

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Tuesday 19 July 2022.

- PRESENT:** Councillors M Saunders (Chair), T Mawston (Vice-Chair), C Cooke, C Hobson, D Jones, D McCabe, C McIntyre, J McTigue and J Thompson
- OFFICERS:** C Breheny, S Butcher, T Parkinson, G Cooper, C Benjamin, A Hoy, S Reynolds and R Brown
- APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors D Davison, B Hubbard, J Platt and M Storey

20/106 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/107 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - 11 MAY 2022**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 11 May 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/108 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD - 22 JUNE 2022**

20/109 **EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chief Executive submitted a report which identified the forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive, as outlined in Appendix A to the report.

The report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Board with the opportunity to consider whether any item contained within the Executive Forward Work Programme should be considered by the Board, or referred to a Scrutiny Panel.

NOTED

20/110 **EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE**

The Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Children's Services, Cllr Mieka Smiles, was in attendance to update the Board on her aims and aspirations, progress made to date and to highlight any emerging issues relating to her portfolio. The Director of Legal and Governance, the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Director of Education and Partnerships were also in attendance.

The Deputy Mayor / Executive Member opened by thanking the Board for the invite and advised that she would highlight some of the key areas she had been working on, as well as some of the emerging issues relating to her portfolio. During the presentation the following key points were made:-

- The Deputy Mayor / Executive Member stated that there was no greater responsibility than the future generation of Middlesbrough.
- In 2019 Middlesbrough Council's Children Services had received an inadequate rating from OFSTED in every single area. Not only had this been worse for Middlesbrough children financially it had been ineffective.
- The Deputy Mayor advised that she now felt reassured in every respect that Children's Services was delivering what the people of Middlesbrough deserved. The recently developed departmental score card was on track and the Board could be reassured that the headline figures - the number of children in care and the number of children in external residential places - had decreased. In June 2020 Middlesbrough had 670 children in care but that had figure had now reduced to 507.
- Reference was made to the cost of external residential placement and it was highlighted that it was extremely alarming for local authorities across the country that the average cost of a placement had risen significantly in recent years from an

- average of £3,500 per week to £5,500.
- In addition the recruitment of Social Workers remained a real challenge and the amount of agency staff employed in Middlesbrough was a further area of concern. It was emphasised that although staff received a generous pay package and had flexible working arrangements in place recruitment and retention remained a key issue in the town.
 - The Board was advised that the high number of school exclusions was another major issue in Middlesbrough both in terms of fixed term exclusions and permanent exclusions. However, work was currently being undertaken in partnership with schools in an effort to address this issue.
 - In terms of her main ambition the Deputy Mayor/Executive Member stated it was crucial that Middlesbrough received a better OFSTED judgement and that the next full inspection was expected to take place early next year.
 - Another main ambition was to ensure that every child in Middlesbrough had access to a musical education. Work had therefore been undertaken with the Music in Secondary Schools Trust and Kings Academy to enable an entire year group to learn a musical instrument. As a result 240 children at Kings Academy were learning to play the violin and the scheme would be rolled out at Outward Riverside Academy in September 2022.
 - Finally, it was advised that Eton Star Academies had teamed up with Middlesbrough Council and a bid had been submitted for an area of land, which Eton would have an option on. It was emphasised that places at the school would be heavily weighted towards children from deprived backgrounds including children in receipt of free school meals.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member of the Board queried whether it was the case that Social Workers were leaving local authorities to undertake agency work, as it was more profitable. In response it was confirmed that recruitment remained a challenge and although Middlesbrough salaries were competitive and retention payments were comparable very few Social Workers were looking for permanent jobs. In response to a recent advert for Social Workers in the assessment team no applications had been received and the agency pool of staff was very limited. Managed agency teams were being brought into numerous local authorities and the department's reliance on agency staff had been picked up in the recent OFSTED monitoring visit.

In terms of Social Worker caseloads it was acknowledged that the average caseload was 18 cases per Social Worker. However, there had been an outflow of Social Workers on the assessment team and although the ideal number of cases per Social Worker was around 17 caseloads were increasing as a result of the workforce challenges. It was a difficult time and there were significant pressures on the service. Middlesbrough Council currently employed 173 Social Worker FTE's. Demand in the assessment service was high and Middlesbrough received more safeguarding referrals than North Yorkshire, which was four times the size. Currently Middlesbrough had the highest level of demand in the country.

A Member of the Board queried whether the admissions policy for the new Eton College had yet been determined. It was advised that there would be some of selective admissions process, however, the aim was to improve social mobility for children living in the most deprived areas and therefore if that was not part of their cohort Eton College would have failed in its mission.

Reference was made to the astronomical cost of external residential care placements for children and it was queried whether this was an issue that was being looked at nationally. It was confirmed that the government was currently looking at this issue and there was widespread acknowledgement that the children's residential care market was broken.

In response to feedback provided by a Member of the Board in relation to the Council's current child safeguarding referral forms the Deputy Mayor/Executive Member advised that this would be taken onboard. It was also advised that if any Members had serious concerns about the safeguarding of a child then they could contact the Deputy Mayor/Executive Member of the Executive Director for Children's Services at any time.

In terms of local authority children's homes it was advised that Middlesbrough currently had five home, as well as the hub, which looked after our most complex children. Again recruiting

staff to work in children's residential homes was becoming problematic and a significant amount of work was being undertaken in this area. The Deputy Mayor / Executive Member advised that it was a key aim to have as many Middlesbrough children returned to the area as possible. From a high of 74 children being looked after in external residential placement in June 2022 this figure had now been reduced to 37. Work continued in an effort to reduce this number further.

In response to a query regarding school exclusions it was confirmed that the rates had now decreased, as was expected towards the end of term.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Mayor and Executive Member for Children's Services and the relevant Directors for their attendance and contributions to the meeting.

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

20/111

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE

The Chief Executive was in attendance and provided an update to the Board in respect of the following:-

- Chief Executive / LMT 'hot topics'
- Town Centre Strategy

In terms of LMT 'hot topics' it was advised that the key issues for consideration were Strategic Plan delivery; locality working; health and safety; the town centre; school exclusions; closure of accounts (external auditor judgement); budget planning 2023+ and the Mayoral Development Corporation.

In terms of the Town Centre Strategy it was advised that the Strategy concentrated on encouraging more people to live in the town centre, with additional units being built around the Old Town Hall. It was anticipated that there would be 400-600 houses built on the Middlehaven site. Discussions were ongoing about bringing additional education facilities into the town centre and it was anticipated that the first two new leisure attractions in Captain Cook Square would open in September 2022. Reference was made to the number of incidents of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the town centre and the fact that although the statistics showed ASB was decreasing the message from town centre retailers was that it was worse than ever. There was a real need to address this issue and action had been taken by the Council.

The Board was advised that on 15 June the Council had launched a 6-week blitz - 'Operation Banton' - of the town centre to reduce the number of incidents of ASB, begging, street drinking and criminality. The Operation had also included increased use of CCTV voice boxes, preparation of PSOP extension (or equivalent) in TS1, the development of a town centre communications plan to ensure businesses were better informed, exploration of limiting the sale of cheap alcohol and developing a joined up approach of existing arrangements including security, Middlesbrough Retail Crime Partnership and Shopwatch. Significant enforcement activity had been undertaken and there was real momentum. Feedback from retailers indicated that they had seen improvement, however, there was still a considerable amount of work to undertake.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his briefing and contribution to the meeting.

20/112

THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - FINAL REPORT - SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)

The recommendations to be submitted to the Executive were:

- a) That awareness raising activities were undertaken to ensure that all of Middlesbrough's schools and settings were aware of the Local Authority's explicit offer of targeted inclusion support. There was a need for schools and settings to receive clear and concise information on what targeted support can be accessed, what is part of the "core" offer open to all schools and settings (without requiring a statutory assessment and plan), and the additional offer that settings and schools can tap into by using their own resources.

- b) That work is undertaken with Legal Services and the Data Protection Officer to develop an effective transition planning process for all stages of education, which addresses the restrictions associated with GDPR. For example, Durham County Council has developed an electronic process for primary school Headteachers to share the names of students who may require additional transition support into secondary education. Wording, informing parents that information will be shared to support transition, has been included in the admissions brochure, on Durham County Council's website and in secondary application forms and offer letters.
- c) That the Local Authority links up with Middlesbrough College to provide placements for the college's supported internships programme. Supported internships have been introduced at Middlesbrough College to give a greater focus on preparing young people with special educational needs and disabilities with the skills needed for adulthood and employment.
- d) That, to support continuous improvement, a regular cycle of SEND reviews takes place across all educational settings and outcomes are reported to the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel.
- e) That SEND annual reports were published to demonstrate how data, intelligence and feedback has been used to support strategic planning arrangements and ensure that there is sufficient local provision and support.
- f) That work was undertaken with the Integrated Transport Service to explore and identify solutions to ensure children and young people with SEND were provided with travel assistance to enable them to access respite care.
- g) That, to further promote effective partnership working, a local area partnership agreement was developed, which outlines how partners would work together and sets out responsibilities and agreed working arrangements. Investing time in fostering relationships and partnerships, given their importance to the local SEND system, is highly important - as there was a risk that those relationships could change very quickly.
- h) That the collaborative work undertaken by Education, Social Care and Health is commended and continues to drive further improvement in the SEND system. Given the increasing demand for provision to support those children and young people with SEND, it is vital that work continues to expand specialist provision and enable mainstream settings to provide support.
- i) That data/intelligence was collected, analysed and reported on to demonstrate the specific strategic approaches and practices that had been effective in supporting children and young people with SEND, enabling them to achieve the best possible educational outcomes and preparing them effectively for adulthood.
- j) That regular updates were reported to the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel, on a six monthly basis, in respect of the progress made with implementing the above recommendations and the work undertaken to develop and sustain an effective local SEND system.

AGREED that the findings and recommendations of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel be endorsed and referred to the Executive.

20/113

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME REPORT 2022-2023

The Democratic Services Officer submitted a report, the purpose of which was to invite the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider each scrutiny panel's work programme for the 2022/2023 Municipal Year.

The topics put forward for each scrutiny panel were as follows:

Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

19 July 2022

- 'The Role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in Supporting Adult Social Care (with a focus on Covid-19 Recovery)' - current review topic (work to continue from the next meeting - 7 September 2022); and
- 'Hospital Discharge' (final title TBC in due course, but the review will focus on the impact of the cost of care and the impact of care worker recruitment on hospital discharge and the Council's Adult Social Care services.
The impact on lone adults will also be assessed as a supplementary 'feed in' area of focus).

Updates

- Integration of Health and Social Care (standard agenda item);
- A performance report in respect of increases in service demand on a quarterly basis. Reporting systems and processes are currently being reviewed and this will commence from Autumn/Winter 2022;
- Charging Reforms and Fair Cost of Care – updates to be provided as work progresses; and
- Previous scrutiny review – 'The Recruitment and Retention of Staff within Adult Social Care'

Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Youth Offending and Partnership Working with Schools; and
- Early Learning for Young Children Short Review
- School Meals and Physical Education

Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Transition from Children's Social Care to Adult Social Care Short Review
- Procedures for Child Protection Plans/Early intervention support

Updates

- OFSTED inspections
- South Tees Safeguarding Children's Partnership
- Performance information • Sufficiency and Permanency (Perceptions of Children in Care)
- Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective

Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Scrambling bikes and illegal quad bikes- what enforcement is in place/ has operation kickstart been rolled out to other areas of Cleveland? and
- The impact of private rented properties on areas of owner occupied properties and areas of social housing and what can be done to mitigate negative effects.

Updates

- Future High street fund
- Surveillance Policy
- Preventing Terrorism
- Community Safety Partnership
- Cohesion/ Asylum Seekers and support for Ukraine families.
- Previous scrutiny review

Cultural events site visits

- The panel expressed an interest in visiting the new Art School as part of the wider Cultural programme.

Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Improving and Enhancing the Physical Environment Town-Wide.

The review will focus on the following areas: - Environmental Enforcement/Fly Tipping. - Damage to grass verges. - Tree Replacement Programme. - Enforcement of Planning Conditions. - Pest Control Service. - Allotments. - Empty Properties.

Short Reviews/Updates:

- Teesside Crematorium
- Flood Risk Management
- Local Plan
- Town Centre Strategy - Update on Future High Streets/Towns Fund.
- Middlesbrough Mayoral Development Corporation.
- Income to the Council from Housing/Potential impact of increased development costs.
- Housing – impact on health and wellbeing.

Health Scrutiny Panel

Full Review

- Dental health and the impact of COVID-19; and
- GP access and quality of service

Short Reviews / Updates

- The Neurodevelopmental Pathway; and
- NEAS / ambulance service provision in Middlesbrough

AGREED that the topics put forward by the scrutiny panels for inclusion in the 2022/2023 scrutiny work programme be approved.

20/114

SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE

The Scrutiny Chairs/Vice Chairs provided updates in respect of the work undertaken by their respective panels since the last meeting of the Board.