

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

<p>Date: Tuesday 27th September, 2022 Time: 10.30 am Venue: Mandela Room</p>

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 26 July 2022 3 - 8
4. Transition to Adulthood - Further Information 9 - 18

The Panel will be provided with further information in relation to its current topic 'Transition to Adulthood' in relation to the Pathways (Leaving Care) Team.
5. Update - Ofsted Monitoring Visit 19 - 32

The Executive Director of Children's Services will be in attendance to provide the Panel with an update in relation to the Ofsted monitoring visit carried out 13-14 July 2022.
6. Overview and Scrutiny Board - Update

The Chair will provide a verbal update in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scuritny Board meeting held on 21 September 2022.
7. Any other urgent items which in the opinion of the Chair, may be considered.
8. Date and Time of Next meeting - 24 October 2022, 10.30am

Charlotte Benjamin
Director of Legal and Governance Services

Town Hall
Middlesbrough
Friday, 16 September 2022

MEMBERSHIP

Councillors D Davison (Chair), T Mawston (Vice-Chair), T Higgins, M Nugent, R Sands, Z Uddin, 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

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 26 July 2022.

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

OFFICERS: R Brown, E Cowley, J Dixon, G Earl and P Jemson.

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

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

MINUTES – 21 JUNE 2022

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

INTRODUCTION TO NEW SCRUTINY TOPIC – SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

R Brown, Director of Education and Partnerships, was in attendance at the meeting accompanied by E Cowley, Head of Inclusion and SEND, G Earl, Head of Prevention and P Jemson, Head of Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting.

The Officers provided the Panel with a broad overview of several areas within Children's Services that supported young people during the transition to adulthood, namely:-

- Children with disabilities
- Care Leavers and young people who were not in education, employment or training (NEET).
- SEND needs

The Head of Prevention provided Members with information as to how young people are supported in their transition to adulthood in terms of education, employment and training.

It was explained that within the Early Help Service (or Stronger Families), there was a dedicated team, consisting of six staff – three Family Practitioners and three Support Workers - specifically supporting young people aged 16 and 17 who were not in education employment or training (often shortened to NEET). In accordance with the Learning and Skills Act 2008, local authorities had a duty to 'encourage, enable or assist young people's participation in education or training.'

In order to fulfil its statutory duties, the team at Middlesbrough Council supported all young people aged 16 and 17 in Middlesbrough who were due to leave school or college to ensure they had a suitable offer of learning by the end of September. This was known as the September Guarantee.

The September Guarantee could be a place at a collage, a job with suitable training leading to a qualification, or an apprenticeship. Information was checked on a weekly basis by the team, in conjunction with the Performance Team, to identify which young people had received an offer of education, employment and training and to contact those who had not received an offer.

In response to a query from a Panel Member, it was confirmed that the Team supported all 16 and 17 year olds living in Middlesbrough and this figure was several thousand young people.

The September Guarantee rate for Middlesbrough in 2021 was 96.2% and was above the England rate of 95.5% and the North East rate of 95.7%.

The NEET Team then tracked the destinations of young people to offer careers guidance and a placing service to support young people into suitable opportunities. The Team ensured that all young people had taken up their offers and started in their agreed placements. For those young people who did not commence their placement offers, one to one work was undertaken on an individual basis and a named worker was assigned to each young person. The named worker would support the young person and help them decide what they wanted to do and to obtain a suitable placement. The Team worked with a range of learning providers including schools and colleges, Middlesbrough Council's Community Learning Service and apprenticeship providers.

In 2021/22, 5.6% of 16 and 17 year olds in Middlesbrough were NEET (not in education, employment or training). This was slightly higher than the North East average of 5.4% and the England average of 4.7%. Middlesbrough was fourth out of 11 statistical neighbours.

Young People with SEND

The Head of Inclusion and SEND provided the Panel with information on how young people with SEND are supported in their transition to adulthood.

The SEND Code of Practice provided statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to specific legislation that must be followed by local authorities and other bodies. A significant part of the Code of Practice related to preparing young people with SEND for adulthood.

The SEND Team worked with young people between 14 – 25 and focused on planning for their future and the transition to adulthood by preparing them for employment, independence, community inclusion and good health outcomes.

The SEND Team worked closely with social care colleagues to ensure that person-centred planning took place with the young person to ensure that their voice was heard and that the right support pathways were in place. For example, if a young person wanted a job, all efforts from that point onwards would be put into helping and supporting that young person to find suitable employment. All children with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) were supported at Year 11 with place planning to ensure they had a suitable offer of education, employment or training. The SEND Team ensured that this cohort of young people had the support they needed, going forward, to make decisions about their future and ongoing support with education and employment providers. Once it was established where the young person would be placed (eg college, apprenticeship), the SEND Team would examine whether commissioned services were required. For example, many young people wanted to find a job and the SEND Team was able to fund providers to offer internships. Funding was provided to offer job coaches in the work place to help young people learn whilst in the job. 180 young people had been supported to date with internships. This was part of a Tees Valley local authorities' arrangement and planning was undertaken on a multi-agency basis.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query, it was confirmed that the local authority provided High Needs Funding to meet the needs of children with SEND and had partnerships with a range of providers including Middlesbrough College, Project Choice, Stockton Riverside College, Prior Pursglove College and Middlesbrough Community Learning.
- In response to a query regarding academies, it was clarified that it was a statutory duty to support any young person with an EHCP, regardless of whether they attended an academy. The SEND Team had a good working relationship with all schools, including academies, with the key aim of ensuring all young people with SEND progressed.
- A Panel Member asked where a young person has a named Children's Social Worker, do they transition to a named Adult Services Social Worker and, if so, at what point that would happen. It was explained that young people with very complex needs are discussed at the Transition Forum and careful planning takes place to ensure any transitions run smoothly.

Pathways (Leaving Care)

The Head of Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting informed the Panel that the Pathways Care Leaving Service had a statutory obligation to support care leavers to independence. A care leaver was a young person who had been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more, spanning their 16th birthday, up to the age of 25.

Each young person leaving care needed a transition period during which to focus on developing skills for independence and to prepare for adulthood. A young person in the care of the local authority had a Social Worker up to the age of 18, then each individual was assigned a Personal Advisor from within the Pathways Team. The Social Worker completed a needs assessment for the young person, setting out the interventions and support services they required to prepare them for adulthood.

A Pathways Plan was then developed for each care leaver setting out their needs, views, goals and the support they would receive. Support for care leavers included:-

- Access to financial support, depending upon needs.
- Computer and internet access.
- Support with opening a bank account.
- Access to money management and developing budgeting skills.
- Personal allowance.
- Financial assistance for university student.
- Invitation to social groups.
- Care Leavers Forum providing an arena for their views to support service development.

It was highlighted that 11 young people had gone on to University and had been helped with their accommodation needs.

Social isolation was recognised as an issue for young people leaving care and the Pathways Social Group had been established to help combat this. The group met on a weekly basis and enjoyed activities such as movie nights and cookery classes. The Care Leavers Forum was established to support service improvement and development.

In response to a query as to how many young people participated in the social group and the care leavers forum, it was acknowledged that the CLF struggled for numbers and there were currently two or three regular members, however, the Participation Manager was attempting to expand this with more creative and inventive ways of taking part. The social group had recently put on a Platinum Jubilee barbeque and celebration event which was attended by around 20 young people.

In terms of support with education, employment, and training, the Pathways (Leaving Care) Team provided young people with structured support focussing on helping young people into education, employment or training.

A NEET (not in education, employment or training) Panel, made up of Personal Advisors, Social Workers, Work Readiness Team, Youth Offending Services and education providers, discussed how to best help and support those young people who were more difficult to place in education, employment or training.

Work readiness support was provided to care leavers, including help to produce CVs, practice interviews, access to bursaries, purchasing college equipment and clothing for interviews, etc. and ensuring that care leavers were guaranteed an interview for jobs and apprenticeships. It was highlighted that Middlesbrough Council provided apprenticeship opportunities and currently had four young people in placements across the authority.

Young people were also supported to obtain work experience opportunities and support with travelling to interviews and attending local job fairs and college open days. This linked in with the Virtual School.

During discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- In response to a query from the Chair regarding advising young people on moving to collage or into employment, the Head of Service advised that they were currently trying to broaden the membership of the NEET Panel to include other potential employment providers and services such as CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). It was acknowledged that mental health issues and substance misuse were two of the biggest obstacles to young people moving into education, employment or training and it was hoped that broadening the NEET Panel to reflect this and to provide more specialised support where required would assist.
- It was queried how many cases, on average, social workers held. The Head of Service stated that within her own service area the average caseloads for Social Workers was approximately 22-23 per worker, however, this varied between service areas. Social Workers within the assessment and safeguarding teams had higher caseloads as the demand in these areas was greater. It was noted that the Personal Advisors within the Pathways Team had 25 or fewer cases each.
- In terms of the levels of support provided, it was clarified that Social Workers worked with Children Looked After up to the age of 18, then Personal Advisors supported care leavers only. They kept in touch with each young person assigned to them approximately every eight weeks depending on need. The Personal Advisors would keep in contact more frequently with those young people who had a greater need – sometimes contact could be daily. The physical building where the Pathways Team was situated had an open door policy where young people were always welcome. The building had kitchen and shower facilities and a duty team that was always available.

Members were advised that in terms of health, the Pathways Team included a dedicated CAMHS Worker who was able to offer additional support around emotional wellbeing. Young people were supported with referrals to other agencies; support to speak to/attend Doctor appointments, access to leisure services, health passports, C cards, registering with a doctor, dentist or optician and advice and guidance regarding LGBTQ+ issues with signposting to support services.

In relation to housing/living arrangements, the Panel was informed that once a young person in care turned 17, focus was placed on planning for their post 18 future, when they would no longer be a 'Looked After Child'.

The Pathways Team supported young people with their preferred post 18 option, such as:-

- 'Staying Put' - this arrangement allowed young people to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18.
- Access to Supported Lodgings provision – working with accommodation providers. (Some young people moved to supported lodgings provision prior to becoming 18, with a support plan, if this was appropriate, however, no young person would be placed in such provision before their 16th birthday).
- Young people's housing panel – supporting access to multiple housing options.
- Support with Council tax exemption (up to age 21).
- Support with setting up home allowance.
- Support with removal costs.

Children and Young People with Disabilities

The Head of Children Looked After and Corporate Parenting provided the Panel with information around how young people disabilities were supported in preparing for adulthood.

Within the Children with Disabilities Service were three dedicated teams supporting young people aged from 15 years and six months up to 17 years. It was a statutory duty to help prepare these young people for adulthood.

It was noted that children with disabilities already had a multi-disciplinary team in place and a new assessment, depending on their status, was completed before their 16th birthday.

A Transition Panel considered which adult service was most appropriate to meet the needs of each young person and for those that were most at risk (for example from exploitation), they would transfer into the vulnerable adults services. The Children with Disabilities Service worked closely with Adult Social Care to undertake a capacity assessment to ascertain whether they were able to make decisions as adults. This work was carried out in conjunction with parents, the young person and courts to ensure their needs and rights were met.

The Panel heard that a huge amount of work went into all of the transitional arrangements for young people to plan for the best outcomes possible. Parallel planning was always undertaken to cover all eventualities.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and the information provided. The Chair asked Members to consider possible areas for further investigation and asked the Democratic Services Officer to circulate the presentation to all Panel Members requesting suggestions for potential areas for further investigation.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the information provided be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's new scrutiny topic 'Supporting Young People in the Transition to Adulthood'.
2. That the Panel receives further evidence at its next meeting in relation to the Pathways (Leaving Care) Service.
3. That the Panel receives further evidence at its October meeting in relation to the Children with Disabilities Service.
4. That the presentation be circulated to all Panel Members for information and that suggestions for possible areas of further investigation in relation to the current topic be sought.

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 at its meetings on 22 June and 19 July 2022, namely:-

22 June 2022

- Final Report of the Culture & Communities Scrutiny Panel – Enforcement in Middlesbrough and its impact on crime and anti-social behaviour.
- School Exclusions – Feedback from school visits.
- Strategic Plan 2021-24 – Progress at Year End 2021/22.
- Revenue & Capital Budget – Year end outturn position 221/22.
- Scrutiny Chairs Updates.

19 July 2022

- Executive forward work programme.
- Executive Member update – Deputy Mayor & Executive Member for Children's Services (Councillor Smiles).
- Chief Executive's Update.
- Final Report of the Children & Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel – Special Educational

Needs & Disabilities (SEND).

- Scrutiny Work Programme Report 2022-23.
- Scrutiny Chairs Updates.
- Next OSB meeting – Wednesday, 21 September 2022 at 10.00am

NOTED

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled to take place on Monday, 19 September 2022 at 10.30am, Mandela Room, Town Hall.

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

SCRUTINY REPORT

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

19 September 2022

Scrutiny Board Report – Transition to Adulthood

Paula Jemson, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting

Summary

Attached report to be presented to Scrutiny Board detailing services provided to looked after children and care leavers to support their transition to adulthood.

Introduction

Please see attached report.

Evidence / Discussion

Please see attached report

Conclusions

Please see attached report

Scrutiny Board

Transitions to Adulthood - Pathways

September 2022



Owner – Rachel Farnham, Middlesbrough Council, Director of Children’s Social Care

Author – Paula Jemson, Head of Service for Looked After Children and Corporate Parenting

Pathways Care Leaving Service supports care leavers so that they can live successful independent lives (This includes young people with disabilities). A care leaver is a young person who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday

Personal Advisor

Section 3 Children and Social Work Act 2017 requires local authorities to provide personal advisors to care leavers up until the age of 25. Our Personal Advisors are here to help our care experienced young people to understand everything they need to positively transition to adulthood. Our team strive to give our young people the best start to adult life and show Middlesbrough children that they matter.

A Personal Advisor's role is to:

- provide advice (including practical advice) and support to the young person;
- participate in reviews of the young person's case;
- liaise with the responsible authority in the implementation of the pathway plan;
- co-ordinate the provision of services and take reasonable steps to ensure the young person makes use of such services;
- remain informed about the young person's progress and wellbeing;
- keep full, accurate and up to date records of contacts with the young person and services provided;
- provide information about financial capability-how to manage day to day finances;
- provide housing options available to the care leaver;
- support in finding further education, employment or training;
- keep in touch with the young person.

Needs Assessments and Pathway Plans

Every eligible care leaver has a right to a Needs assessment. This is completed by the social worker when the child is 16 years old. This assessment considers the young person's independent living skills and ability to manage their own finances. The aim of the needs assessment is to ensure that they leave care at a time that is right for them.

Relevant children have a Pathway Plan, which will set out the support that will be provided to the care leaver once they have left care.

This must be based on the Needs Assessment carried out.

The Pathway Plan should include:

- the nature of and level of contact and personal support to be provided;
- the young person's health needs and how these should be met;
- arrangements to support the young person in further education or employment;
- arrangements to support the young person in sustaining and developing family relationships;
- arrangements to ensure the young person is properly equipped for taking greater responsibility towards their independence;
- an assessment of the young person's financial needs and capacity and any financial assistance provided;
- arrangements to ensure the young person is living in suitable accommodation; and
- any 'Staying Put' arrangements.

Local Offer for Middlesbrough Care Leavers

The Local Offer for Care Leavers in Middlesbrough is designed to tell our care experienced young people about their entitlement and the support available to them to help them in every area of their adult life.

The Local Offer was created in October 2020 following consultation with young people and is in the process of being reviewed and updated to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of our young people.

Areas of Support Considered within the Middlesbrough Care Leaver Offer

- **Relationships** – we understand that feeling supported and having good healthy relationships is important to every person
- **Education and Training** – we want to see all of our young people thriving and learning new skills and knowledge
- **Employment** – Working is a great way to earn money, increase confidence and help young people get to where they want to be in their adult life
- **Emotional Wellbeing** – We recognise that supporting young people to take care of their emotional wellbeing is very important. Emotional health is as important as physical health.
- **Health and Wellbeing** – Being healthy is important
- **Accommodation** – We work to ensure that all of our young people are safe and secure in accommodation appropriate to their level of need.
- **Finances** – Pathways provide financial support and advice to help young people prepare for their transition to adulthood and independence
- **Participation** – We work to ensure that young people are active members of society and to have all the chances in life that other young people have.

Independence

- Pathway Plans for each care leaver setting out their needs, views, goals and what support they will receive
- Access to financial support depending on needs
- Computer and internet access
- Support to open a bank account
- Support to be provided with a form of ID – passport, birth certificate and driving license
- Access to money management and support to develop budgeting skills
- Personal allowance
- Financial assistance for university students
- Invites to social groups
- A Care Leavers forum to provide an arena for your views to support service development

Employment, Education and Training

- NEET panel
- Work Readiness Support
- Guaranteed interview for jobs and apprenticeships
- Support to: access bursaries, purchase college equipment, produce CVs, purchase clothing for interviews
- Support to understand rights and entitlements
- Work experience opportunities
- Additional financial support to ensure that there is a financial benefit to working
- Support to travel to interviews
- Support to attend local job fairs, college open days
- Work with Adult Care Social Worker to access Services for young people with Disabilities

Health

- A dedicated worker who can offer additional support regarding emotional wellbeing within Pathways
- Support with referrals to other agencies
- Support to attend appointments and speak to the doctor
- Free access to Middlesbrough leisure services
- A health passport with key information about young people's health
- C cards
- Support to register at a doctor, dentist and optician
- Advice and guidance regarding LGBT and signposting to support services
- Work with allocated Adult Care Social Worker or Health Lead Professional if young adult with disabilities

Housing

- Staying put allows young people to stay with foster carers post 18
- Access to Supported Lodgings provisions
- Young people's housing panels supporting access to multiple housing options
- Council tax exemption up to the age of 21
- Setting up home allowances
- Support with removal costs
- An in-house unregulated supported accommodation provision for children over the age of 16 with self-contained flats (for 9 young people) – Daniel Court
- A regulated in-house care provision for children over the age of 16 to gradually transition them to an independent flat where they will be supported to be responsible for the tenancy and live with floating support at a pace that meets their needs - Rosecroft

Finances

- A local Council tax exemption up to the age of 25 years
- Setting home allowance of up to £2000 to support young people to purchase necessary furniture and equipment in their own home
- Support with removal costs
- Personal allowances of £66.66 per week for children over the age of 16 years living in supported accommodation – this is in lieu of benefit entitlement
- Financial assistance for university students , higher education bursary including a tuition free loan and maintenance loan from student finance departments. Extra bursary provided by the LA of £X, three times a year.
- Weekly allowance of £66.66 for university students living away from home
- Support to purchase college equipment
- Children in residential and supported accommodation are engaged in an independence programme including budgeting
- PA's will offer 1:1 budgeting advice
- Recent access to £40 housing support grant to purchase groceries

17 August 2022

Sue Butcher
Executive Director of Children's Services
Middlesbrough Council
PO Box 505, 3rd Floor
Civic Centre
Middlesbrough
TS1 9FZ

Dear Sue

Monitoring visit to Middlesbrough children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Middlesbrough children's services on 13 and 14 July 2022. This was the fourth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in January 2020. There has also been a focused assurance visit in July 2021. Her Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Louise Hollick and Matt Reed.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- The front door service that receives contacts and referrals.
- Child protection enquiries, such as strategy discussions or section 47 enquiries.
- Child in need assessments.
- Early help assessments.
- Step-up and step-down to early help.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

The corporate leadership team has continued to develop and improve services at the front door since the last inspection in November 2019. The multi-agency strategic improvement board has overseen positive service improvements since Ofsted last visited the front door service in a monitoring visit in September 2020. An area of improvement has been to expand the offer of early help support to vulnerable children. There are stronger and wider partnerships in the Multi-Agency Children's

Hub (MACH), which are improving the quality of referrals, the richness of information-sharing, and leading to better-informed decision-making. Workforce instability and increased demand in the assessment service have led to the slowing of throughput of children's cases in this service. This is placing additional pressure on some social workers' caseloads and the quality of practice. Unfinished assessments and incomplete records have led to delays for some children in their circumstances and risks being fully assessed. Senior leaders have identified the pressures within this service and have very recently added an additional managed team to add capacity.

Findings and evaluation of progress

The executive Director of Children's Services (DCS) and the senior leadership team continue to track and monitor improvements to services to children at the front door. Practice improvement is supported by a robust and comprehensive quality assurance programme including thematic audits, deep dive audits, and regular scrutiny of performance data. This enables leaders to have an accurate understanding of the quality of practice and the impact of this on children and families' experiences. Audits conclude that practice within the assessment service still needs to improve, with a quarter of audits rated as inadequate. Within the MACH and early help service, audits demonstrate a significant improvement with the majority of practice now rated as good.

A wide menu of support services and targeted interventions is available through early help services, coordinated by partner agencies as lead professionals. When children's needs escalate, families are offered early help assessments through the local authority 'stronger families' teams. In the children's cases sampled by inspectors, early help interventions at this level are preventing risks escalating and reducing the need for statutory social care intervention.

Managers in the 'stronger families' early help service have robust oversight of work. There is routine auditing and performance data scrutiny to ensure consistent quality of practice. There is timely allocation of children to practitioners, with prompt and meaningful initial contact. Children promptly step up and step down from early help in line with their needs. As a result, more families are working with early help and their circumstances are improving. There are high caseloads within the early help teams that impact on practitioners' capacity for intensive work. There has been investment in additional capacity within the early help service. Additional teams and team managers have been created, and recruitment is in process to increase the number of workers in line with the increased demand.

In the small sample seen, early help assessments are thorough and completed in partnership with families. They include direct work with children, the views of parents, and consider the needs of all the children in the family. The resulting 'my family plan' includes the family goals to develop a shared plan that families actively engage with. For a small number of children, actions in the plan do not always

include all the presenting risks from the initial contact. This can result in potential risks to children being lost and left unaddressed. During this visit, the manager identified these gaps and subsequently was able to direct the worker to improve the plans to ensure all risks were captured.

The remit and responsibilities of the MACH have increased in response to the volume of work at the front door and the need to improve partnership working. Leaders have correspondingly increased partner presence and social work management posts to ensure there is adequate capacity to manage this increased demand. Managers have worked with partner agencies to improve the quality of contacts and referrals into the MACH in line with the agreed threshold document. This has led to a significant number of police contacts being sent back when they do not meet the threshold and is leading to more appropriate police contacts into the MACH. This is ensuring that children and families referred through the MACH receive a well-co-ordinated response in line with their needs.

A daily multi-agency triage meeting screens police notifications to enable detailed information to be shared between agencies and facilitates effective decision-making. Actions from the meeting are promptly followed up by the social worker. This ensures that responses to police contacts are timely and families are not waiting for a response or outcome.

Managers in the MACH make appropriate and timely decisions regarding children's contacts. There is effective management oversight of all work and precise record-keeping. Appropriate management direction is provided to social workers when they are allocated new contacts to screen. This ensures they are clear about next steps and what actions need to be taken to gather information and safeguard children.

Concerns about children are appropriately 'RAG' rated by managers to ensure the most urgent children's cases are given priority. Timescales for screening children's contacts are monitored by managers. They ensure that any delays are appropriate and in the best interests of children, so that a well-informed decision can be made. Children whose risks are such that they need an immediate response are considered without delay. If an urgent visit is required, this is completed on the same day. This ensures that children and families are effectively safeguarded in line with the level of initial risk rating.

Social worker screenings of contact and referrals in the MACH are comprehensive and much improved since the last inspection. Screening considers past history to understand previous concerns, as well as considering presenting issues. Parents are routinely contacted to be made aware of the concerns, to clarify information and to confirm they give consent for information-gathering and next steps.

When there are escalating risks to children, strategy meetings are promptly held. Partner agency attendance at strategy meetings has improved since the last visit, and this enables a significant level of multi-agency information to be shared. This is

assisting in well-informed shared decision-making. Strategy meetings are identifying key risks and discussing immediate actions to safeguard children. In most strategy meetings, the decision-making is appropriate and informs the next steps. This is ensuring that children have a plan to protect them from escalating harm.

For a small number of children, the response is disproportionate to the level of risk and need. This means that some children and families are subject to strategy meetings and section 47 child protection enquiries unnecessarily, when a lower threshold of intervention would suffice. This is overly intrusive for families and provides a disproportionate chronology of risks on children's records. It also adds extra work pressures on social workers, who have to complete additional assessments and enquiries.

Children's section 47 child protection enquiries and child in need assessments are thorough and most are completed in a timeframe suitable for the child's needs. Good-quality direct work with children is ensuring that their wishes and feelings are clearly identified and included in assessments. The voice of the child in assessments is now consistently clearer. Parents, including non-resident parents, are consulted and included. Relevant partner information adds richness to the assessment. Analysis of children's risks and needs is clear and is leading to appropriate next steps in the majority of assessments.

A legacy of poor practice has left some children being referred back to the service as the quality of previous intervention has not met their sustained needs. Leaders have introduced a monthly panel to monitor re-referrals and to identify practice deficits. For some children transferred to the assessment service, consent for a child in need assessment has been withdrawn, leading to assessments not being completed and children's needs being unaddressed. Leaders have now strengthened senior management oversight of decisions to close assessments due to no parental consent.

In the past three months, there have been challenges in managing demand and throughput of work in the assessment service. There has been an increased volume of work, and children with more complex circumstances have required more detailed assessments and responses. For some social workers, this has created additional pressures in workload and higher caseloads. This has meant there have been some gaps in case recording and case records not being finalised. This leaves some children's records incomplete and can lead to gaps or delay in identifying and responding to their needs. For a small number of children, social workers have left the service before finishing the children's assessments, meaning that these have had to be re-allocated to a new worker. As a result, there has been a delay in the children's circumstances and risks being fully assessed. Senior leaders have identified the pressures within this service and have very recently added an additional managed team to add capacity.

Workforce instability remains a challenge and has contributed to some of the difficulties within the assessment service. Middlesbrough still has a significant

number of agency teams and social workers to cover permanent vacancies. The majority of these agency workers have worked in the service for a significant length of time and, therefore, have a good level of local practice knowledge. Leaders have developed a substantial workforce development offer to encourage permanent social workers to the service, including a generous financial package and a comprehensive training offer. Currently employed staff spoke positively about working in Middlesbrough and feel well supported by their colleagues and managers. The DCS and senior leaders are highly visible and hold regular engagement sessions with staff to keep them informed and motivated.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Louise Hollick
Her Majesty's Inspector

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Middlesbrough Children's Services

Ofsted Monitoring Visit July 2022

Summary of Findings

Sue Butcher



MIDDLESBROUGH
CHILDREN
MATTER



**Our mission is to show
Middlesbrough children
that they matter.**



Context

- Fourth Monitoring Visit (plus a focused assurance visit in July 2021)
- Two weeks' preparation
- Two days on site 13th/14th July
- Two inspectors reviewed progress made since the last full inspection on
 - The front door service that receives contacts and referrals
 - Child protection enquiries,
 - Early help assessments
 - Step-up and step down to early help

Headline Findings

Positives

- Front door services have continued to develop and improve overseen by the Improvement Board
- Robust and comprehensive quality assurance programme ensures leaders have an accurate understanding of practice and it's impact on children and families Expansion of the offer of early help support to vulnerable children
- Stronger and wider partnerships in the MACH
 - Improving the quality of information,
 - The richness of information-sharing
 - Leading to better informed decision making.

Page 28

Areas needing focus

- Workforce instability and increased demand in the assessment service have slowed down throughput
- Additional pressure on some social workers' caseloads and quality of practice
- Unfinished assessments and incomplete records have led to delays and risks being fully assessed for some children

Findings/Evaluation of Progress – Early Help



Positives

- Audits demonstrate that the majority of practice is rated as good
- Interventions are preventing risks escalating and reducing the need for statutory intervention. Families' circumstances are improving
- Managers have robust oversight of work (auditing and performance data)
- Prompt 'step-up' and 'step down' aligned with children's needs
- Additional teams and team managers have been created and ongoing recruitment
- In the sample seen assessments are thorough and completed with families
- My family plans include family goals – a shared plan for families to actively engage in.

Page 29

Areas needing focus

- High Case loads impact on practitioners' capacity for intensive work
- For some children, actions in the plan do not address all the presenting risks

Positives

- Audits demonstrate that the majority of practice is rated as good
- An increase in partner presence and sw management posts to ensure capacity for increased remit and responsibilities
- Work with partner agencies to improve the quality of contacts and referrals –well coordinated response for children in line with their needs.
- Triage ensures timely response to police contacts
- Managers make appropriate and timely decisions and oversight
- Concerns are rag rated ensuring safeguarding is in line with initial risk rating.
- Screenings of contacts and referrals – comprehensive included past history and contact with parents
- Strategy meetings
 - Are held promptly
 - Improved partnership presence assisting information sharing
 - Appropriate decision making
 - Children have a plan in place to protect them from escalating harm.

Assessment Service

Positives

- Child Protection enquiries and CiN assessments are thorough and mostly completed in timescale.
- The voice of the child is consistently clearer and parents are consulted
- Analysis of risks and needs are clear and leads to appropriate next steps
- The legacy of poor practice means some children are referred back to the service as their sustained needs have not been met. Monthly panel introduced.
- Consent withdrawn on transfer – strengthened senior manager oversight of decisions to close due to lack of consent.

Page 31

Areas needing focus

- 25% of audits are inadequate
- In the last three months, challenges in managing demand and throughput due to increased volume of demand and complexity of children's circumstances are causing additional workload pressures and higher caseloads.
- Some gaps in case recording and case records not finalised leaves children's records incomplete and can lead to gaps or delay in identifying and responding to children's needs.
- Social workers have left before finishing assessments and reallocating work has led to delay
- Workforce issues remain a challenge and have contributed to difficulties in the assessment service. Significant number of agency staff and agency teams. However, substantial workforce development offer.

Next Steps

- Next Monitoring Visit in November focusing on Care Experienced Young People
- Annual Engagement Conversation (across Children's Services) in Dec 2022
- Judgement inspection – best guess – Feb 2023
- Thank you to Everyone across the Service for your dedication to evidence that 'Middlesbrough Children Matter'.