

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL

Wednesday 14th October 2020

STRATEGIC

1. Youth Services

Staff from the Commissioning Team and the Early Help and Prevention Service have been working together to develop the specification for the new Youth Service Contract. A number of other departments within the Council have contributed to the development of the service model including Public Health and representatives from the Community Hubs, who are able to offer venues and facilities for delivery of youth sessions. We have also had involvement from the Young Commissioners who have been reviewing the specification and working with us on the evaluation questions. This will be a fully commissioned model and bids will be invited from organisations when the tender is published, which will be during October.

The next steps in the planning process are to progress with further work in regard to the pricing schedule, evaluation process, mobilisation of the new service and how we will include and focus on social value. All work is in progress and we are on track to meet the required deadlines and to have the new service up and running from 1st April 2021.

2. Ofsted Improvement Journey

As noted in the last report Middlesbrough's own MACH (Multi-Agency Children's Hub) went live on 1st July 2020. An additional Assistant Team Manager has been recruited along with two additional screening social workers to support the increased demand. The police remain the highest referrer into the MACH with 31.5% of contacts received in August but their conversion to social care assessment is the lowest. By the time of this board meeting there will have been two multi-agency strategic MACH boards since the disaggregation. The first was a set-up meeting and signed off the board's terms of reference.

In order to improve performance a fifth assessment team has been created within current resources which has created a four week gap in the duty cycle giving assessment social workers an extra week to complete their single assessments. It is anticipated that this model will contribute to a reduction in caseloads in the assessment service over the coming months.

However, currently as a result of high demand, social work caseloads are greater than the Directorate target with 61% of case holders carrying 21 or more cases. It is a challenge to mitigate against higher caseloads impacting on the quality of our work including management oversight and our ability to embed learning from audit and training.

In our Early Help Services known as Stronger Families here in Middlesbrough, the level of demand has increased and staff are also carrying high caseloads. To mitigate against this and as part of our recovery planning, the service has recruited additional Senior

Practitioners to increase capacity and has refocused the work of all teams to focus on family work. In addition, we have recently welcomed two members of staff to Stronger Families from the voluntary and community sector. These staff are employed by Safer Communities but will be working within Stronger Families through a formal secondment agreement, these staff will be supporting Early Help Practitioners with casework and delivering interventions with families.

As part of our response to the COVID 19 situation here in Middlesbrough Stronger Families offered a check in service for families during the 6 week summer holidays, these were children that schools felt that may need support whilst the schools were closed and who did not have a Social Worker or an Early Help Practitioner. During the 6 weeks, families have been contacted and 129 children have been supported over the holiday period.

I am very pleased to inform the board that Future for Families, Middlesbrough's service providing outreach to young people edging towards care was registered by Ofsted on 7th September and the service went live on that date providing both in-reach and out-reach support. The service is currently working alongside the Innovate team to support young people moving on from external residential placements and also with 11 additional young people to prevent family or placement breakdown.

A programme of roadshows is underway, looking at service specific improvement, five have taken place to date with seven more still to be carried out. Overall feedback from staff has been positive.

Governance and Partnership

The July Operational Board was substituted by a survey asking attendees for their views on the board's organisation and function – what it does and how it could be done better. Unfortunately there were only four responses so it is not possible to draw any real conclusions from them. However, in general terms the few responses indicate that the purpose of the board is understood but the papers are too long, too detailed and too local authority focused. This will be discussed at the October meeting of the board.

Our emerging Children's Workforce Development Strategy is now being drafted. This work sees a significant shift in scope and emphasis from our previous strategy and is critically aligned with the detailed actions and outcomes set out in our Strategic Improvement Plan. A draft will be available for sharing with DfE and Ofsted later this month. This will provide us with an opportunity to benefit from any initial feedback from our statutory regulators to inform content and approach before an open consultation with our staff during the autumn.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy, including the Permanency and Sufficiency elements, has been developed during the summer and will be subject to an open consultation with members, staff and other stakeholders for one month from 1st October. The strategy outlines our corporate parenting priorities, our plans for improving permanency for children and young people, and our forecasting and sufficiency priorities for placements and support for children and young people in our care. The strategy has been drafted in consultation with young people.

A virtual meeting between representatives from the Ministry for Communities, Housing and Local Government (MHCLG) and relevant Middlesbrough colleagues led by the Kay Dargue, Head of Services for YOS and partnership took place on 3rd August. The

purpose of the meeting was for the MHCLG to scrutinise our work to prevent homelessness amongst 16/17 year olds - a recommendation from our Ofsted inspection report. The meeting received our current position statement, information about our improvement programme and also a copy of the draft 'Homelessness' protocol for comment.

The feedback from the meeting outlined a number of strengths to build upon, along with the significant challenges we need to tackle as part of our improvement journey. However, they stated that "despite this creating all manner of challenges, it is an exciting time and there is plenty of energy exuded by those championing the ambition". A working group has subsequently been set up to take forward the advice from the MHCLG. They will develop an action plan to ensure advice is taken on board and recommendations are progressed. MHCLG will conduct a further visit in 8-10 months' time to assess our progress.

Our first Ofsted monitoring visit took place virtually on 23rd and 24th September focussing on the MACH and the Assessment Service. The lead inspector was Jan Edwards who was also the lead for the full inspection last year. We submitted a considerable amount of documentation to evidence the work undertaken so far this year including performance, audit and caseload information. Jan chose seven casefiles for in-depth scrutiny but she and her colleague inspector also case tracked many more. The visit went smoothly and the staff involved reported positive experiences. I am pleased that not one child was brought to my attention as requiring urgent remedial work. Jan provided some initial verbal feedback at the end of day two and this is being followed up in the form of a letter. All findings are confidential until we receive the final copy of the letter on 16th October. Monitoring visits are not graded and as this is the first monitoring visit the letter will not be published.

3. Integrated Commissioning Model

The Homeless Advice and Prevention Service (now known as Housing Solutions) transferred back into Middlesbrough Council on 1st September 2020 and the team are settling in nicely. There are some concerns around capacity due to the increase in demand as a result of Covid so we are looking to create a part-time admin officer and full-time accommodation officer, fixed-term until 31st March 2021. Tenders for specialist services have been received and are currently being evaluated.

PERFORMANCE

4. Pot Hole Initiative

The responsive maintenance team are now into week 12 of a planned 20 week programme and have so far completed work in 10 wards with works being carried out in Wards alphabetically with the teams currently in Longlands and Beechwood. Not including ongoing works in this Ward, the team have so far identified and repaired 1769 defects which equates to over 8800 potholes, laid 752 tonnes of tarmac over an area of 7885 square metres and have programmed a further 10251 square metres of resurfacing works to be carried out by a main contractor to repair those areas too large to patch.

Work is progressing well with only minor delays to the programme so far due to a combination of inclement weather and the scale of works identified in 2 wards which extended the planned week per ward programme to ensure that actionable defects were repaired. Feedback from residents so far has been very positive.

