

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.