

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 February 2023.

PRESENT: Councillor Davison (Chair); Councillors: Mawston (Vice Chair), Nugent, Sands and P Storey (substitute for J Walker).

OFFICERS: J Dixon and J Savage.

PRESENT BY INVITATION: K Dudding, Tees Valley Children in Care Service, Harrogate & District NHS Foundation Trust.

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

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

MINUTES – 17 JANUARY 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 17 January 2023 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD – FURTHER INFORMATION

At its previous meeting the Panel agreed to invite a representative from the Children in Care Health Team to provide an overview of how children and young people with care experience are supported to ensure their physical and emotional health needs were met. Accordingly, K Dudding, Named Nurse with the Tees Valley Children in Care service was in attendance to provide a presentation to the Panel.

By way of background, the Panel was informed that from 1 April 2022 responsibility of initial health assessments (IHAs) and review health assessments (RHAs) for South Tees NHS Trust was amalgamated into a Tees Valley Children in Care contract.

All children coming into the care of the local authority must have an initial health assessment within 20 days to ascertain an overall view of their physical and emotional health needs and to ensure that they were registered with a GP and dentist. A Health and Care Plan was also devised. Children in care aged five and under had a review health assessment every six months and this was carried out by a nurse within the Team. For children over the age of five, review health assessments were carried out on an annual basis.

Where there was an identified health need, this would be passed to the 0-19 service which included health visitors and school nurses to provide ongoing support. Where there was a bespoke health requirement, for example an issue with emotional health and well-being, the case-holder would be responsible for supporting the child and co-ordinating an additional package of support.

Once the young person reached 15, the Team would start talking to them about their Care Plan and review health assessments and amalgamate the information into a Health Passport. The Health Passport would be handed over to the young person at around 17 and a half years of age.

It was highlighted that some areas of the country would only hand over the passport to the young person if they consented to accept it, however, the decision was taken to not give that option in Middlesbrough so that all young people would be given their health passport and it would also be sent to their GP so that they would have it on record. It was clarified that the young person was still

required to give consent for the passport to be shared with their Social Worker, therefore, if they did not give consent for this it could not be shared with the Social Worker.

The passport contained details of childhood immunisations, GP, dentist, opticians, attendance at A&E, family history. All of this information would be collated once the young person became 16 then discussed with them at their final health review assessment at age 17 at which point the information from the final HRA would also be added to the passport.

Once completed the health passport was sent to the young person and their GP and would remain on their GP record so that they could access it at any point in the future.

During a discussion, the following issues were raised:-

- It was queried whether all of the information provided within the passport was already on their health record with their GP. In response it was explained that the NHS IT system used to record health information, System One, was not user-friendly for non-professionals and generated excessive amounts of paper to print off any records, whereas the passport provided a condensed summary of everything on the young person's health record in an easy to understand format.
- It was queried whether the Team ensured that the young people were registered with a GP and dentist and whether this was followed up. It was explained that there was no budget within the contract to follow up, however, up to the age of 18, or 25 if the young person had an identified SEN, each young person should be registered with a GP, dentist and optician. If the team became aware of a young person who was not registered with a GP, this would be identified within their care plan and rectified. The Panel was informed that a new pilot scheme had been launched in January across the Tees Valley to ensure that any young person who had not been seen by a dentist within the last six months could be referred to a dentist that had signed up to the pilot.
- In response to a question regarding how many young people in Middlesbrough were open to the team and how many were about to become 'care leavers', the Panel heard that when the Team took over the contract there was a backlog of health assessments across the south tees which had now been cleared. There were around 40 young people open to the service in Middlesbrough, with around 10-12 due to become care leavers in the near future - a total of between 50 and 60 in Middlesbrough alone.
- Clarification was sought in relation to the final review health assessment and it was confirmed that this took place before the young person's 18th birthday. The information for the health passport was collated once the young person was 16 and the team started to talk to the young people about the health passport at around 15-16 to explain what it was and the information that would be contained in it. Once the final RHA had taken place, the information from that was added to the other collated information and the passport was completed.
- A Panel Member asked what percentage of children/young people were not registered with a GP when they first became open to the service. The Panel was advised that this figure was minimal and was 1.6% for children in Middlesbrough. In terms of those registered with a dentist, the figure was 11.2% in Middlesbrough, prior to the start of the pilot scheme, however, this figure could be slightly skewed as it did not ask when the young person last saw a dentist so it could be that they had seen a dentist but were not registered with one or that they had been automatically deregistered with a dentist because they had not seen one for six months.
- A Panel Member asked whether young people were prepared to take up the passport. The Panel was informed that they were not given a choice as it was felt it was a very important document that provided a user friendly summary of their health record. There was also a tendency for young people who felt fit and healthy to feel that they did not need a health passport, however, this way they were able to access their health records at any point in the future if required.

- It was queried whether health passports were also made available to young people who were adopted. It was explained that for a young person who went on to be adopted, the System One database was closed in respect of that young person, however, HDFT were providing a health summary containing details of the young person's birth (date, place, delivery, weight), family health history, etc so that there was a record allowing health professionals to have background information on the young person in order to know the best way of supporting them. There was currently no national guidance in relation to this, however, it was something that had been due to be examined by NHS England prior to the Covid pandemic.

The Chair thanked the HDFT Tees Valley Children in Care Health Service representative for attending the meeting and for the valuable information provided.

AGREED that the information be noted and considered in the context of the Panel's current scrutiny topic.

SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN PREPARING FOR ADULthood – FURTHER INFORMATION

J Savage, Head of Resident and Business Support, was in attendance at the meeting to provide the Panel with further information around the current and future support arrangements in terms of accommodation for care experienced young people.

The Head of Resident and Business Support advised the Panel that her responsibilities included the delivery of welfare support, collection of all of the Council's finances and the Council's Empty Property Strategy. In addition, she was now leading on the work being undertaken in relation to accommodation within Children's Services, in conjunction with the Children's Services Residential Manager and Head of Regeneration, and in collaboration with Thirteen Housing.

By way of background to the project, the Panel heard that, historically, there had been difficulties in securing accommodation for young people with care experience which had resulted in the use of expensive placements. The cost of a young person leaving care into mainstream accommodation was around £5,500 per week per placement, totalling approximately £14.4 million pounds for 50 young people per year. The cost of rent in a normal tenancy agreement was around £430 per week. It was clear that a new menu of opportunity, particularly for cohorts of care leavers and children in care was required.

The project was an opportunity to respond to the challenges faced by Children's Services by working collaboratively across several Council directorates and with external partners whilst also addressing the number of empty town-wide properties to provide a rounded offer.

In response to a query from a Panel Member, reassurance was provided that, in conjunction with Children's Services, each property would need to be fit for purpose before being offered to a young person. Key areas had been identified and presented to Thirteen in this respect and the Head of Service advised that she was also responsible for Section 17 payments enabling the Council to provide assistance in terms of goods and services. This would include payments to help the young person setting up their own tenancy and would ensure there was a whole support package in place, including furnishings and food packages if required.

The Panel was informed that the main areas of focus for the project in its entirety were as follows:-

- 1) Those with no recourse to public funds – families who were in the process of an asylum claim or had a failed claim decision.
Requirement – a number of home options for small families was required on a temporary basis where accommodation was needed pending a claim.
- 2) Crisis situation: Crash pad – short term/temporary requirements which allowed a domestic or social situation to defuse prior to return. Often required to be distant or out of area.

Requirement – two or three homes for short term lets.

- 3) Looked after children: bespoke arrangements – Local authority was unable to source a regulated package through fostering or residential – need to put in place a staff package to look after a child for long term and for children with complex needs.
Requirement – three or four bed homes for children and a staff team for several weeks or months at a time. Two staff required for up to four children = four placements = six bed home.
- 4) Care leavers – children in residential care up to 18 – leaving care and transitional arrangements for young people, ie independent tenancies.
Requirement – smaller homes for care leavers to live alone and cluster flats for 2/3 young people.
- 5) Direct Delivery of residential homes – avoidance of significant expense – local authority owned.
Requirement – larger properties up to six bedrooms which can be converted to care homes (subject to planning and consultations).

In terms of care leavers, the project would provide a good opportunity for some quick wins as well as establishing a long term strategy to ensure ongoing cost savings.

There were 50 young people approaching their 18th birthdays so being able to plan for this, in conjunction with Thirteen, was crucial in terms of tenancy agreements. The Head of Service advised that she was also responsible for the take up of benefits and crisis payments so once a young person had a tenancy arrangement, it was important to be able to offer an holistic support package. There was a framework of property with Children's Services and detailed dialogue with Thirteen had begun in order to secure properties in the right locations to house care leavers. All stakeholders had a responsibility to the young people of Middlesbrough which was why a collective offer with joint responsibility was key. For example, putting in place council tax exemptions, help with universal credit and other benefits and generally creating a one-stop solution as part of the strategy.

Thirteen group would seek security of tenure and income with the possibility of a Service Level Agreement for a number of properties exclusively for care leavers, progressing to a tenancy for the young person at the right time, to remove financial burden on the Council. This would provide a life cycle solution for Middlesbrough's young people. It was acknowledged that it may be more cost-effective in the long term for the Council to purchase some properties and bring them up to date.

Two hypothetical scenarios were provided to the Panel demonstrating the potential cost avoidance to the Council that the new scheme would have.

The first scenario highlighted the cost of placing two teenage siblings together with a private provider (due to no availability of in-house placements) for a period of five days following a breakdown of their placement with a family member. This was approximately £8,460 per child. The children then had to be placed in external supported provision at a cost of £5,000 per week. The full cost of the placement per annum was around £269,160.

The second scenario highlighted the cost of placing a teenager with support needs in a regulated setting due to no in-house provision being available, following the breakdown of a placement with a family member. The cost of this provision was approximately £4,500 per week with the full yearly cost totalling £234,630.

By comparison, the potential revenue costs associated with the rental of two flats (either let privately or with an RSL), staffing support costs and utilities, repairs, furnishings etc was approximately £101,009 per annum. This could potentially provide a cost avoidance of approximately £402,781 to the Council.

The project had identified a range of other opportunities, including:-

- Council agreement to restore and let properties, or to have other providers to restore properties on behalf of the Council, with an option to align with Children's Services.
- Individuals would be assessed to determine they were in receipt of the correct benefits and entitlements to minimise direct Council contributions.
- Property availability could be increased by unlocking larger, available properties and seeking certain bedroom tax exemptions.
- There were currently more than 1,800 empty properties in Middlesbrough and this project could be aligned to the empty property strategy (with Children's Services being a priority).

The following actions had been identified, going forward:-

- Options Appraisal with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), however, joint working with Thirteen to look at scenarios and working towards a menu of opportunities to address the issues was underway.
- Active Nominations Strategy – solution to be developed that would align to all areas and maximise use of available properties for both new builds and existing stock. This needed to be reactivated, particularly as there would be approximately 20 care leavers between September and November 2023.
- Purchasing Opportunities – affordable solutions when external offerings were not suitable.
- Empty properties strategy – bringing empty properties back in to use to address accommodation shortfalls.
- All of the actions would also support other areas such as adult social care / homeless where accommodation was providing an increased burden to Council finances.

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

- A Panel Member commented that it was good to hear about the proposals and queried whether there were currently any young people that might be eligible to be moved to an available property under the new scheme but would incur a financial penalty with their current placement provider. The Head of Service responded that it was likely that a notice period would need to be given to the current placement provider and that such issues would need to form part of the business case for the project.
- A Member commented that it was good to know that a young person moving to their own property would not have to worry about paying council tax and that the proposed scheme would go a considerable way towards solving some of the accommodation costs in Children's Services and hoped the Council would be in a better position to challenge placement providers who were charging expensive rates. The Head of Service agreed that a cost-effective solution was needed with a framework for negotiation so that the Council was dealing with small numbers of people rather than 'en-mass' groups. There would be opportunities for the framework to be extended where gaps were identified.
- A Panel Member raised concerns over placing vulnerable young people in properties located in areas known to have high levels of anti-social behaviour and/or drug misuse. The Head of Service confirmed that Children's Services would need to have sight of the property and that she also had responsibility for problem properties and wanted to bring everything together to provide a single solution with a strong understanding that Children's Services had the final say as to whether the property and location was suitable for a young person.
- A Panel Member asked in what way young people were supported when they left care and went to live in social housing properties and commented that she had witnessed anti-social

behaviour amongst young people in such properties. The Head of Service responded that it depended on the type of tenancy. If they were in a supported tenancy they would receive ongoing support and that Thirteen held tenancy reviews to check up on the property, however, this needed to be linked to the instances of anti-social behaviour when problems arose. It was important to set the young people up in their own tenancies in the right way, so ensuring that they received the benefits they were entitled to, short term financial support where needed, help with the cost of furniture and white goods, etc.

- The Panel Member stated she would like to see more support from the RSLs for young people. The Head of Service agreed that it needed to be a corporate parenting solution as young people were everyone's responsibility not just the local authority's and all stakeholders needed to ensure the young people were ready for the responsibility of having their own tenancy and to support them to ensure it was successful.
- It was queried how long the local authority remained responsible for care leavers. It was clarified that the local authority was responsible for a young person in care up until the age of 18 or 25 with a SEN. If the young person remained in supported accommodation, the local authority remained responsible. The most cost-effective way would be, pre-18, for the Council to pick up the cost of the tenancy with the young person taking possession of it and being supported.
- It was queried whether the properties were inspected, and by whom, prior to a young person moving in. The Panel heard that Children's Services would need to be happy that the property was suitable for the young person and that Social Workers were very pro-active in ensuring properties were in a suitable location. Properties would also need to be inspected by the relevant housing provider to ensure it was fit for purpose.
- It was queried whether any consideration would be given to shared tenancies, with more than one young person living together. The Panel was informed that it would be something that could be considered, for example, looking at single flats with support on site or two people living together. This would need to be discussed with the young person and their family at the point they moved on to establish their wishes and what would work best for them.
- A Member asked where a young person would go for help if they had moved into a property and then found that they were not managing well. The Panel was advised that the young person could speak to their Social Worker or Personal Adviser, and could also contact her team (Resident and Business Support) to help with finances under the welfare strategy. The Social Worker would signpost the young person to the Resident and Business Support team who would carry out a review and provide a solution to help.
- It was queried how the Council could be sure that a young person could afford a tenancy. The Panel was informed that, in accordance with the welfare strategy, the Resident and Business Support team would have a detailed discussion with the young person to look at their situation and establish whether it was a viable option.
- Reference was made to the current cost of living crisis and it was queried whether the proposals included inflationary figures. The Head of Service advised that the Government support fund would continue into 2023/24 with around £3 million available in Middlesbrough. The Resident and Business Support team would provide advice and support regarding eligibility and it was highlighted that the team had circulated £16.5 million to residents across the town to date. Everything possible would be done to make things easier and more affordable for the young people with their tenancy.
- Once a young person had entered into a tenancy agreement it was queried whether they would know who to contact if something went wrong with the property. The Panel was informed that there should be a link to a tenancy liaison officer and that consideration may need to be given to establishing high risk priority categories for care leavers.

- A Panel Member suggested that some form of information pack could be provided by the Council to care leavers moving into their own tenancy. The pack could include useful and emergency contact numbers and perhaps information about the location of the property such as nearest shops, bus stops, etc.
- A Member suggested it might be worthwhile placing some care leavers in properties near each other to try to avoid feeling isolated. The Panel was informed that wherever possible, care leavers were offered properties situated as close as possible to their support networks.

The Chair thanked the Officer for her 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.

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 March 2023 at 10.00am, Mandela Room, Town Hall.