

Middlesbrough Children's Services

Ofsted Monitoring Visit July 2022

Summary of Findings

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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.

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.

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.

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'.