

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 17 January 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor Davison (Chair); Councillors: Mawston (Vice Chair) and Uddin.

OFFICERS: J Dixon, J Earl, G Nicholson, C Sowerby and C Thorpe.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Higgins, Nugent, J Walker and Wilson.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

MINUTES – 20 DECEMBER 2022

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 20 December 2022 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD – FURTHER INFORMATION

J Earl, Alternative Provision Co-ordinator, and C Thorpe, Apprenticeships Co-ordinator, from Middlesbrough Community Learning Service (MCL), were in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with an insight into the work undertaken by the service in the context of the Panel's current review and to explain how Community Learning supported vulnerable young people into further education, training or employment.

Middlesbrough Community Learning offered high quality learning opportunities for people of all ages and abilities and offered a wide number of courses.

The Middlesbrough Community Learning offer included:-

- Programmes for young people, including supported internships and study programme
- Apprenticeships
- 50 Futures
- Youth Hub
- Youth Employment Initiative
- Support for Employers
- Support for Learners
- Information, advice and guidance for parents, carers, social workers and personal assistants.

J Earl, Alternative Provision Co-ordinator, advised that she ran post-16 provision for vulnerable young people, including those with Special Educational Needs. This consisted of two programmes, both predominantly delivered from the Lingfield Learning Centre, Coulby Newham:-

- Study Programme (for 16-19 year olds)
- Supported Internships (for 16-24 year olds)

Study Programme

The Study programme was available to 16-19 year olds, or up to the age of 25 if the young person had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The length of the programme was a full academic year (September to July) and its main aim was to enhance employability skills by ensuring students were ready for employment. The programme was designed to engage with students who were not quite ready for the employment market - for whatever

reason - and to support them in gaining work experience/vocational placements and enhance their chances in the employment market by developing their employability skills, including English and Maths qualifications where none had been gained previously.

Students needed to be aged between 16 – 19 years old and have left secondary school and not be 19 before 1st August within that calendar year.

The programme offered the following opportunities, all of which were tailored to suit the needs of the individual:-

- Vocational Qualification & Vocational Placements (in the student's desired vocation)
- Employability Qualification
- Personal and Social Development Qualification
- Maths and English

This programme helped to reduce the number of young people who were NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) within Middlesbrough. Community Learning worked with all aspects of children's services to ensure Middlesbrough's young people had access to the support and opportunities they needed to develop and progress.

Supported Internship

The main aim of the supported internship programme was to provide the learner with a meaningful work experience placement with a trusted local employer. Participants must be aged 16-24 and have an EHCP.

Again, the programme ran from September to July and enabled access to:-

- Work placement
- Maths and English
- Vocational Qualification
- Employability Qualification
- Preparation for Adulthood and Personal and Social Development – all of which were tailored to the individual.

Once students had successfully completed the assessment process, they were generally ready to work and there had been some amazing success stories from both programmes.

Some care experienced young people had undertaken the programmes and the team worked closely with the virtual school and NEET service within Stronger Families, as well as other Social Care colleagues and Youth Offending Service.

The maximum capacity at Lingfield Learning Centre was 30 and there were currently 25 students enrolled in the programmes. Of those 25 students, 16 had an EHCP and five had a SEND Plan.

The Panel was informed that the Lingfield Learning Centre was now in its seventh year, with the programmes being delivered by a dedicated Team of seven staff who ensured bespoke learning opportunities for some of the most vulnerable young people. Many students commented that they found the Lingfield Learning Centre to be a calm, safe space. Every student was interviewed by the Alternative Provision Co-ordinator.

It was highlighted that students with SEND were referred to MCL from the SEND Service for consideration to establish the individual's abilities and requirements and that all individuals were considered and provided with bespoke learning based on their needs and aspirations. This was coupled with a holistic support package for learners and their families/guardians.

Several real-life case studies were provided to the Panel for information. These included testimonies from individuals who were part of a Study Programme or Supported Internship at Lingfield - including

details on the individual's background, support provided to them at Lingfield and the impact this had had on their long term employment outcome.

The Panel was informed that, last year, (2021/22), the following had been achieved at the Lingfield Learning Centre:-

- Achievement results rate was 91.7%, (above the service target of 90%) and this was a 5.1% year on year improvement.
- 94.4% success in students gaining a work placement (through quality partnership working – internal and external).
- 36% of learners were successful in gaining employment (with only one student remaining NEET due to circumstances outside of the student's control).
- The rate of progression into employment was 36.4% and 54.5% into further training.
- 42% of the SEN cohort had successfully gained employment.

During the course of discussion with Panel Members, the following issues were raised:-

- In response to how long the programmes had been running, the Alternative Provision Co-ordinator advised that she had been running the programmes for the past six years, however, there had been some form of provision by MCL prior to that.
- A Member of the Panel praised the work of the teams within MCL and attributed their dedication to the success of the students and commented that such successes and good news stories needed to be promoted more as too much focus was placed on the negative things happening in Middlesbrough. The Alternative Provision Co-ordinator added that in the process of the Local Offer being updated, two students had given their permission for their own stories to be included within the Local Offer to demonstrate that barriers can be overcome and that goals could be achieved with the right support.
- In terms of capacity for the learning programmes, it was queried what happened if there was not enough places. The Alternative Provision Co-ordinator responded that she would work with SEND, Social Care and other training providers in Middlesbrough to do whatever possible to obtain the right learning package and support for that student. They would not be put to one side and forgotten about.
- In response to a query it was confirmed that the current number of students engaged in the learning programmes was 25 and that this was a manageable number, however, 30 was considered to be maximum capacity for the size of the team supporting them – which was currently two members of staff short. It was acknowledged that college was not for everyone and that some students thrived with the more personal learning provision at Lingfield. The Co-ordinator stated that she knew all of her students well and would always support them if they wanted to try college but quite often, they returned to Lingfield to continue their studies.
- It was noted that Lingfield was situated in Coulby Newham and it was queried whether travel was a barrier for some students. The Panel was advised that some students were transported by parents, however, Lingfield did advocate independent travel. Independent travel guidance could be, and had been, provided to students whereby a member of the Team would accompany the young person on the journey to Lingfield from their home, showing them which buses to use, etc. This had proved successful with students feeling a great sense of achievement.
- It was queried what level of education was provided/aimed for by the students. The Panel was advised that this depended on the individual and that courses for English and Maths were part of the offer for both the study programme and supported internship programme. This ranged from Entry level 1 to 3 and functional skills levels 1 and 2 for those who had not already attained GCSE English and Maths at level 4 or above. These City and Guilds courses were recognised by employers in the same way as GCSE qualifications. Students were also provided with life skills support to prepare for independence.

- In terms of apprenticeship placements, entry requirements varied depending upon the level of the placement but all required Maths and English at either level one or 2, or GCSE grade 4 or above. For students with an EHCP, they would be put forward for an apprenticeship at any level, depending on the employer as some roles were not reliant on maths and English. The minimum requirement for apprenticeships was maths and English. For those wishing to do a level 3 apprenticeship, they must first have level two unless they had an EHCP.

Apprenticeships

C Thorpe, Apprenticeship Co-ordinator, advised that she headed up a small team, of seven staff, including a Learning Mentor. A wide range of apprenticeships were offered within Middlesbrough Council who recruited around 100 apprentices every year.

Community Learning also recruited and delivered apprenticeships for local employers within the Tees Valley. All apprenticeship vacancies were advertised via the National Apprenticeship website, on social media and on the Community Learning website.

Case studies relating to six apprentices were circulated to the Panel for information. It was highlighted that seven care leavers had been helped into apprenticeships, two of whom had achieved 100% distinction criteria in their external assessments.

There was a 76% apprenticeship achievement rate through Community Learning this compared with a 52% achievement rate nationally. Middlesbrough's target was to achieve a 90% success rate.

Apprenticeship courses were 15 – 18 months long which could be difficult for some individuals to remain invested in, however, breaks could be offered from both programmes. A problem for some young people who were Care Leavers or NEET was that they had no form of formal identification such as a passport, national insurance number or birth certificate. Whilst the Team helped support the young person to obtain this, it could take a considerable amount of time, however, staff ensured they kept in touch and supported the young person as it was important to ensure the individual did not give up and was supported into their chosen pathway.

All apprentices were offered support from the recruitment centre to prepare them for interviews with employers. Where it was felt that the individual was not ready for an apprenticeship placement they could be referred to the Youth Employment Initiative or Adult Education to ensure that the individual reached the point where they were ready to start work. External services were sometimes sourced to meet an individual's needs where they could not be met from within the Community Learning Service. This was to ensure that the individual was supported as much as possible to achieve their goals. Community Learning worked closely with Personal Advisers and Social Workers and would advocate on behalf of individuals with employers to provide them with as much support as possible to achieve.

Some of the agencies that learners could be referred or signposted to included:-

- Impact on Tees Mental Health
- Hart Gables
- National Careers Service
- Welfare Benefits
- SARC
- Survivors
- MIND
- Stop Smoking Service
- Thirteen
- CAMHS

655 apprenticeships had been approved from level 2 up to level 7, so there was something out there for everyone, but individuals must first have level 1 maths and English.

The apprenticeship team worked closely with the alternative provision team to ensure that learners were provided with the right support to gain work and life experience and preparation for interviews. Where an individual experienced difficulties at the recruitment centre, the learning mentor would discuss any issues with them and make the employer aware of issues, for example, it may be that the employer needed to ask questions in a certain way. The learning mentor had also helped young people to plan how they would get to work on time. It was recognised that some young people were not used to getting up early to get to work on time for the duration of the placement (minimum of eight weeks). One example provided was the learning mentor helping a young person to take a shorter alternative driving route to work. The mentor had travelled with the young person and the shorter route had saved time, ensuring they had arrived for work on time. 96% of MCL learners went on to gain employment or to further education.

During the course of discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- A Panel Member queried whether young people were given regular work experience opportunities within school. The Panel was informed that the 50 Futures programme provided a practical work experience placement with Middlesbrough Council or its trusted partners for up to a maximum of 8 weeks. The aim of the placement was to provide an insight into a paid job role, for young people aged over 16 with little professional experience. All areas across the Council were encouraged to offer a placement opportunity for a young person. The 50 Futures Programme Co-ordinator co-ordinated all placements within the Council and external placements, with the majority of the referrals made to 50 Futures coming from the Apprenticeship and Alternative Provision Teams. It was important to promote the use of 50 Futures placements across the Council.
- Work placements outside of the 50 Futures programme were also used and between all of the community learning teams, every effort was made to find a suitable placement for the individual.
- It was queried whether Middlesbrough Council reacted positively in terms of providing work experience for young people. The Panel heard that it had been difficult. Providing a work placement was time consuming, however, mentors or job coaches supported the young person in their work placements within the Council and the MCL Teams supported them with skill scans and job descriptions and helping the provider to be detailed and specific about the tasks that they wanted the individuals to undertake. It was a work in progress and would be good to have more people on board.
- A Member of the Panel commented that continuity within the MCL teams must be essential and queried whether there were any issues with staff turn-over. The Apprenticeship Co-ordinator responded that turnover within the apprenticeship team was low. She had been in charge of the same team of staff for around four years now but currently had half a manager's post vacant. One member of her team had been there for 35 years. She added that the team lived the Council's values and were passionate about helping young people to succeed. The Alternative provision Co-ordinator advised that she had been leading her team for six years and that turnover had been high over the last 12 months, having lost two members of staff during that period. Four members of the team had been there for 5-6 years, however, it was acknowledged that working at Lingfield was not for everyone and that recruitment had to be particularly stringent and selective to ensure the right people were employed as they would be dealing with young people who had many and varied difficulties.
- It was queried whether care leavers were referred to MCL by Social Workers/Personal Assistants. It was stated that this was not always the case but that some of the vacancies were ring-fenced to care leavers.
- It was acknowledged that some care leavers may have other problems other than gaining employment and it was queried whether MCL was able to help in any way. The Apprenticeship Co-ordinator advised that care leavers who were NEET were discussed at the NEET Clinic – of which both the Apprenticeship Co-ordinator and Alternative Provision Co-ordinator were members. Those with issues that would be a barrier to working, such as drug misuse, would not

automatically be excluded and every effort would be made to work alongside the right services to help the individual overcome this in order to help them go on to gain employment via one of the programmes described. In addition, a care leavers' bursary of £1,000 (one-off payment) was available.

- Once the young person had completed their study programme, they were monitored for six months afterwards. If they were continued into employment or higher education they would be monitored by MCL, if they did not MCL would continue to support placements and were very person-centred around the individual. It was not a blanket approach but tailored to suit the individual's needs and circumstances. MCL would work with any other agencies and do whatever was needed to support the individual to achieve their goals.
- It was highlighted that once an MCL apprentice had moved on they often kept in touch with the Team and felt comfortable in approaching them for further advice or support.
- The Director of Children's Care acknowledged the officers' passion for helping young people and the good working relationships they had forged with Personal Assistants and Social Workers through their attendance at the NEET Clinics but queried whether they had good links with other parts of children's services, other than the Pathways service, for those young people who were not looked after but were still looking for the same opportunities. The Alternative Provision Co-ordinator advised that she was the Safeguarding Lead for Early Help and that whilst there were good links with Early Help and other parts of the service, there were still parts of the Council that were unaware of MCL and the ways in which they could potentially help more young people.
- In response, the Director stated that there had been very recent changes within the senior leadership team in Children's Services and suggested it might be worthwhile for the officers to attend a meeting of Children's Services Management Team to promote their work. The officers agreed that this would be useful as they were especially passionate about vulnerable young people who were not suited to attending college.
- The Panel supported this proposal and considered it to be important to spread the message regarding the work of MCL and that, as corporate parents, every effort must be made to act in the best interests of Middlesbrough's children and young people.
- The Officers advised the Panel that they were also involved in a Task and Finish Group with the Head of the Virtual School to produce an Action Plan. This would involve speaking to students who were unsure of what they wanted to do. Support, information and guidance would be provided to them by MCL.
- It was highlighted that MCL was often regarded as Middlesbrough's adult education provision and this was not the case. They were able to offer advice and signposting regarding various pathways available to young people and this needed to be promoted.

The Chair thanked the officers for their attendance and the valuable information provided.

AGREED that the information provided be noted and considered in the context of the Scrutiny Panel's current review.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD – FURTHER INFORMATION

G Nicholson, Advanced Health Practitioner, Public Health, was in attendance at the meeting to provide information in relation to how the physical and emotional health needs of young people, particularly those in care/care leavers, were met and the role health partners played in supporting young people to adulthood and independence.

The Panel heard that there was a very broad needs base and that a lot of work had been done to support children in schools in relation to mental health with the Headstart Programme now being delivered by Public Health in all Middlesbrough schools. The programme aimed to develop resilience

and emotional well-being through peer support, undertaking specific work in the classroom and in assemblies.

In terms of young people with care experience, Healthy Child programmes were in place run by the Children in Care Team in conjunction with Social Care. This supported young people to plan for leaving care, undertaking health reviews and assessing the health needs of young people. The team worked with appropriate support services where required to ensure all of the young person's health needs were met and that appropriate services were put in place where required.

It was highlighted that the Children in Care Team provided a very specific service providing health assessments and reviews for care experienced young people and offered appropriate support to families and carers. It was suggested that a representative from the Children in Care Team be invited to a future meeting to provide the Panel with a more focused overview of the pathways and support they offered families including outreach services to address reactive areas.

AGREED that arrangements be made for an appropriate representative from the Children in Care Team (Health) be invited to the next meeting of the Panel and that the information provided be noted and considered in the context of the Scrutiny Panel's current scrutiny topic.

UPDATE – OFSTED MONITORING VISIT

C Sowerby, Director of Children's Care, was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with an update in relation to the findings of the most recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit to Children's Services.

Ofsted had undertaken a sixth monitoring visit to Middlesbrough's Children's Services on 1 and 2 November 2022 with a focus on older children leaving care and care leavers.

The findings provided clarity on areas where progress had been made since the initial full inspection and areas requiring improvement. The Panel was advised that some of the areas for improvement identified had already been acted upon and further actions had been added to the Improvement Plan.

The issues identified included:-

Positives

- Since the last inspection, services for older children in care and care leavers had started to improve.
- Most older children who were approaching leaving care were supported to develop the necessary independence skills needed to live alone.
- Care leavers told inspectors that most of them had experienced a positive transition from care, including that they had been well supported by their social workers and their personal advisors.
- Regular contact was maintained with most children and care leavers, with care leavers making use of the dedicated social media messenger page to stay in touch.
- Independent advocates were offered to children and care leavers, and they had been actively involved in supporting them with their issues and concerns.
- Those children and care leavers who benefitted from the supported living accommodation and the bespoke children's home were well supported to prepare for independent living. Staff provided them with opportunities to develop life skills and promoted resilience in preparation for living alone. It was clear that they had established trusting relationships with support staff who were attuned to their needs. It was a real positive that those children and care leavers who talked to inspectors, and who lived in those homes, were all either in education or work.
- Return home interviews after children had been missing were undertaken in a timely way and

information from the child or care staff provided a helpful insight to understand risk. Children had appropriate safety plans and oversight from the vulnerable exploited missing and trafficked (VEMT) Panel. Consequently, children had reduced their missing episodes as well as their risks in the community.

Areas for Improvement

- Transition planning for some children had not been as effective as it should have been. As a result, a small number of care leavers described: feeling rushed when moving out of care and this had resulted in a small number remaining as children in care post-18 due to a lack of planning with continued support in accommodation.
- Some young people stated they needed more financial support to enable them to buy food and pay their energy bills. Plans were in place to ensure the right level of support was in place.
- Needs assessments and the resulting Pathway plans varied in quality. Most plans required tighter target setting/smarter focus, however, the better plans and assessments included the clear voice of the child and care leaver and were written to them. This meant that children and care leavers were very clear about their rights and entitlements.
- Contingency planning was mostly absent or entirely focused on the breakdown of living arrangements rather than a holistic view of the child and care leavers and their circumstances.
- The Pathways Team did not always demonstrate sufficient curiosity and challenge about the care leaver's holistic needs. Managers acknowledged this was an area for development. In addition, some newer members of the team did not receive the frequency of supervision and type of support that they would benefit from to develop themselves and progress their understanding of the work.
- Whilst most personal advisors talked enthusiastically about their care leavers, and described 'stickability' with them, this did not always translate into direct action which was promoting young people's safeguarding and well-being. Risk for some care leavers was not always recognised in a timely way.

Next Steps

Based on Ofsted's findings, an Action Plan was being developed to address the areas identified as requiring further improvement and changes had been made to the improvement plan. A focused audit was planned for March 2023 to check on progress.

One of the key areas for improvement was housing for care leavers, particularly in relation to the suitability of housing offered to care leavers and the locations in which properties were situated. Greater thought was needed around replicating the same opportunities for care leavers as other young people – for example, very few 16-18 year olds left the family home to go and live on their own – consideration of how the young person wanted to live, perhaps with friends/shared tenancy, etc.

In addition to providing more choice for care leavers about where they lived, development of a more holistic support package was underway to help support the transition to independence, including support with health, education and employment, understanding financial demands such as energy bills, food and travel costs and cost of living pressures. This might include practical strategies such as financial support with food and energy bills and Council Tax. At the present time, as part of the current Care Leaver Offer, Middlesbrough's Care Leavers benefitted from a Council Tax exemption but this only applied to those living in Middlesbrough, putting those who lived outside of Middlesbrough at a disadvantage. As a priority, development of a regional care leaver's offer would be examined to ensure consistent support to a young person regardless of where they lived within the region.

Work was ongoing around young people in custody to ensure that the right links with the Youth Offending Service and prisons was in place to ensure Personal Advisers kept in touch and visited the young person when they were released from prison as this was another key transition back into the community.

Partnership working was seen as key to developing an improved offer of support for care leavers and there was a desire to strengthen partnership working with education, health and housing colleagues, amongst others, to drive this forward. It was hoped that a physical building could be provided for care leavers to utilise at evenings and weekends to meet, eat, socialise with their peers, do their washing, etc. It was important for all partners to commit to progressing this as corporate parents.

As well as requiring practical support, it was recognised that many young people and care leavers had lived experience of trauma so it was also important to support their mental and emotional health and well-being.

During the course of discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- Members expressed some concerns regarding the Ofsted findings particularly in relation to some children living in unregulated children's homes and some young people feeling rushed into leaving their placements. The Director advised that in terms of unregulated placements, some children's homes were regulated and others may have recently been established and not yet registered as this could take quite some time. Those that were unregistered would be the subject of additional scrutiny through risk assessments and visits to ensure everything was as it should be.
- In relation to some young people feeling unprepared or rushed into independent living, the Director stated that it was important to gather feedback from a range of different young people to gain a better understanding of any issues and problems that they might have experienced. In some instances it may be that the young person did not want to live alone or did not want to live in the location offered to them and had not been offered alternative opportunities. It was important to work with partners to ensure these issues were addressed. In addition, work was underway in conjunction with the Participation Team to look at how Corporate Parenting Board could potentially be more representative of the views of more young people to ensure a balanced view on a range of different experiences.
- Reference was made to the Panel's previous intention to look at accommodation for care leavers and it was suggested that as this formed part of the Action Plan in response to Ofsted's findings, it may be more appropriate to discuss the issue after April when there would be more information available as to the progress against the action plan. Whilst the Members agreed that there may be more stability at that point, they were still be keen to receive information in relation to the current position and the proposals to address the issues identified for care leavers in order to complete the Panel's current scrutiny topic.

The Chair thanked the Director for her attendance and the information provided.

AGREED that the update information in relation to the most recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit, for November 2022, be noted.

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 12 January 2023, namely:-

- Executive Forward Work Programme
- Executive Member Update – Councillor Grainge, Executive Member for Neighbourhood Safety – provided an update on current and ongoing work within his portfolio.
- Scrutiny Chairs' Updates
- Next OSB meeting – Wednesday, 22nd February 2023 at 10am.

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, 14 February 2023 at 10.00am, Mandela Room, Town Hall.