

## **EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

### **STRATEGIC**

#### **Children's Services - Governance and Partnerships**

1. Our Commissioner, Peter Dwyer, has submitted his report to the Department of Education although again at the time of writing we don't yet have the Minister's response. This will be shared at the board meeting if it has been received by the time of the meeting.
2. The Department for Education has allocated Stuart Smith as our new improvement adviser and I am pleased that Stuart was able to attend our last board meeting. Stuart has been the DCS in two local authorities and we are looking forward to working with him in the coming months. He has already met with some key personnel and shared great practice from other authorities.
3. Following the Chancellor's Spending Review announcement on 25<sup>th</sup> November it has been confirmed that funding for the Troubled Families Programme will continue for a further 12 months i.e. through 2021/22. The Spending Review commits £165 million for Local Authorities, through the Troubled Families Programme, providing intensive support to families facing multiple interconnected problems. We are waiting to hear more details about the actual funding allocations for Middlesbrough as this grant is currently used to support the work of the Prevention and Early Help Service within Children's Services. In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions' Reducing Parental Conflict Programme which is operational in Middlesbrough will also continue in 2021/22, to further develop the evidence base on what works and to support local authorities and their partners to fully embed support for families locally.
4. On 11<sup>th</sup> December senior leaders from Children's Services met with Ofsted for Middlesbrough's Annual Engagement Meeting (AEM), a conversation that takes place between Ofsted and every Local Authority regardless of their rating. Two weeks prior to the meeting we submitted a self-evaluation document to inform the conversation that subsequently covered social care and education outcomes. One of the main issues raised by Rachel Holden our senior HMI is that of compliance, as outlined earlier in this report it is crucial that social care services are delivered in a timely way. Ofsted will send a letter outlining the discussion at the AEM that will be shared with this board as appropriate. We will be in contact with Ofsted early in the New Year to discuss our focussed visit which will take place sometime before the end of March 2021.

#### **Children's Services - Leadership and Management**

5. The Children's Services 'Middlesbrough Children Matter' website was launched on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 and has been well received by our Middlesbrough Children, our

Children's Services workforce our corporate colleagues and our partners. The overarching aim is that this website will help us connect with Middlesbrough Children so we can then use it to evidence how much they matter to us. Our vision is showing Middlesbrough Children that they matter. The website address is:

<https://middlesbroughchildrenmatter.co.uk>

6. The Corporate Parenting Strategy has now been signed off at a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on 14<sup>th</sup> December. Workshops have taken place with partners from the Virtual School, Adoption Tees Valley (our Regional Adoption Agency), Commissioning and Legal Services, to develop the action plans to support roll out of the strategy.
7. The structure and approach to developing the Workforce Strategy is now being finalised. This programme, crucial to ensuring that we have the social work/social care capacity and capability to improve our work with vulnerable children and families, now has 5 work streams:
  - Children's Services Recruitment and Retention
  - Children's Social Care Demand Forecasting
  - Children's Social Care Internal Restructure
  - Children's Services Workforce Development
  - Children's Services Workforce Development Strategy
8. The strategy itself will be developed between January and March next year and is planned to go live in April.
9. The last report described the process for commissioning youth services in Middlesbrough. At the time of writing no decision has yet been made on awarding the three separate contracts.
10. Sara Davidson, Strategic Lead for Education left the authority on 4<sup>th</sup> December and I would like to place on record my thanks to Sara for all of her hard work as part of the Children's Services Leadership Team. However, I am pleased to announce that Karen Smith, previously Middlesbrough's Senior Education Adviser was appointed to the vacant post on 8<sup>th</sup> December. Congratulations to Karen, I am sure that she will make a real difference to Middlesbrough's children in her new role.

### **Children's Services – Performance**

11. The average caseload is recorded at 22 children per fte. However, as noted in previous reports this does not adequately reflect the practice focus in each service area, the complexity of different pieces of case work and individual social worker's level of experience. Action is being taken to alleviate caseloads as described in the following paragraphs.
12. A paper had been submitted to the Council's Executive committee proposing to extend the existing Innovate Managed Team's contract for 2 years on a continued invest to save basis. I am pleased to report that this proposal was successful and the contract will be extended for a maximum of two years with review points on a quarterly basis. The team will continue to work with a rolling case load of 90 – 100 which will alleviate some of the pressure on the Looked After Children's teams. The Innovate team has more than met its original invest to save target

13. The fieldwork teams, working in collaboration with Futures for Families, continue to focus appropriately on reducing the number of older children coming into our care as a result of family breakdown. The work to discharge children's care orders and support them to permanence by being cared for under the auspices of Special Guardianship Orders is also reducing the number of children in our care and to this end three court hearing have been held every week for the last four weeks. I understand that this will continue into the New Year. The number of children in our care at the time of writing this report is 556 which is down 21% from an all-time high in August 2020 of 702.

14. I would like to specifically reference this quote. Futures for Families workers have had significant support and training around the power of language and communication which supports the understanding of those young people and the understanding of the trauma that young people have faced in their lives. It is of particularly poignant to know that 75% of all young people accessing Futures for Families are receiving support (either directly or indirectly) from the Life Coach. Of those accessing support 92% had no previous identified need. Previously 32.5% of young people had an undiagnosed Speech and Language difficulties and of those 92% are male. This really evidences the need for preventative services stopping families' situations escalating until young people are on the edge of care.

**Challenge Your Assumptions!**  
*Futures for Families has been working with young person. It was assumed that he could tell the time because he had a watch. Unfortunately it he couldn't – he said that he wore a watch because it looked good.*

15. The proposal to the corporate leadership team as mentioned in the last report was successful and additional resources have been secured to commission two managed teams from Innovate for a six month period each consisting of five social workers and one team manager. The teams began work in Middlesbrough on 14<sup>th</sup> December and they are aligned with the Assessment Service with the aim of completing single assessments in a timelier manner and working with proactively with children in need to prevent escalation and transfer to the Safeguarding and Care Planning service. This should begin to reduce the caseloads in the Assessment Service and the Safeguarding and Planning Service, so with the 'invest to save' Innovate team taking work from the Children Looked After Service and the reduction in the number of children looked after there should be scope for social workers to focus more on compliance and improving practice across these services as a whole. The Innovate teams will also take more of a role in terms of sharing good practice across the services they are supporting. The aim is that when the Innovate teams move on from Middlesbrough there will continue to be sufficient flexibility in the system as work for children and young people will be of a higher quality and progressed to permanence in a more child friendly timescale.

16. Commissioning managed teams from Innovate has proved more reliable and productive than procuring individual agency workers although this must not be taken to mean that Middlesbrough doesn't have many excellent agency workers.

17. Significant improvements and critical changes are being made to the Children's Social Care Liquidlogic case management system (LCS) that include:

- Improvements to the recording and reporting of legal proceedings.
- A redesigned Children and Family Assessment that will help to improve social work practice and reflect the needs of our vulnerable children and their families.

- A number of redesigned forms, including the Pathway Plan for Care Leavers, which will make more accurate and efficient recordings for social workers.
18. COVID 19 continues to affect practice across the whole of Children's Services i.e. services for education as well as social care. Head teachers are particularly under pressure as illustrated by the following figures:-
- 38 members of school staff and 810 pupils are currently isolating
  - 640 members of staff and 9928 have been asked to self-isolate since September.

### **Youth Council**

19. Middlesbrough Youth Council is a virtual platform for all young people aged 11-18 and will go live in January. This is a fantastic opportunity for young people to make a difference to the future of their Middlesbrough. The group will be supported by the Member of Youth Parliament and the Deputy Member of Youth Parliament and has been co-designed with young people from the start. A full communications plan has been arranged to ensure all children and young people across Middlesbrough have the opportunity to be involved.

### **Middlesbrough Alcohol Centre of Excellence**

20. South Tees Public Health secured capital funding from Public Health England to develop the Middlesbrough Alcohol Centre of Excellence (MACE). This has seen the former Holgate Depot/East-West Centre on Ayresome Green Lane brought back into use via significant investment to make it fit for purpose as a flagship health and wellbeing facility. MACE will be a holistic approach to addressing alcohol misuse with a focus on achieving and sustaining positive change. It will provide a co-ordinated and multi-agency approach to the prevention, treatment and aftercare of those seeking support for alcohol use. The service will place particular emphasis on prevention and will also offer appropriate advice, referral and treatment interventions where needed. In addition to specialists in alcohol clinical and recovery support, members of the integrated service model for domestic abuse, homelessness and substance misuse, and partner agencies from health and the voluntary and community sector will operate from the MACE. The service will commence in January 2021.

### **Integrated Commissioning Model**

21. The specialist contracts have now been awarded for supported housing, domestic abuse and substance misuse and the decommissioning of existing services and the mobilisation of new ones has started.
22. The TUPE information has been requested from Humankind and CGL; the services which will be transferring into MBC on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021. The Integrated model will sit within Public Health and robust pathways and governance will be developed alongside Adult's and Children's Social Care

### **Pothole Initiative**

23. The Highways Team have spent the last 20 weeks conducting a Pothole Challenge. The results have been really impressive. They have;
- Repaired 26,750 potholes

- Used 1425.5 tonnes of tarmac
- Completed 13,898 m<sup>2</sup> of patching

24. The level of effort that has gone into this initiative has been superb and the teams have worked incredibly hard. This is more impressive when you consider the changes in working arrangements that had to be made because of Covid.

25. Thanks a lot to all involved, it's made a big difference to the roads across Middlesbrough.