child to provide bespoke support. PEPs are reviewed each school term and updated where appropriate.

The team provides advice, guidance and information for all of those involved in the education and progress of children looked after, as well as delivering an extensive programme of training to help upskill stakeholders. Advice and guidance is also provided to parents of previously looked after children.

The Virtual School also plans and helps children looked after to make the transition from nursery to primary school and from primary to secondary education.

## Community Learning

Middlesbrough Community Learning provides learning opportunities for people of all ages and abilities. This includes a wide-ranging offer of traineeships and apprenticeships, starting at 16 plus, as well as a programme of adult education through the adult skills budget.

For those who are not in full time employment, education or training, Middlesbrough Community Learning can provide support across a range of options including apprenticeships and training.

Apprenticeships are available from the age of 16 and are delivered in a variety of vocations from Levels 2 to 5, such as business administration, customer service, public service, operational service and supporting teaching and learning in schools.

Additional support is provided with the apprenticeship programme to those young people who are looked after, or care leavers. At the recruitment stage, once an application was received for the chosen apprenticeship, a young person identified as being looked after/care leaver, is guaranteed an interview providing they met the entry criteria.

Should their application for their chosen apprenticeship programme be unsuccessful, further support is provided via the Youth Employment Team through the Youth Employment Initiative (YEI), accessible to young people aged 16-29. An advisor is assigned to the young person providing practical support, such as help with completing applications and building self-confidence for interviews and providing advice to explore other options available. This might include an offer of work experience through the 50 Futures programme if required.

Once the young person commences their apprenticeship, a learning mentor is assigned to them and remains with them throughout their apprenticeship, providing additional support to encourage and build confidence, learn new skills and offer financial advice.

For adults aged 30 and over with multiple barriers into work, support is provided through the Routes to Work Programme.

## PAUSE - Report for Scrutiny Panel (Middlesbrough) July 2021

### Summary and operational updates

The contract started on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020, however Middlesbrough came into the contract a little later.

We have a Data Sharing Agreement in place with Middlesbrough and we take all of the initial referrals from Scoping data gathered by Pause National. **162** women were considered eligible for the Pause service in Middlesbrough.

Middlesbrough sent the details of **18** women they considered most at risk of repeat pregnancies that would likely lead to children being removed from their care on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2020. We are commissioned to work with **10** women in Middlesbrough.

Out of those **18** women; **9 women are open** on the program and **1 is engaging**. She regularly meets with the practitioner and is being given the full offer, we hope she will be open in the next couple of weeks. We have also received a number of referrals directly from children's social Worker's following final hearings.

#### Closed without being open;

**5** women declined the service or there was not enough information to track the women down and offer the service, **6** of the women were not eligible to work with Pause due to no risk of pregnancy (sterilisation 1), **2** had children in their care, **1** still in court proceedings, **1** moved out of area. **1** of the women had too complex mental health difficulties to be able to consent to the Pause program.

**5** women that declined the Pause service were engaging for some time and were offered supports and referrals into other services for a period of 3 months.

#### Engaging but never opened

**1** woman was in an abusive relationship, the practitioner continued to attend her property and felt although the woman declined the service, she continued answering the door, accepted care packages. The woman was then supported to flee an abusive relationship and moved to a women's refuge in York. As such she is out of area, but built a trusting relationship with the practitioner and managed to get to safety. She reported that she looked forward to their short door step interactions and gave the woman hope that things could be different, but she could never talk openly as her abusive partner was in the home.

Once women are open on the program we have had **0% drop out rate**.

Women have consistently chosen to focus on **(1) Relationship with my children, (2) housing** and **(3) physical and mental health** as their top priorities.

The **10** women on the programme have had a total of **28** children removed from their care (an average of 3 children per woman). The women range in **age from 23 to 41 years old**, with an average age of **28 years**. **22%** of the women have **care experience**.

## Partnerships

We continue to build partnerships with **Virgin Care Sexual Health Services**. There has been a slow start women waiting 3 or 4 weeks for telephone triage appointments and a further 3-4 weeks to be able to gain contraception. We now have a pathway for women to be seen the next day. We are hoping to hold a group for Pause women with a sexual health nurse discussion around STD/STI's general sexual health and how to safely use home testing kits.

We have made positive links with **IMPACT on Teeside** and are looking at starting a bespoke **grief and loss group** for women that are on the Pause Program and this starts in August 2021.

Next month we are presenting to **Adoption Tees Valley** and Middlesbrough **Adult Safeguarding** following some frontline partnership working.

We have also made links with **My Sisters Place**.

## Group work and creativity

We have been on day trips since the easing of lock down to **Redcar beach and Beamish**, with women from all over the North East.

We run a virtual drop in session where we have ran **healthy cooking sessions on a budget**, crafts groups with a link made with MIMA.

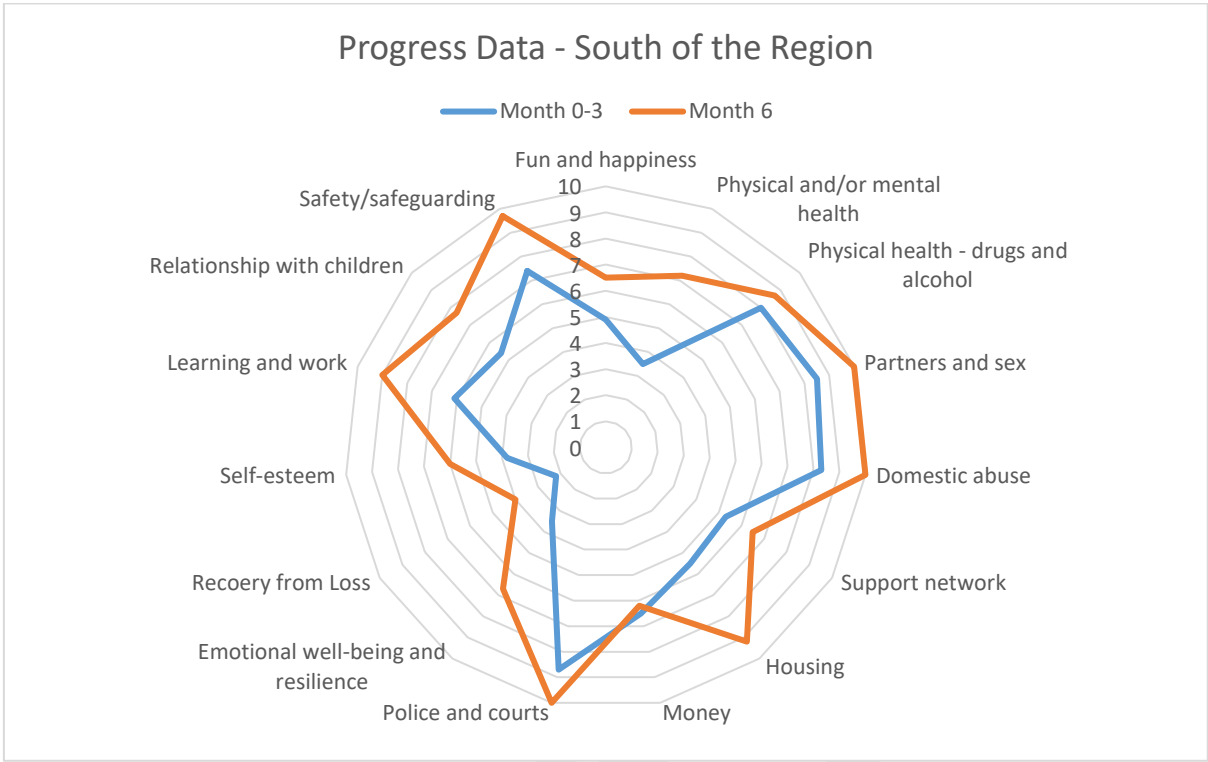
Groups really help with **self-esteem building, reduced social isolation, managing loss** through reducing the stigma if child removal through peer support and shared experience, role modelling positive behaviours and trying new things.

We have worked in collaboration with Digital Me for the women to create **a film** displaying a song that was written by Pause women during a **Music Therapy one to one and group** facilitated through Pause. This also includes woman's art work, poetry and interviews about their experiences of services and working with Pause, explain the way in which they would like to be supported by services to recover from past and present traumas. They have created a podcast through music therapy about the woman's journey and writing songs about working with Pause, domestic abuse and the loss of her children,

We have also been working with **Open Clasp Theatre company** and the women have co-written a play to explore the complexities, challenges and successes in relationship between women that have had their children removed from their care and social workers. They are holding auditions for this in July 2021.

## Outcomes;

The radar chart shows how **17 women** working with Pause North East (Stockton, Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough) have self-reported on a range of areas such through scaling questions (where 1 is the lowest score possible and 10 is the highest). We use the women's self-report on relationship with children as a proxy measure for how our work affects children.



**Outcomes for women and children: Mental health**

Women’s mental health outcomes looks at CORE 10 scores and answers to the assessment question; ‘How would you describe your mental and emotional health?’



### Mental and Emotional Health



1.

Row Labels	Baseline	Mid point	Final
Good	3%	30%	60%
Neither good nor bad	30%	40%	20%
Bad	43%	20%	20%
Very bad	23%	10%	0%

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## MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

### ADDENDUM

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD  
11 MAY 2022  
FINAL REPORT  
CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE &  
SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL  
SUFFICIENCY & PERMANENCY (PERCEPTIONS OF  
CHILDREN IN CARE)**

1. The Scrutiny Panel's review was carried out over the course of the full Municipal Year 2020-21 and was lengthy to compile given the volume of evidence provided, the very broad subject matter and various changes in political structures.
2. Given that the Children's Services improvement journey was required to move at pace, and that the service has inevitably been subject to continuous monitoring and inspection by Ofsted, many of the issues of concern to the Panel at the time of the review had already begun to be addressed and progress is being made.
3. The progress made to date by Children's Services is supported by the decision made by the Minister for Children and Families to endorse the recommendations made in July 2021 by Peter Dwyer, Department for Education's Children's Commissioner, that the Service no longer required oversight by the Commissioner.
4. Mr Dwyer worked closely with the Council from January 2020 and his final report in July 2021 noted "considerable progress has been made and there is evidence of real impact." "Most impressively in the face of significant demand and need, the Council has tackled legacy issues which had inflated the volume of cases in higher tiers of provision."
5. The Commissioner's report noted specific improvements including a reduction in the numbers of children on Child Protection Plans and a speeding up of assessment timeframes. The number of Children Looked After reduced from a peak of **702** in August 2020 to **539** in July 2021.
6. With this in mind, it is worth highlighting that the data provided to the Panel was correct at the time it was provided and that by the nature of the subject matter, data is constantly changing and evolving.
7. On 14 and 15 December 2021 a second Ofsted Monitoring Visit took place, specifically focusing on: Children in Need; Children in Need of Protection and Public Law Outline.
8. The findings of the inspection include:-
  - Senior managers have a realistic view on progress made since the last inspection.
  - Social worker caseloads have reduced.
  - The ongoing improvement work has resulted in stronger practice when there are immediate safeguarding issues, and in the support for children in need where there are serious concerns and they are on the edge of coming into care.
  - All of the social workers that met inspectors on this visit knew their children and families well, and have an enthusiasm and passion for working with them and improving their lives.

- The Council is ensuring that children are allocated to social workers who have the required time to work with them.
- More focus is needed on the lived experience of individual children, but notes that plans are in place to address this and other issues

#### National Picture – Latest Headline Information – 2020-21<sup>1</sup>

9. The latest figures available from the DfE for Children Looked After in England as of year end 31 March 2021.
10. As at 31 March 2021, the number of Children Looked After in England was **80,850** – this figure has increased by **1%** from the previous year and is now at an all-time high.
11. **28,440** children started being looked after during the year ending 31 March 2021 – down **8%** on the previous year.
12. **28,010** children ceased to be looked after during the year ending 31 March 2021 – down **6%** on the previous year.
13. The number of children who ceased to be looked after because they were adopted was **2,870** – down **18%** on the previous year.
14. The rate per 10,000 children, aged 18 and under, who were looked after as at 31 March 2021 was **67** and this was the same as in 2020.
15. The data shows that in 2021, the number of children looked after by local authorities in England rose to its highest level at **80,850**, up by **1%** on the previous year.
16. The increase was driven by there being slightly more children started to be looked after during the year than those ceasing to be looked after, however, both starting and ceasing were down with monthly figures showing:-
  - The numbers of children starting to be looked after were consistently lower than usually expected throughout the year but were particularly low during periods of national lockdowns or when restrictions were in place.
  - The numbers of children ceasing to be looked after were similarly affected by the first national lockdown but returned to the levels typically expected from September 2020 onwards. This fall is likely to have driven an increase in the average duration of care for those ceasing to be looked after, which increased by a further 79 days (more than two and a half months) compared to the previous year.
17. Other interesting headlines suggest an impact of the pandemic are:-
  - The number of CLA who were adopted has fallen 18%, continuing a fall from a peak in 2015. The large decrease this year is likely driven by the impact on court proceedings during the pandemic where cases progressed more slowly or were paused.

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<sup>1</sup> DfE Statistics for Children Looked After in England year end 31 March 2021.

## In Middlesbrough

18. In providing this update, the following update information was provided to the Corporate Parenting Board meeting on 18 January 2022:-

### Permanency

19. From the height of **702** children looked after in September 2020, the figure has reduced to **510**. During the 12 month period November 2020 to November 2021, numbers had reduced from 654 to 526. This was a **19.5%** reduction.
20. This equates to **197.4** per 10,000 per population in November 2020 reducing to **158.8** in November 2021. This is the lowest rate in 12 months and was continuing to reduce month on month. By January 2022, this rate reduced further to **149** per 10,000 – narrowing the gap for demand between Middlesbrough and its regional statistical neighbours (whose rate was **134** per 10,000).
21. In terms of adoption, since 1 April 2021, **19** adoption orders have been granted, including four to children from BAME backgrounds; four to sibling groups of more than two and four to children over the age of four.
22. More Middlesbrough children have been adopted than from any other Tees Valley Local authority.
23. There has been a significant reduction in the number of days between a Placement Order being granted and a child being adopted has reduced from **558** in 2019/20 to **382** in 2020/21.
24. There are currently **38** Middlesbrough children progressing to adoption, with all but two children already linked to potential adopters.
25. Within the last 12 months **76** children secured permanency via Special Guardianship Orders.
26. As at January 2022, there were **114** children residing in connected carer (kinship care) placements. This has reduced from a peak of **212** in 2020.
27. **47** children currently resided in Placements with Parents (PWP) and this has reduced from **52** in October 2021, and from a peak of **99** in September 2020, then **50** in August 2021. This equates to an overall reduction of 52%.
28. There has been a reduction in external residential placements from **74** in June 2021 to **47** in December 2021. This is a positive step as children cared for in Middlesbrough and in Middlesbrough placements achieve better outcomes.
29. School attendance for looked after children stood at **91%** in November 2021 and there had been no permanent exclusions in the last five years.
30. **3.1%** of looked after children are receiving less than 25 hours of education per week (11 children). Action Plans and oversight from the Virtual School were in place for each child.

31. Children's Services has identified that risks to making continuing progress include: an increase in demand across the Tees Valley, and the region as a whole; recruitment of staff within the children looked after and care leaving services.

#### Sufficiency

32. In terms of increasing placements for Middlesbrough children that are closer to home, internal occupancy increased to **23** young people being placed across Middlesbrough's residential provision. Work is continuing on a regional framework (12 north east local authorities) or sub regional framework to develop this.
33. The intensive work undertaken with PAUSE has proved positive and the contract has been extended for a further six months. PAUSE is currently working with **11** women who have had multiple children removed from their care or are at risk of further removals.
34. Of the **326** foster placements, the number of in-house foster care placements (with Middlesbrough foster carers) has increased to **169 (52%)** and has now overtaken the number of placements with Independent foster carers (IFAs), **157 (48%)**. Middlesbrough continues to run a significant recruitment campaign to attract in house foster carers. In addition, a business case for a new in-house fostering service delivery model continues to be developed.
35. Weekly monitoring takes place in respect of residential placements in Middlesbrough and there has been a shift away from reliance on external market provision towards in-house residential provision, largely due to the opening of Rosecroft and Daniel Court.
36. At the start of January 2022 there were **68** young people placed in residential provision – **23 (34%)** in internal provision and **45 (66%)** in external provision but this was reducing.

#### Demographics

37. In terms of the children looked after population in Middlesbrough, **54%** are male; **45%** are female and **1%** are unaccompanied asylum seeker children.
38. In terms of ethnicity of the current children looked after population in Middlesbrough, the highest percentage are White/British – **81%**, with **8%** mixed race; **7%** Black or Black/British; **2%** Asian or Asian/British and **2%** from various other nationalities.
39. Within the six months up to January 2022, **97** children became looked after due to abuse or neglect (this is a slight increase on the year 2020/21) and remains significantly higher than statistical neighbours and the England average.
40. In terms of **demand**, in January 2021 there were **617** children looked after in Middlesbrough. This figure has reduced by **17%** during the last 12 months (to January 2022), and there has been an overall reduction of **27%** since the height of demand in September 2020 (**702** children looked after).
41. For every 0.6 children entering care, one child exits and this ratio has been maintained for the six-month period to January 2022.

### Futures for Families

42. Since going live in September 2020, Futures for Families had supported **50** young people on the edge of entering care. Of those 50, **37** had not become looked after (74%).
43. Of the 37 young people that did not become looked after:-
- 21 were supported at Child in Need level (57%).
    - 11 remained supported at Child in Need level.
    - 10 children (47%) no longer required a Child in Need Plan and were no longer in need of support by the local authority.
  - 16 young people (43%) were subject to Child Protection procedures.
    - 10 remained supported at Child Protection level.
    - 4 (25%) were 'stepped down' to receive Child in Need support.
    - 2 (13%) no longer required any service from Children's Social Care.

### Caseloads

44. Since December 2020, and throughout the improvement journey, caseloads have consistently reduced. Whilst caseloads vary between services, the average caseload across Children's Social Care (per full time equivalent employee) stands at **16.7** in December 2021. This has reduced from **22.3** in December 2020.

### Placement Stability

45. In the last 12 months, less than **5%** of the children looked after population have experienced placement breakdowns.
46. In January 2021, **123** (20%) looked after children had experienced three or more placements over the last 12 month period.
47. This has reduced to **36** in December 2021. This equates to 7% of the current looked after population. This figure is currently below all external benchmarks and below Middlesbrough's outturn for 2020/21.
48. This has been achieved through improvement in practice, ensuring care plans are reviewed more regularly and more effective in supporting placement stability; stronger partnership working and stronger management oversight.
49. It is worth pointing out that not all placement moves are disruptive. For example, a child may move from a foster placement back to parents or to a planned adoptive placement.

### Quality and Impact

50. In terms of outcomes and quality of practice, key performance outcomes from the December 2021 performance report are highlighted below:-
- **94%** of children looked after had been seen within the last six weeks. This is a 5% decrease from November 2021, however, this has been consistently high with more than 90% of children looked after being seen since May 2021.
  - Management oversight of cases has improved, with **94%** of children looked after receiving management oversight in the form of supervision within the month of

December 2021. Again, this is a 5% decrease from November 2021, however, this has been consistently high with more than 90% of CLA receiving management oversight since May 2021.

- **99%** of children looked after had a recorded Personal Education Plan (PEP) within the previous six months. This performance has remained consistently high and has not dropped below 93% for the last 12 months.
- **90.8%** of CLA health assessments have been conducted and recorded within the last 12 months. (This does not include a small cohort of older young people who did not wish to undertake a health assessment). Again, performance has been consistently high at more than 90% for the last 12 months.
- **66.1%** of children had undergone dental assessments in the last 12 months and appears to be one of the areas most impacted by Covid and requires ongoing improvement.

### **Changing Perceptions of Children in Care**

51. Key to improving perceptions around children in care is ensuring the voice of those with care experience is heard and listened to.
52. Since the review was undertaken, a significant amount of work has been ongoing to increase participation with children in care and care leavers. This includes the commissioning of 'Participation People' – an organisation that delivers award-winning youth voice, engagement and participation programmes across the UK and is working with Middlesbrough Council to:-
  - Inspire Change – Changing the approach to working with young people by transforming organisational culture.
  - Gain Data – Helping to understand the lived experience of young people by using youth-led programmes.
  - Take Action – Keeping young people engaged and working with them to find out what they think needs to change.
53. As a result of collaborative working, the following groups have recently been re-launched for care experienced young people to come together and have a voice in influencing key decision makers when developing services for children and young people:-
  - Middlesbrough Mini Children in Care Council – for care experienced young people aged 7 – 12 years
  - Middlesbrough Children in Care Council – for care experienced young people aged 13 – 17 years
  - Middlesbrough Care Leavers Forum – for care experienced young adults aged 18 – 25 years.
54. In addition, through engagement with Participation People, Middlesbrough's Corporate Parenting Board has been kept updated and involved in youth engagement work and recently hosted a workshop with care experienced young people and care leavers to



speak to them about their experiences of being looked after, their hopes and aspirations for the future and how they see services for young people being shaped.

## CONCLUSIONS

31. Based on the evidence provided throughout the investigation, the Panel's conclusions are as follows:-
- a) The Panel wishes to acknowledge that due to the need for Children's Services to improve with urgency and pace, significant progress has been made since the Panel commenced its review. This is supported by the Department for Education's Children's Commissioner recommending that Children's Services in Middlesbrough no longer required oversight by the Commissioner and was endorsed by the Minister for Children and Families in July 2021.
  - b) The Panel also acknowledges that improvements were made despite significant demand on services coupled with the Covid pandemic which called for alternative and inventive ways of working.
  - c) The Panel recognises that whilst the number of children looked after in Middlesbrough remains high, it has significantly reduced – with a 19.5% reduction during the period November 2020 to November 2021.
  - d) The Panel feels reassured that since the start of its review, significant improvements have been made across Children's Services in Middlesbrough, with the following areas most recently noted as having improved by Ofsted:-
    - Senior managers are realistic and know their service – they are aware of progress and areas that still require improvement.
    - Social Worker caseloads have begun to reduce.
    - There is stronger practice in relation to immediate safeguarding concerns and in support provision for children in need where serious concerns exist and they are on the 'edge of care'.
    - Social Workers are enthusiastic and know their children and families well and are committed to improving their lives.
  - e) The Panel also notes positive progress has been made in the following areas:-
    - An increase in the numbers of children being adopted, where it is in their best interests, with more Middlesbrough children being adopted than from any other Tees Valley local authority in the last 12 months up to December 2021. Parallel planning has been improved between Middlesbrough's fostering service and Adoption Tees Valley. In addition, Adoption Tees Valley continues to promote interest in adopting through continuous recruitment events managed by a dedicated Marketing Officer.
    - A significant reduction in the number of children living in connected carer placements and an increase in the number of children whose permanency has been secured via Special Guardianship orders.
    - A 50% reduction in the number of children residing in Placements with Parents during the 12 month period to August 2021.
    - A significant reduction in external residential placements in the six months up to December 2021.
    - An increase in young people being placed in Middlesbrough residential provision.

- An increase in the use of in-house foster care placements as opposed to Independent Foster Agency placements.
- f) The Panel is aware that there are areas of the service that require further development and is keen to ensure it is kept updated on progress.
- g) The Panel heard that Children's Services has implemented a sophisticated data analysis package to monitor demand, impact and trends and to support improved performance reporting and social work practice. A raft of Performance Management Framework indicators are in place and appropriate scorecards are being developed by the Service Area and Children's Services Improvement Advisor, with input from the relevant Chairs, for use by this Scrutiny Panel, the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel and Corporate Parenting Board for governance and assurance purposes. The Service has also developed a set of seven proxy indicators with indicative targets based on statistical neighbour averages with the ambition of achieving the statistical neighbour average for children looked after over the next three years.
- h) The Panel recognises that the Futures for Families Service has been successful in providing support for young people on the edge of care and has prevented 37 young people becoming looked after. The service also provides support to fragile placements and placement stability has improved.
- i) The Panel notes that there have been improvements in practice with consistently high numbers of children looked after being seen by social workers; improved management oversight of cases; consistently high (99%) numbers of children looked after having a recorded Personal Education Plan and more than 90% of children looked after health assessments being carried out. The Panel notes that an area for improvement is dental assessments where 66% of children looked after have had an assessment in the last 12 months, however, this has also been impacted by Covid.
- j) The Panel is aware of the need to increase the number of Middlesbrough foster carers in order to provide sufficient local placements for Middlesbrough children and acknowledges that in-house capacity has been increased due to continued foster carer recruitment drives and a range of initiatives including managed social work teams (Innovate) specifically working to: bring children from expensive external placements back to Middlesbrough; reduce the number of children placed with parents on care orders (where safe to do so); progressing plans for Special Guardianship where children live with a connected persons carer; and ensuring support is provided for children living with foster carers where the placement is at risk of breaking down. This work has realised significant cost reductions. The Panel acknowledges that there are specific groups of young people for whom more specialised carers/placements are required including older children/teens, parent and baby placements, sibling groups, children with complex needs and/or disabilities, children from minority ethnic groups and that these children can wait longer for permanent homes.
- k) A Corporate Parenting Strategy has been devised and adopted which includes a Permanency Strategy and Sufficiency Strategic sitting within it. Each strategy was shaped by input from children and young people in Middlesbrough.

- l) The Panel heard that Children's Services had developed a social work practice model 'Children and Relationships First', developed with the workforce. This was supported by the recently established Centre for Practice Excellence which, as well as supporting the practice model, provides co-ordination to driving innovation and best practice across the whole system of support for children and young people and offers tools and resources to support the practice model, workforce development, quality assurance arrangements and opportunities to share and develop best practice.
- m) The Panel recognises the excellent work being undertaken by Pause, a national charity working with women who have experienced, or are at risk of, repeat removals of children from their care. Pause offers an intensive support programme with the aim of breaking the cycle of repeat removals by supporting women to tackle destructive patterns of behaviour and to develop new skills and responses to create a positive future. Pause is currently working with 11 women in Middlesbrough.
- n) In terms of improving perceptions of children in care, the Panel is encouraged to learn that increased engagement is taking place with children in care and care leavers through Participation People and is supportive of this being developed going forward.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

32. Based on the evidence gathered during the investigation, and the conclusions above, the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel makes the following recommendations for consideration by the Executive:-
- a) The Panel supports the sustained efforts being made to reduce the number of children looked after in Middlesbrough in line with our regional statistical neighbours and that the performance scorecard being reported to LMT on a six-weekly basis in relation to this indicator be shared with the Panel on a quarterly basis.
  - b) The Panel notes the high percentage of children (15.1%) who become looked after at birth and recommends that a specific piece of work be undertaken to establish why this is the case and that this work includes performance information and exploration of whether further interventions can be put in place to reduce this figure. If appropriate, a set of performance indicators should be identified to monitor improvement over the next year in the first instance.
  - c) That analysis be undertaken to identify any potential gaps in child protection provision in the more ethnically diverse wards and further work be undertaken to provide assurance that the statistical under representation/over representation of children of different ethnicities being looked after by the local authority aligns with the level of need amongst these groups.
  - d) That work is undertaken to identify how the provision of Early Help can be increased in North Ormesby, (subject to further analysis and if this remains appropriate), and that the recommendations put forward by this Panel in its Final Report on 'Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective' regarding further assessment of demand and the number of Early Help workers assigned to the areas, be taken forward.
  - e) That the sustained efforts to increase the number of children being placed in an in-house foster placement be continued and that the targets established remain a key priority indicator for the service and performance be regularly reported to the Panel.
  - f) The Panel appreciates the challenges faced by the service in relation to the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers and the continuous efforts being made to increase in-house Foster Carer provision. It is recommended that additional feedback is sought from Foster Carers leaving Middlesbrough's Fostering Service to ensure that the information gained through the satisfaction surveys is fully utilised to focus on continuing improvement in this area.
  - g) The Panel notes that there is currently very little advertising across the town to indicate that Middlesbrough Council needs and wants more people to become in-house foster carers. The Panel recommends that the work to increase the number of carers continues with pace and focus on additional advertising and marketing which should be analysed to improve awareness of the continuous need for more people to become in-house foster carers.
  - h) The Panel appreciates that an essential strand to improving sufficiency is to continue to improve social work practice. It is acknowledged that numerous initiatives have been put in place to achieve this including the introduction of a Social Work Practice Model, a new Centre for Practice Excellence, the development of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, the work undertaken by the Future for Families Team, the commissioning of Innovate Teams and the effectiveness of the PAUSE project. However, whilst the Panel acknowledges

improvements in the reduction of the use of Connected Carer Placements and Placements with Parents, it remains an area for improvement, and it is recommended that performance data is regularly presented to the panel in respect of these elements.

- i) The Panel recognises that particular progress has been made in strengthening the auditing process which provides a wide and in-depth coverage of the quality of services, however, a small proportion of social work practice continues to be identified as 'inadequate' through the audits. Whilst the Panel notes the continuing reduction in 'inadequate' practice, it recommends that increased focus is placed on addressing poor quality practice through increased management oversight, support, guidance and training identified as appropriate for individuals, as set out in the Children's Services improvement plan.
- j) The Panel would also reinforce that the day to day lived experience of the child should be at the heart of all social work practice and that this should be a key feature of learning and development to improve practice and a key part of the auditing process.
- k) That the improvement in the number of children being placed for adoption over the period 2018/19 (17) to 2020/21 (22) be continued alongside the improved focus on permanency planning.
- l) That progress against the set of seven proxy indicators with indicative targets based on statistical neighbour averages be reported to the panel and OSB on a quarterly basis.
- m) That mandatory training to provide a basic awareness of the Children's Social Care system, including information regarding key terms and phrases, be provided to all Council staff and Elected Members through the Middlesbrough Learns platform and that this be completed on an annual basis.
- n) That the local authority considers the use of certain terminology and acronyms that can be perceived as negative in relation to children in care/care leavers and that this be considered in conjunction with the young people themselves via the Children in Care Council, Care Leavers Forum and other participation routes.
- o) That the Participation Officer be asked to undertake a piece of work with children in care and care leavers through the various forums that have been established, to obtain their views around their experiences of the care system, what works well, what does not work well and to present their findings to the Panel and the Corporate Parenting Board.
- p) That opportunities are maximised to continually gather the views of children and young people in care, care leavers and their carers that can be used to shape and drive service improvement within the system.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Sue Butcher	Executive Director of Children's Services
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Victoria Banks	Head of the Virtual School
Caroline Cannon	Head of SEN & Vulnerable Learners
Kay Dargue	Head of Partnerships
Trevor Dunn	Head of Access to Education
Gail Earl	Head of Prevention
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Amanda Richardson-Roe	Head of Referral & Assessment
Paula Jemson	Head of Corporate Parenting & Performance
Paul Rudd	Residential Care Service Manager
Rob Hamer	Futures for Families Service Manager
Bill Robinson	Children's Services Programme Manager
Jenny Rowan	Team Manager, Children's Care
Sam Turner	Policy & Participation Manager, Become
Vicky Davison-Boyd	Service Manager, Adoption Tees Valley

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following sources were used/referred to in the preparation of this report:-

Reports to, and minutes of, the Children & Young People's Social Care & Services Scrutiny Panel meetings: 14 September, 12 October, 9 November, 7 December 2020, 18 January, 15 February & 22 March 2021.

HM Government - Working Together to Safeguard Children (A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) July 2018, updated December 2020.

HM Government – Working Together to Safeguard Children (Statutory Framework – legislation relevant to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children) July 2018.

Independent Review of Children's Social Care.

DfE Statistics for Children Looked After in England year end 31 March 2020.

Government Statistics - Fostering in England 2019/20 (main findings).

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations: Vol. 2 – June 2015 – DfE.

Ofsted Inspection on Middlesbrough Children's Social Care Services 25/11/19 – 06/12/19 (published 24/01/20).

Sufficiency – Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children (March 2010).

PAUSE website and correspondence; Become Charity website & reports

**COUNCILLOR D DAVISON  
CHAIR, CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES SCRUTINY  
PANEL**

**The Current Membership of the Panel: Councillors: T Mawston (Vice Chair),  
A Hellaoui, T Higgins, M Nugent, M Storey, Z Uddin, J Walker and G Wilson.**

**(During the course of the review, the Panel Membership was as follows: Councillors: L Garvey (Chair), C Dodds (Vice Chair), C Cooke, B Cooper (from S Hill, M Saunders, Z Uddin, J Walker, G Wilson & C Wright).**

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