

## EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL

### EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CHILDREN'S SERVICES - COUNCILLOR ZAFAR UDDIN

DATE OF MEETING: 29<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2023

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members on areas of activity within my portfolio including performance against strategic priorities.

#### STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND UPDATES:

**We will show Middlesbrough's children that they matter and work to make our town safe and welcoming and to improve outcomes for all children and young people.**

➤ **Early Help:**

1. To ensure that there is a strong early help offer in Middlesbrough to meet needs, we have merged the Early Help Board and Family Hub Implementation Board into one strategic overarching board which reports progress directly into the Childrens Trust, to effectively co-ordinate all Early Help Services including those delivering from the Family Hubs. This new Family Help Board is well attended by a range of statutory services and voluntary and community sector partners.
2. The Early Help Service 'Stronger Families' provides support to families in Middlesbrough who have reached a threshold whereby the family are experiencing multiple and complex issues. The Family Practitioners work with the whole family to create a Family Plan, and using a strength-based approach set goals with the family to improve outcomes. Early Help also involves other services and partners, who can provide help and support to the family to prevent problems from escalating to more statutory and costly services.
3. The Early Help Service remains stable in terms of staffing and all teams are performing well. Children, young people and families are allocated into the Early Help Service on a daily basis from our Multi Agency Childrens Hub and this means that children are receiving early help services without delay, as families are contacted within 3 days of allocation to a Family Practitioner. This swift response ensures that families engage with Early Help at the time when they need it most and children are seen on a regular basis,
4. so that our work is focussed on the voice of children. There is very little turnover within Early Help, so children benefit from consistent and strong relationships with their Family Practitioners. We are supporting more children at an early help threshold in Middlesbrough, and we can see that the proportion of early help cases has increased

5. over the last 12-month period. During October 2023 we had 833 children open in Stronger Families and a further 2543 children receiving early help support from our partners which includes Health, Schools and the Voluntary and Community Sector including our Youth Services.

➤ **Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH) and Assessment:**

6. In the MACH the new MACH Team Manager has now commenced the role and has settled in well and Assistant Team Manager, remains in post. This is supporting stability within the team. We have only one agency position in the MACH who will continue to cover maternity leave. The team continue to provide timely responses to our children and families in terms of referrals for safeguarding and support.
7. We have regular overview of the processes to ensure oversight through Audit processes which informs any areas of development. The Team has regular Team meetings to look at team development, improvement and stability. Monthly MACH strategic Board is held with key partners to support improve and develop multi-Agency working.
8. The Assessment Team have continued to be a stable staff team and although there are some agency workers in place, there is current recruitment out to advert to replace the current agency workers with permanent members of staff. There continues to be a drive-in relation to performance and practice, with regular high support and challenge within supervision and management oversight. There will continue to be team development within Team Meeting's that are taking place regularly to support development and reflection in order to improve outcomes for our children and families.

➤ **Safeguarding & Care Planning/Children with Disabilities:**

9. Safeguarding continue to be busy with a high number of proceedings due to finalise between now and February. We have just held our first Private Fostering Panel where we talked about the children subject to private fostering arrangements and are just completing the last of the amendments on our Private Fostering Statement. There is a plan to have this promoted for awareness and also training to be rolled out, with some champions developed in the teams who will be the 'go-to' for advice and guidance where Private Fostering Arrangements are in place.
10. We hope to have all arrangements in place and measurable impact within the next 2 weeks and the carers will be entitled to all the same training as our foster carers and kinship carers. An interim head of service will be starting in post on 23.11.23 however permanent recruitment for heads of service will take place on 21.11.23.

➤ **Fostering Services:**

11. We are looking at the children in connected care arrangements who are on Care orders and how we can look at alternative orders for permanency. We will be running mandatory

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training for carers to look at the benefits of other orders and vulnerabilities of children remain under care orders. We will have approved 14 new fostering households by the end of December with a further 3 to be approved by February.

12. Our new resource worker is getting excellent. Feedback from children and carers on the work she is doing with them. We are looking at combining fostering and residential training to give more opportunities to staff and carers alongside introducing trauma informed support from residential to the fostering service to undertake work with carers.

➤ **Children Looked After (CLA):**

13. Staffing recruitment and retention continues to be a factor within the CLA service but we are seeing a steady incline. We have appointed two permanent social workers and now have 2 very experienced agency Team managers that are driving the workforce. Bekki Leeman is currently appointed as interim Head of service and will be taking on the role across CLA, Pathway and Leaving care. There was some excellent multi agency working across CLA and fostering. Through their quick thinking and long hours of work, they were able to successfully keep 2 siblings together within a in house foster home when theirs had broken down.

➤ **Residential, Supported Accommodation, Resource and Care Leavers:**

14. One home has had an assurance inspection and we are awaiting the publishing of this report. Residential staff continue to work hard to keep young people within our community and residential care is currently at 93% occupancy. A recruitment campaign is under way to increase staffing at one home so that more young people can be supported in Middlesbrough. Young people have enjoyed Halloween and Bonfire night and are now planning for Christmas with staff.

<b>HIGHLIGHTS</b>
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15. Practice Week for Children's Care was held week commencing 23 October and was a huge success with 9 virtual learning bite size sessions being delivered by internal and external partners with over 250 places being taken by our Children's Services workforce. A celebration event was held in the Town Hall on 26 October and included guest speakers and stall holders from across the service, external partners and our care experienced young people. The events have been well received by our staff. Feedback has now been collated and will be used to shape and improve this offer in the future.
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*Anything you wish to highlight – good work/best practice/good news stories,*

<b>THE TIME AHEAD:</b>
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16. We are continuing to review our looked after children's external placements in view of bringing children and young people locally, closer to their home and their families and friends.
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**Democratic Services**

Middlesbrough Council, Town Hall, Middlesbrough TS1 9FX  
middlesbrough.gov.uk

17. As part of our regular discussion with various teams, recently Mayor Chris Cooke and I have chatted to Victoria Banks, Head of Virtual School about recruitment of Governors for Virtual School.

18. 16. I also continued to Liaise with Vicky Davidson-Boyd, Service Manager at Middlesbrough Adoption Team, the Adoption Tees Valley in terms of recruiting Panel members with appropriate skills, knowledge, and experiences. We are also discussing the issues around an equality, inclusion, and diversity strategy.

*Upcoming issues/things on the FWP/projects involved in*  
See as above.

NAME: Cllr Zafar Uddin

DATE: 29<sup>th</sup> November 2023.