

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

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

Setting the Scrutiny Panel's Work Programme 2022/2023

21 JUNE 2022

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To invite the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel to consider its work programme for the 2022/23 Municipal Year.

BACKGROUND

2. At the start of each Municipal Year, Scrutiny Panels discuss the topics that they would like to review during the coming year.
3. Work programmes are useful as they provide some structure to a Scrutiny Panel's activity and allow for the effective planning and preparation of work.
4. As part of the process for establishing the work programme, support officers gather information/views and suggestions from a number of sources. Below is a list of topics which are anticipated to be of interest to the Scrutiny Panel. Members are advised that the list of possible topics is not exhaustive and that additional topics can be added and considered at the Scrutiny Panel meeting.

Work Undertaken by the Panel 2021/22

5. A recap of the Panel's work throughout 2021/22 is set out below, for information:-
 - Sufficiency and Permanency (Perceptions of Children in Care). (Full Review continued from 2020/21).
 - Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective. (Full Review).
 - Regular updates in relation to outcomes of Ofsted monitoring/focused visits.
 - Presentation – Developing a Council-wide approach to Children's Services (LGA North East Children's Improvement Advisor).
 - Presentation – SEND Review Update ((LGA North East Children's Improvement Advisor).
 - Regular updates on Covid recovery within Children's Services.

Suggestions

Suggestion	Details
Strategic Plan Workplan 2022-2024	<p>“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.”</p> <p>As part of the community-focussed initiatives within the Strategic Plan Workplan for 2022-24, it is suggested that the Panel may wish to examine the following: create and deliver a strategy to increase digital inclusion for children, young people and adults across Middlesbrough. (CYP04: <i>(suggestion from Chief Executive)</i>).</p>
Procedures for Child Protection Plans/Early intervention support	Investigation into the Policy, Process and Procedures of Child Protection Plan / Early Intervention Support to Middlesbrough’s “Birth” families – <i>(suggestion from a member of the public)</i> .
Transition from Children’s Social Care to Adult Social Care	To examine the effectiveness of the transition from Children’s Social Care to Adult Social Care, including how young people are supported into further education/employment and independent living. <i>(Suggestion from the Chair)</i>

Topical Issues

Topic	Details
Independent Review of Children’s Social Care	<p>An Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, led by Josh McCallister, was announced in January 2021 and published in May 2022. The report sets out its recommendations for reform in eight chapters, with details around proposed implementation. An initial response has been provided by the Government, with a full, detailed response expected by the end of 2022. The initial response includes a number of commitments including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with local authorities to boost efforts to recruit more foster carers and to provide more support throughout the application process. • Refocussing the support Social Workers receive during the early part of their careers. • Joining up data from across the public sector and increasing transparency. • Establishing a new Digital and Data Solutions Fund to help local authorities improve delivery for children and families through technology. • Developing a national children’s social care framework, setting direction for the system. • Funding for family hubs, social workers in schools and designated safeguarding lead supervision programmes.

	<p>The Government also set out its three key priorities to improve children’s social care:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve the child protection system so that it keeps children safe from harm as effectively as possible. • support families to care for their children, so that they can have safe, loving and happy childhoods which set them up for fulfilling lives. • ensure that there are the right placements for children in the right places, so that those who cannot stay with their parents grow up in a safe, stable and loving home. <p>The Local Government Association responded to the comprehensive review report on 26 May 2022 stating that the report reflects many of the issues raised by local authorities for some time, such as further investment in early help services, better support for kinship carers, making sure that children in care had the right homes and better futures for those leaving care. Whilst the LGA supports many of the recommendations the report makes, it also highlights some concerns around the recommendations regarding Regional Care Co-operatives and further states that some recommendations cannot wait for delivery such as placements for children in care who have the most complex needs, placements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, and workforce capacity. <i>(Reference: LGA, Independent Review of Children’s Social Care)</i></p>
<p>Children’s Social Worker Shortage</p>	<p>In March 2022, the LGA reported that a shortage of children’s Social Workers had reached a five-year high. The workforce data showed that the number of social workers leaving their roles in 2021 was 4,995 – an increase of 16% on the previous year.</p> <p>As of 30 September 2021, the number of vacancies had risen by 7% from the previous year, to 6,522.</p> <p>This is reflective of both the impact of the pandemic and the increasing challenges of social work roles as a result of rising demand and falling investment in the services children and their families need.</p> <p>The LGA is calling for children’s services to be adequately funded so that councils have the resources to ensure social workers receive the support and reward they deserve, and to fund the family help services social workers need to refer families to.</p> <p>It is estimated that, due to mounting pressures on children’s social care, future costs are set to increase by £600 million each year until 2024/25, with more than 8 in 10 councils already in the unsustainable position of having to overspend their budgets. Rising demand means that despite increasing their children’s social care budgets, councils are having to divert funding away from family help services to protect those children at most immediate risk of harm.</p>

	(Reference: LGA, LGiU)
Review calls for dedicated child protection units	An independent review, launched last year following the deaths of 16-month-old Star Hobson and six-year-old Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, has recommended changes to child protection services in England that would see the establishment of specialist units. The child protection teams - based in councils' children's services departments - would include social workers, mental health workers, police officers, paediatricians and psychologists to oversee cases where children are at serious risk of harm. The chair of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, Annie Hudson, who carried out the review, stated: "We think there is too much inconsistency and ambiguity in child protection practice in England. This does not serve children, their families or practitioners well." Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi pledged to publish a "bold implementation plan" later this year to put the recommendations into action. (Reference: Sky News / The Independent / Daily Mirror / The Guardian / The Times)

Updates

Ofsted Updates	To continue to receive regular updates in relation to visits and findings of Ofsted on the progress of the Children's Services improvement journey.
South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership	For the Panel to receive an overview of the remit of the STSCP including its Annual Report.
Performance information	For the Panel to receive regular updates in relation to key performance information, currently being developed. (Timetable to be prepared by Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chair and Service Area).
Updates on previous reviews	To receive updates in relation to the Panel's previous reviews:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sufficiency and Permanency (Perceptions of Children in Care) • Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective (Timetable to be prepared by Democratic Services Officer in conjunction with the Chair and Service Areas)

6. It should be noted that the topics outlined above are *suggestions* and the content of the Scrutiny Panel's work programme is a decision for the Panel. When considering its work programme, the Panel is advised to select topics that are of interest to it, as well as topics that the Panel feels by considering, it could add value to the Local Authority's work.
7. In addition to undertaking the agreed work programme, Scrutiny Panels have also previously responded on an ad-hoc basis to emerging issues - such as considering relevant new legislation, guidance or Government consultation documents. This

approach occasionally results in further topics being identified for investigation or review throughout the year.

8. On occasion ad-hoc scrutiny panels may also be established throughout the year to undertake additional investigations, for example to examine areas of work which overlap more than one Scrutiny Panel.
9. The Scrutiny Panel is also advised that, under the terms of the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities have a responsibility of community leadership and a power to secure the effective promotion of community well-being. Therefore, in addition to the Scrutiny Panel's generally recognised powers (of holding the Executive to account, reviewing service provision, developing policy, considering budget plans and performance and financial monitoring), Panels also have the power to consider **any** matters which are not the responsibility of the Council but which affect the local authority **or** the inhabitants of its area. For example, nationally, local authorities have undertaken scrutiny work on issues such as post office closures, rural bus services, policing matters and flood defence schemes.

Scrutiny work plan prioritisation aid

10. Members may wish to use the aid attached at **Appendix 1** to prioritise issues where scrutiny can make an impact, add value or contribute to policy development.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

11. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider and agree its work programme for the 2022/23 Municipal Year. The Executive Director of Children's Services will be in attendance to assist the Panel by highlighting priority areas/issues and challenges and also to provide an overview of the structure within Children's Services.
12. When considering its work programme, the Scrutiny Panel is asked to ensure that topics agreed for inclusion:-
 - Affect a group of people living within the Middlesbrough area.
 - Relate to a service, event or issue in which the Council has a significant stake or over which the Council has an influence.
 - Are not issues which the Overview and Scrutiny Board or the Scrutiny Panels have considered during the last 12 months.
 - Do not relate to an individual service complaint; and
 - Do not relate to matters dealt with by another Council Committee, unless the issue deals with procedure.
13. It is suggested that the Scrutiny Panel has a mixture of working styles in its programme. This can include detailed and in-depth reviews, shorter topics, or one-off investigations.
14. Once the Scrutiny Panel has identified the areas of priority, support staff will draw those topics into a programme for approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

RECOMMENDATION

15. That the Scrutiny Panel identifies the areas of focus/topics it would like to include in its work programme for 2022/23, for consideration/approval by the Overview and Scrutiny Board.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

16. Throughout the report, reference is made to documents published by Middlesbrough Council, Dfe, Ofsted, LGA, LGiU, Gov.uk.

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