

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 14 November 2022.

PRESENT: Councillor Davison (Chair); Councillors: Higgins, Nugent, Uddin and Wilson.

OFFICERS: S Butcher, E Cowley, J Dixon and K Scratton.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mawston and J Walker.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no Declarations of Interest made by Members at this point in the meeting.

MINUTES – 24 OCTOBER 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 24 October 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD – FURTHER INFORMATION

S Butcher, Executive Director of Children's Services, E Cowley, Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review and K Scratton, Interim Head of Children with Disabilities, were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with further information in relation to its current review.

The Interim Head of Children with Disabilities opened the presentation by stating that, in the same way that safeguarding was everybody's business, so too was preparing young people for adulthood and independence.

The Panel was informed that the following services and partner organisations were some of the key players in ensuring young people were fully supported to become independent adults:-

- Stronger Families Service
- SEND and Inclusion Service
- Children with Disabilities Service
- Children Looked After and Pathways (Leaving Care) Service
- Virtual School; Education and Schools
- Youth Offending Service
- NHS North of England Commissioning Support Unit
- Adult Social Care
- Integrated Support Solutions (for example substance misuse)

Stronger Families

Stronger Families, often know as Early Help services, provided targeted early help services to address the assessed needs of a child and their family, focussing on activities to improve outcomes for the child. An assessment of need was undertaken for children and young people and their families who were identified as benefitting from early help.

Stronger families referred young people into adult services prior to becoming 18 for preparation for adulthood. Youth provision worked with young people with SEND up to the age of 25.

Education, Employment and Training

Within Stronger Families, the Education, Employment and Training service supported young people aged 16-18 into suitable education, training and employment opportunities.

After the age of 18, young people were allocated a Support Worker and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and care leavers were supported by a worker until the age of 25.

SEND and Inclusion

In supporting young people to prepare for adulthood, the SEND and Inclusion service must have a clear delivery plan to ensure that the vision and outcomes as identified within the SEND Code of Practice were achieved.

A Strategic 'Preparation for Adulthood' Group had been established which aimed to understand the direction of travel and to identify and fill any gaps in provision. The group met every six weeks and reported in to the SEND and Inclusion Group chaired by the DCS to ensure a clear line of sight by senior managers.

The voice of the child was key throughout supporting any young person and when young people with special education needs were asked about their aspirations for the future, the majority said that they wanted the same things as anyone else – to have a job, their own home, perhaps get married and have children of their own.

The Panel was informed that the key areas of focus in preparation for adulthood were as follows:-

- Increasing the range of pathways and post-16 opportunities including supported internships and enterprise.
- Improving and increasing the number of employment and independence opportunities
- Improving provision planning and transition to adulthood.
- Ensure the voice of the child/young person is central to everything, with co-production at the heart.
- Embedding preparing for adulthood fully across the whole 0-25 education, health and care system.
- Ensuring robust policies and procedures were in place which facilitated a smooth transition to adulthood for all young people.

Children with Disabilities

The Panel was advised that within the Children with Disabilities (CwD) service there were two Social Work Teams and one Short Breaks Team.

There were approximately 100-120 children currently open to the Social Work Teams. This meant that they had met the criteria through having a profound disability or life-threatening condition.

There were around 200 children in Middlesbrough that received a short break. Provision ranged from attending a specialist youth club for three hours a week to high level packages to prevent young people going into residential care. The aim was to support the young person to develop any interests that they had.

The Social Workers within the CwD Teams working with young people from 14-15 years old and carried out a Capacity Assessment. The assessment looked at whether the young person had capacity to make their own decisions as adults and Social Workers did the assessment in conjunction with parents, the young person and courts to ensure their needs and rights were met.

There were currently around 30 young people in Middlesbrough who did not have the capacity to decide for themselves. The remaining young people had capacity to make their views known and their views were gathered in relation to their future aspirations.

CwD worked closely with colleagues in Adult Social Care and young people were presented to their 'Transitions Panel' at the earliest opportunity. Adult Social Workers were usually allocated at least

six months prior to the young person's 18th birthday so that their transfer to adult care was seamless.

For young people with a disability, an assessment was undertaken to establish whether their needs relied on Health or Social Care. Where the outcome was Health, a Lead Professional from health was appointed to work with the CwD Social Worker. At 18 years old, the young person would close to Children's Social Worker and would not be open to an Adult Social Worker.

Young people with disabilities had the same needs as any other young person – to be safe, secure, happy, to have a good home, employment, education or training and to have a good support network of people who cared about them around them.

Pathways (Leaving Care) Service

It was acknowledged that the Panel had heard detailed information regarding the Pathways (Leaving Care) Service at a previous meeting, however, it was recapped that the Service supported all care leavers for which the local authority was corporate parents. Legislation directed the necessary planning that was required to be in place for each care leaver supporting them with their rights and entitlements, providing a local offer, listening to their views through advocacy and the Care Leavers Forum, supporting them into education, training of employment, housing options, health passport and social support such as staying put or staying close arrangements.

Preparation for Adulthood – Teeswide

The Panel was advised that there were a range of Teeswide policies and procedures in place in relation to preparing for adulthood, including:-

- Teeswide Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) implementation group in place and liaison with the Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards Manager (Adult Social Care) and Legal Services.
- Tees Transitions document which follows national guidance.
- A Forum was created to support young people aged 17.5 years and over, who had been exploited.
- A system was in place for Police to inform the Local Authority of people who go missing (of all ages) and an internal system to refer those over the age of 18 to Adult Social Care.

It was highlighted that new legislation around liberty safeguards was anticipated to be implemented in Spring 2023 and that this would result in an increase in the number of capacity assessments required to be undertaken within the CwD service. The new legislation would affect anyone working with children and young people and staff were currently being trained in preparation for this.

The Panel was also informed that the current Teeswide priorities were as follows:-

- Workers to understand the Human Rights Act
- Mental Capacity Act Training (currently being delivered and due to finish in January 2023).
- Workers to be able to recognise a deprivation.
- Best Interest Assessors to feel comfortable completing assessments – Adult Social Care were willing to offer opportunities for workers to complete assessments and support through this process.

Team Around the Young Person

The importance of providing co-ordinated planning and putting a team around the young person to support them was explained. The starting point was the young person and firstly determining their capacity to make decisions. The team of support around them was crucial and included professionals from social care, education and health, together with the young person's family and community networks who were fully involved as part of the decision-making process.

Various planning meetings – such as Child in Need; Child Protection and Children Looked After Plans and Care Management meetings – were used to identify the young person's aspirations and needs and what they wanted to happen. If the young person was a Looked After Child they would also have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) that was reviewed each school term.

Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) were also used to identify the young person's aspirations and needs and were used to drive forward the local authority's decision making and commissioning decisions in respect of the young person.

Employment

Through speaking to the young people, the types of jobs that they wanted to do were identified. The local authority commissioned a number of post-16 education providers to provide education to prepare young people with a disability for adulthood. The providers included:-

- Project Choice
- Askham Bryan College
- Beverley School
- Prior Pursglove College
- Middlesbrough College
- Priority Woods School and Arts College
- Middlesbrough Community Learning.

Study programmes included Qualifications from entry Level to Level 3; supported internships; skills for employment and independence and also engaging with employers, careers and work experience.

Supported internships were funded by the local authority and it was a study programme that was carried out in a workplace. A number of employers were funded to provide a work placement for a young person with a disability. There was a curriculum in place to support the young person which included pastoral activities, holistic programme and travel training.

Opportunities at Middlesbrough Council

The Panel was informed that Middlesbrough Council was a Level 3 Disability Confident Employer and was committed to supporting disabled people into employment both within the organisation and within the community.

The '50 Futures' programme arranged by Middlesbrough Community Learning, offered opportunities for work experience and internships. The programme worked across Council departments to offer work-based placements with some opportunities leading to full and part-time employment. The Panel heard that last year, eight young people with a disability or learning difficulty moved into employment, one of which was at Middlesbrough Council.

A small number of young people were also supported into apprenticeships. The CwD and SEND/Inclusion Services worked with Community Learning to ensure that EHCPs were reviewed and to support those who were eligible to apply for 'Access to Work' funding from the DoE. There were strong outcomes for those with CwD experience.

Travel Training

For those young people with disabilities or SEND who wished to become more independent, travel training was provided by the Integrated Transport Unit within Middlesbrough Council. The scheme covered general road safety, travelling on buses and public transport and equipping young people with the skills to 'get from A to B'.

This year, to date, the ITU had successfully trained 22 young people with a disability or learning difficulty and were in the process of training a further 11 young people. It was highlighted that schools and colleges also promoted independent travel training as part of their study programmes.

Additionally, independent travel was an essential requirement of a supported internship.

What needs to happen?

The Panel was informed that the following areas required action:-

- Better commissioning of suitable places to live for young adults, particularly those who were most vulnerable – ensuring they were supported in the best way possible and meeting their needs.
- Internships Work with National Development Team for Inclusion – a national project, 'Internships Work' had recently been launched and CwD/SEND were in the process of putting together an Action Plan to be part of that project.
- Greater inclusion of young people in developing services, policies and procedures – ensuring their needs are met.
- Pathway/flowchart to help young people and practitioners understand processes – ensuring everyone was aware of the work that was ongoing.
- Publication and raising awareness of expectations – aiming to bring people together and re-establish events that were held in conjunction with Adult Social Care prior to the pandemic.
- Training/development of understanding Capacity Assessments – This had commenced.
- Legal training and development of Liberty Safeguarding processes.
- Pathway for young people whatever their status (care leavers, SEN or having a disability).
- Bridging the gap for a small number of young people with a disability or learning difficulty that do not meet the criteria for Health as health colleagues do not begin working with those young people until their 18th birthdays if they are not LAC so the age needed to be lowered to around 17 years.
- The EHC process was not being used as effectively as it could be and further legislation was awaited. Once a young person reached 18 years the local authority stop using EHCPs so there was potential to use them up to the age of 25.
- Awareness – Multi-agency focus day followed by another open day for employers and universities.

The Executive Director of Children's Services added that SEND was a very good service with a strong Strategic Board with groups feeding into the Board. Working with Health colleagues needed to be strengthened, particularly around joint commissioning. Demand for ECHP assessments had seen a sharp increase.

Participation work with young people with SEND was ongoing. Parents for Change was a strong lobbying organisation that held Children's Services to account. The Executive Director commented that K Scratton, Interim Head of Children with Disabilities Service, was doing a great job and was passionate about the work they did and felt much more confident about the service going forward.

The Panel held a discussion and the following issues were raised:-

- A Member of the Panel stated that Children's Services was doing a good job under difficult circumstances and would support any mechanisms to ensure that each areas of the service and their associated partners worked together as a team so that everyone was aware of the work they were each doing and to avoid duplication. Concern was also expressed at the proposed budget proposals and how, if approved, it would impact on Children's Services. The Executive Director responded that appropriate impact assessments had been completed to look at what impact the proposals might have. There would need to be consultation with staff and service areas as appropriate and this was in progress.
- With regard to short break provision for young people, such as youth clubs, it was queried whether all provision was day care. The Head of Children with Disabilities responded that around 200 children received short break provision and, for the majority, that consisted of a couple of hours per week contact with an organisation such as MFC Foundation to do sporting activities or specialist youth club provision. The next biggest spend was on Personal Advisors who were paid around £11.50 per hour to go to the young person's home and take them out to a café or similar activity for a couple of hours, sometimes at weekends. This provided the young people with an interest and feeling of greater independence. It needed to be remembered that the parents of these young people were also carers and did not ask for much. There was a short breaks unit at Gleneagles Resource Centre and 37 children had an overnight stay here usually on a monthly basis, and 10 children used it one night per week as this was deemed necessary. Some short breaks were funded by Health such as overnight stays at Zoe's Place who welcomed young people with complex needs.
- A Panel member acknowledged that sometimes the young people's parents did not necessarily want the young people to have overnight stays and found a couple of hours during the day helpful to them, however, it did benefit the young people and give them some free time beyond children's services.
- It was queried how often the Social Workers visited the young people. It was clarified that this depended on the individual young person. In CwD, parents were amazing and the support packages in place meant that some children only needed to be visited every 12 weeks. It was important to remember that most families wanted as little social work intervention as possible, however, the Social Workers were always at the end of the phone if they were needed. All 120 young people known to CwD service had an allocated Social Worker. Of those, around 20 were visited every 12 weeks.
- It was queried whether the local authority had a good working relationship with Housing providers in terms of supporting young people into suitable housing provision. It was acknowledged that there was housing representation on the Corporate Parenting and Improvement Boards but they were not always able to attend. The Panel considered it might be useful to invite a representative to a future meeting.
- Reference was made to children and young people with sensory loss and it was queried how they were supported. The Panel heard that, within CwD, there was a programme of developing practice leads to provide specific support to young people with hearing, sight and speech loss/impairment. In addition the Sensory Teaching Advisory and Resource Services (STARS) operated across the Tees Valley for those with hearing and sight impairment. The local authority employed a member of staff who supported those young people, from 14 years onwards, to become more independent, for example how to make a drink, travelling on public transport, etc. STARS worked closely with colleges to provide equipment to make young people's lives easier – such as braille machines, etc. This was a highly specialised area, however, there was a good offer in Middlesbrough.
- The Chair acknowledged that there appeared to be a lot of support which involved various groups and queried whether there was a mechanism to raise awareness between the groups of the work each of them was doing to avoid duplication. The Head of Children with Disabilities advised that this was being looked at.

- A Panel Member commented that the Executive Director had put Middlesbrough on the right track regarding the improvement journey and had got everyone on board and that this needed to continue going forward. The Panel Member stated that, on behalf of the children of Middlesbrough, they wished to thank the Executive Director and her staff for everything she had done and wished her well for the future as she would be greatly missed.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their attendance and the information provided. The Chair also wished to thank the Executive Director for her support with the Scrutiny Panel's work and wished her well in her future endeavours as she was due to leave the authority on 18 November.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 25 October 2022, namely:-

- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Executive Member Update – Cllr Coupe, Executive Member for Adult Health, Public Protection and Digital Inclusion – provided an update on current and ongoing work within his portfolio.
- Scrutiny Chairs' Updates
- Next meeting of OSB – Wednesday, 16 November at 10.00am.

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 Tuesday, 20 December 2022 at 9.30am, Mandela Room, Town Hall.