

**EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL
Wednesday 25th November 2020**

STRATEGIC

Youth Services

1. Youth Service is on track to start on 1st April 2020, with the following timeline in place:
 - The Youth Service Specification was completed and finalised on the 12th October 2020.
 - The tender went live on the 19th October 2020 with the closing date for submissions by providers as the 23rd November 2020.
 - The evaluation of the tenders will take place between 23rd November 2020 and 3rd December 2020, both successful and unsuccessful bidders will be notified on the 4th December 2020.
 - There is then a standstill period between 4th December 2020 – 14th December 2020.
 - The confirmation of the contracts awarded will be given on 15th December 2020 meaning that successful providers will have from 15th December 2020 – 31st March 2021 as the mobilisation period.
 - Contracts for the provision of youth services will commence on 1st April 2021.

Ofsted Improvement Journey

2. The letter outlining Ofsted's findings from their visit to Middlesbrough's Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH) and the Assessment Service on 23rd and 24th September has been received. The letter notes that improvements have been made albeit from a low base and there is a great deal more to do. It is positive to note that no cases were referred back to us which happens when Ofsted felt that children are unsafe. Staff report a more positive experience than during the full inspection in Nov/Dec 2019 with preparation sessions and a planned and coordinated response in the lead up to and during the monitoring visit.
3. There is a change to Ofsted's inspection programme as the next planned visit to Middlesbrough will be a focused visit. This will take place over three days with the in-depth pre-inspection preparations and there will be three social care inspectors plus one education inspector. It will focus on decision making across Children's Services and take place any time before now and the end of March 2021. After the focused visit Ofsted will decide if we should have another full inspection or remain on a programme of focused visits.
4. In addition to the above we have our Annual Engagement Conversation with Ofsted on 11th December. During these meeting, which take place for all authorities, Ofsted will scrutinise specific areas of practice again across the whole of the service. Ofsted

have not yet sent us their agenda which should provide us with more details of what they wish to discuss.

5. Our commissioner Peter Dwyer is with us from 9 – 11th November gathering information for his second report to the minister. The timetable is in the process of being put together and includes meetings with groups of front line staff and interviews focusing on themes such as quality assurance. This visit will double as the DfE's own review of our progress. The above does indicate the amount of external scrutiny that Middlesbrough is working through.

Leadership and Management

6. There have been some significant changes in the Children's Services leadership team. I am delighted to tell you that against external competition Rachel Farnham has been appointed by members to the post of Director of Children's Care. Rachel is already working in the role on an interim basis so there will be a seamless transition into the permanent role. I would like to thank members of the stakeholder panel and the young person's panel for their involvement in the process. Rachel's previous role was of Lead for Transformation, a fixed term post with two years funding. We will be recruiting to this role as soon as possible.
7. Paula Jemson, whose substantive post is that of Quality Assurance Manager is now acting up into the Looked After Children Head of Service position. Paula has a forensic approach to her work, a solid understanding of what good practice looks like and knows Middlesbrough well. We intend to advertise for the permanent role in the near future.
8. I acknowledge the significance of these changes and there are more to come as indicated above but in my view they are all necessary to build a strong whole service leadership team capable of leading delivery against the improvement plan with pace and in the best interests of Middlesbrough's children and young people.

Social Work Teams

9. The Ofsted letter notes that 'Caseloads are too high and are affecting social workers' ability to provide a timely service for children and their families'. Heads of Service are always considering ways in which to create capacity within existing resources for example in the Safeguarding and Care Planning Service in recognition of the size of each team and the current workload, an additional team has been created on a temporary basis from within the staffing structure to enable team managers to supervise fewer staff thus enabling them to have a greater grip on practice.
10. A number of social work vacancies and the caseloads of social workers who are off sick are covered by agency staff. Agency workers bring many positives such expertise and experience of working in other authorities and currently Middlesbrough cannot do without them. However, the workforce can become less stable particularly because agency workers can leave the authority at a week's notice and they are also more expensive for the local authority than directly recruited staff. There is a national shortage of experienced social workers and currently Middlesbrough is able to attract few suitable agency staff. A campaign targeting the recruitment of permanent social workers and team managers is to be launched as soon as possible with a wider more

in-depth campaign planned for when the work to develop a Workforce Strategy has been completed.

11. Ten new social work students started on our Frontline programme recently and they are currently enjoying their introduction to social work practice and meeting up with our social work teams. I am sure that the board will join me in wishing them every success as students in Middlesbrough and as future social workers.
12. The Innovate team, commissioned to reduce the number of children in residential placements, support fragile placements and promote permanency is working well particularly in conjunction with FFF. The contract is due for a mid-point review on 22nd October and I will report in more detail in my next report.

Covid-19 and Children's Services

13. The pandemic continues to put considerable pressure on children's services and schools across Middlesbrough. As staff and pupils are either diagnosed with COVID or have to self-isolate bubbles of students, year groups and whole schools can be affected.
14. Figures as at 21st October show that 202 members of staff and 3563 children have been self-isolating since September. In these circumstances it is important to maintain contact with our vulnerable children namely those known to a social worker. We have a process in place whereby schools phone Children's Services using a designated number staffed by business support staff and share information relating to the absence of vulnerable children. Business support staff note the details on the child's file and take responsibility for contacting the social worker. The child's social worker then updates the child's safety plan and contacts the child's family or carers as appropriate. This process is being extended to include vulnerable children who should be in school but are not there. Guidance has been re-issued to social care staff about the best ways of keeping in contact with children at this time. As per government guidance Children's Services staff are expected to work from home unless it is not possible for them to do so. This will remain the situation for several months. This does have an effect on team morale as some social workers and from my conversations with them particularly the more inexperienced feel quite isolated.

Care Leavers Offer

15. The Participation Team are working to develop the Care Leavers Offer and there has been a number of workshops held with the Pathways Service and young people to develop this. Care Leavers week starts on the 26th October. We are planning a full week of communications including the launch of the new Care Leavers Local Offer, the Middlesbrough Children Matter website, Mental Health messages and more.

PERFORMANCE

Future for Families

16. Last month I reported on the start of the Futures for Families project. The service is developing well, referrals have been accepted for thirty-nine young people. Eleven young people are currently in foster placements and their foster carers are being supported to care for them. A further three young people being supported are still in

residential placements whilst foster placements are being sourced. In addition there are brilliant examples of the project offering excellent support to maintain children in fragile placements and to offer care to children in crisis situations. This has allowed children to continue to be cared for in Middlesbrough and continue to attend school whilst appropriate longer term placements are secured and matching requirements are given full consideration.

Corporate Parenting Strategy

17. The Corporate Parenting Strategy, which encompasses our Permanency Strategy, our Sufficiency Strategy and our Participation Strategy is out for consultation for the whole of October. A multi-agency planning session is arranged to develop the operational action plan that will sit behind the strategy and will support the local authority and partner agencies to achieve the identified priorities.

Integrated Commissioning Model

18. The tenders for the specialist services have been evaluated and once they have been checked by legal we will enter the 10 day standstill period. It is during this 10 standstill period that we will receive any challenges to the decisions. We are comfortable that due process was followed and the tender evaluations were robust and fair.

19. A draft structure for the Core Team has been agreed but is subject to change once services transfer in on 1st April 2021. The development of the Case Management System is underway and is on track to go live on 1st April 2021.

Pot Hole Initiative

20. Middlesbrough Council's Highways Infrastructure Team have now completed works in the first sixteen wards, and are on target to complete the whole programme by week commencing 30th November subject to no delays caused by inclement weather. To date they have identified and repaired a total of 4033 defects - equating to 20165 individual potholes. The work has seen 1105.5 tonnes of tarmac and 11471m² of patches laid, with a further 13,204m² of carriageway surfacing to be completed by the main contractor.