

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 March 2023.

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

OFFICERS: J Dixon.

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

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

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

MINUTES – 14 FEBRUARY 2023

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 14 February 2023 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

DRAFT FINAL REPORT SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO PREPARE FOR ADULTHOOD AND INDEPENDENCE

The Panel was asked to consider the Draft Final Report on its review 'Supporting Young People to Prepare for Adulthood and Independence', a copy of which had been circulated to Members and contributors prior to the meeting.

The report set out the terms of reference and the subsequent evidence gathered by the Panel during the course of the review.

Proposed conclusions were circulated to Members prior to the meeting and were agreed as follows:-

- A) The Panel recognises that preparing young people for adulthood and independence is a corporate parenting responsibility and that the Council and its partners must work together to ensure this task is shared equally.
- B) The Panel heard a range of examples of how services across Council directorates work together and in partnership with external agencies to support young people to become independent.
- C) Whilst Members acknowledge the improvements identified in the findings of the Ofsted Monitoring Visit to the Leaving Care Service (November 2022), they did express concern at the areas still requiring improvement.

Term of Reference A – To consider how the Council seeks to secure employment or training for young people with care experience and/or special needs

- D) The Panel is satisfied that the EET service (work readiness) is providing good support to young people to help them into Education, Employment or Training, with an above England and North East average of delivering the September Guarantee, although the percentage of 16 and 17 year olds in Middlesbrough who were NEET is slightly higher than the North East and England averages.
- E) Middlesbrough Community Learning is often regarded as Middlesbrough's 'Adult Education Provision', however, this is not strictly the case. The Teams within MCL are comprised of skilled, dedicated staff who are passionate about helping individuals to achieve their goals

in relation to education and employment. The Teams offer advice, guidance and signposting in relation to a wide range of pathways available to young people, as well as adults, with support specific to the individual's needs.

- F) The '50 Futures Programme' has been successful in providing work placements for young people within Middlesbrough Council, and in external placements with trusted local employers. Most referrals to the 50 Futures Programme are received from the Apprenticeship and Alternative Provision Teams.
- G) The Managers of the Apprenticeship and Post-16 Alternative Provision Teams (MCL) attend the NEET Clinics and have forged good working relationships with Personal Advisors and Social Workers, particularly with the Pathways and Early Help services, for those young people who were not looked after but were still looking for the same opportunities. There are other areas within Children's Services and within other areas of the Council that are not aware of MCL and the ways in which they could potentially help more young people.
- H) The Panel notes the involvement of the Apprenticeship and Post-16 Alternative Provision Managers in developing an Action Plan with the Head of the Virtual School which will involve speaking to students who are unsure of what they want to do when they finish school. The aim is to provide support, information and guidance to those young people by MCL.

Term of Reference B - To look at ways in which young people with care experience are supported and encouraged to actively participate – with service development and part within their community

- I) The Panel welcomes the positive, ongoing work being undertaken by the Council's Participation Team with a range of young people but acknowledges the challenges faced regarding engagement.
- J) Members were impressed with the goals and aspirations expressed by young people with care experience who had taken part in completing questionnaires to assist with the Panel's investigation and are keen to ensure that those with care experience should have the same opportunities as their peers, without barriers.

Term of Reference C - To consider, where it is appropriate for a young person to move to supported accommodation or independent living, the options available and the support provided to young people and their families/carers (where appropriate) to prepare and plan for independent living

- K) The Pathways (Leaving Care) service is pivotal in supporting young people with care experience to become independent and, from the evidence provided, the Panel considers that there appears to be comprehensive support provided to care leavers in Middlesbrough.
- L) The Panel is aware of the financial position with regard to Children's Services and is supportive of the potential future housing provision initiative, to be delivered with external partners (/RSL) which will not only deliver significant cost savings to the Council but also provide a life cycle solution to young people with care experience.
- M) In this regard the Panel considers holistic support, in collaboration with the RSL, Health and relevant partners, to be essential in order for young people to succeed in their placements.
- N) In addition, it notes that a cohort of around 50 young people are approaching their 18th birthdays, with 20 between September and November 2023.

Term of Reference D - To examine how care experienced young people are supported with budgeting their finances and how they are supported to ensure their physical and emotional health needs are met

- O) There is a framework of financial support available to young people leaving care.
- P) The health of young people with care experience is overseen by HDFT. The Panel heard that since taking over the contract to deliver IHAs and RHAs of children in care, despite challenges the backlog of assessments has been cleared and the service has been instrumental in delivering immunisation programmes, dental pilot and the development of a health passport.
- Q) The health passport is a summary of medical and family medical history for all young people leaving care and is provided to them at that point. The Panel considers this to be an essential document for all care leavers.

Term of Reference E - To look at how young people with care experience and/or additional needs are supported to become more independent in travelling to school/college/other education settings/places of employment, or to help them become more independent with travelling socially

- R) Independent travel training provides young people, particularly those with SEND, with practical and tailored support to help them travel in a safe manner independently to their place of employment or education or to leisure venues. This provides young people with confidence to travel independently giving them a sense of achievement and helping to overcome isolation by enabling them to travel independently, whether this be to work, education venues or to socialise with family and friends.

The Panel discussed the proposed recommendations which had also been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. It was suggested that recommendation E) be amended to include the wording 'including a Forum for parents/carers'. Subsequently, the following recommendations were agreed for inclusion in the Final Report:-

Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

- A) That clear pathways be established for young people, whatever their status (care leavers, SEN or having a disability), including flowcharts, to help young people and practitioners understand processes in place, options available and ensuring everyone is aware of available support/services.
- B) Whilst the SEND and Inclusion, Children with Disabilities, Early Help and Pathways (Leaving Care) services all work closely with Adult Social Care colleagues to ensure a smooth transition to adult social care, where determined appropriate, the Panel recommends that an Adult Social Worker be allocated to the young person between the age of 17 and 17.5 years to ensure a smooth handover and seamless transition for the young person and their family/carers and to establish appropriate pathways plans, clearly setting out how the young person will be supported to become an independent adult and identifying the team around the young person.
- C) To bridge the gap for a small number of young people with a disability or learning difficulty where their needs assessment outcome is a health need, that health colleagues begin to work with the young person from age 17, rather than 18, to ensure a smooth transition from Children's Social Care, again with clear pathway planning (as B. above).
- D) That work with Health colleagues be strengthened, particularly around joint commissioning and that appropriate health colleagues be invited to relevant groups and Strategic Board meetings associated with SEND to ensure joint working and service development.
- E) To establish a mechanism, including a Forum for parents/carers, to raise awareness between all groups associated with SEND so that everyone is aware of the work taking place within each of the groups so that opportunities for collaboration can be identified and duplication can be avoided.
- F) To ensure effective use of the Education Health and Care (EHC) process for young people

with an identified SEND, up to the age of 25, to drive decision making and commissioning decisions in respect of the young person.

Care Leavers

- G) In line with Ofsted's findings from its monitoring visit to the Pathways (Leaving Care) Service in November 2022, in relation to areas requiring improvement, the Panel recommends that these areas be taken forward as part of the Improvement Plan and that progress be monitored and reported back to the Panel in six months' time.
- H) Ensure that all young people in care are introduced to the Pathways (Leaving Care) service at age 16 and that the process of being allocated a Personal Advisor to help support them in the transition of leaving care and preparation for independence be fully discussed with young people, taking into consideration their views and wishes.
- I) That adequate preparation and support in essential skills (such as cooking, shopping and money management) should be discussed as early as possible and regularly with young people to ensure they feel confident in performing such tasks independently once they do leave care and also that they are aware of who they can contact for help and support if needed.

Term of Reference A – To consider how the Council seeks to secure employment or training for young people with care experience and/or special needs

- J) That there is greater promotion of Middlesbrough Community Learning across all Council services, particularly Children's Services, to ensure all staff are aware of the support that MCL can offer to young people, particularly those with care experience, additional needs or those who are NEET. This should include:-
 - i) Appropriate representatives (Head of Service/Managers from the MCL Teams) to attend a Children's Services LMT to promote their work and advise how they can potentially support vulnerable young people in a range of post-16 employment, education, training or apprenticeship pathways available to them. The information should be disseminated to Team Managers and staff across Children's Services to ensure that all Social Workers, Practitioners and Personal Advisors are aware of the pathways available through MCL and to appropriately signpost young people (and their families/carers) to the service.
 - ii) Better promotion of the 50 Futures Programme across all Council services, including information on support provided to placement providers and the benefits of providing a 50 Futures placement for a young person.
- K) That the Action Plan currently being developed with the Virtual School and MCL be provided to the Panel upon completion, for information, and that students currently monitored by the virtual school be provided with the advice needed, in sufficient time before leaving school, of the pathways available to them, including those available through MCL for those where college was not a viable option.

Term of Reference B - To look at ways in which young people with care experience are supported and encouraged to actively participate – with service development and part within their community

- L) The Panel supports the continuation of ongoing work by the Council's Participation Team with a range of care experienced young people through a range of groups and forums and encourages alternative, innovative ways of engaging those young people who may not necessarily want to meet in person but may still have valuable feedback to share in terms of shaping service development, for example, through the app/online.

- M) To strengthen the programme of participation and inclusion for young people with SEND, and their families/carers, in order for them to contribute to service development, policies and procedures – ensuring their needs are met.

Term of Reference C - To consider, where it is appropriate for a young person to move to supported accommodation or independent living, the options available and the support provided to young people and their families/carers (where appropriate) to prepare and plan for independent living

- N) The Panel is supportive of the future accommodation proposals being developed in partnership with housing providers, particularly in relation to care leavers, and requests an update in relation to progress in the next six months.
- O) That, in the development of the future accommodation proposals for care leavers, all relevant partners work together to ensure a package of holistic support is provided for each individual, tailored to meet their specific needs and that a detailed plan be produced, clearly setting out each element of the support to be provided to the individual. This plan should be provided to the young person and shared with professionals supporting them.
- P) That all accommodation is checked by the housing provider and relevant children's social care staff to ensure that it meets the required living standards and is located in an area considered to be suitable for the young person, also taking into consideration the young person's wishes.
- Q) Once finalised and approved, the proposals for independent tenancies with RSLs (housing providers) should be incorporated into the Sufficiency Action Plan (theme 4 – Improving Placements and Support for Care Leavers) which forms part of the Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- R) That a directory be compiled for young people moving to independent living accommodation containing essential information about the property, local area and amenities and support contact numbers for services/support across all relevant partners (social care, housing, health services, police).

Term of Reference D - To examine how care experienced young people are supported with budgeting their finances and how they are supported to ensure their physical and emotional health needs are met

- S) That, as part of ensuring care leavers are provided with support in essential life skills, particular focus be placed on managing finances and budgeting and as part of the accommodation offer for care leavers, detailed planning in relation to financial entitlements and benefits are clearly set out for each young person.
- T) All care leavers should be provided with information, as part of their Pathway Plan, as to where they can access help with their mental health and emotional well-being, including access to the dedicated CAMHS worker who is part of the Pathways service team, and other relevant services/support/peer groups to avoid social isolation.
- U) The Panel welcomes the introduction of Health Passports for young people leaving care as it provides essential medical history for young people in the future. The Panel feels this is an essential document and requests that the importance of the document is discussed and reinforced to young people on a regular basis.
- V) That relevant partners (health, Children's Social Care and Tees Valley Adoption) explore the possibility of providing a similar health passport for young people who become adopted.

Term of Reference E – To look at how young people with care experience and/or additional needs are supported to become more independent in travelling to school/college/other education settings/places of employment, or to help them become more independent with travelling socially

- W) The Panel is supportive of the independent travel training (ITT) provided to young people to help them have confidence to travel independently to education/employment settings or socially. It recommends that ITT be offered to all young people in Middlesbrough with SEND and/or care experience, where it is deemed they have capacity to travel independently and that this be monitored.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the proposed conclusions, as set out above, be included in the Final Report.
2. That the proposed recommendations, including the amendment to E), as set out above, be included in the Final Report.
3. That the Final Report be submitted to the next available meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board for consideration.

As it was the Panel's final meeting of the Municipal Year, the Chair wished to thank all Panel Members for their participation and contribution throughout the year and to thank all officers and attendees who had contributed to the Panel's work.