

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CHILDREN'S SERVICES - COUNCILLOR ZAFAR UDDIN

DATE OF MEETING: 11 September 2024

1. 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

2. 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.

UPDATES

➤ **Early Help:**

1. **Early Help Service (Stronger Families)**

The Stronger Families Service remains stable and is performing well, supporting 732 children (July 2024) through whole family working and early help interventions. In addition, there are a further 1289 children being supported by early help partners including our schools, health visiting service and partners from voluntary and community sector organisations including youth services. Our early help approach, and strategy is overseen by the multi-agency strategic Family Help Board which is a well-attended and established strategic partnership and provides the interface between government programmes and local partnerships including the integrated Family Hub and Start for Life offer, Supporting Families programme and Reducing Parental Conflict programme.

➤ **Young People Not in Education Employment and Training (NEET)**

2. The Early Help service performs all LA statutory duties linked to participation of young people, and we have a small team of specialist staff who work with young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) or whose current activity is not known. We are performing well against all key national measures and Middlesbrough has been identified by the Department for Education (DfE) as a 'top performer' regarding the participation of young people in education, training, and employment opportunities. The team are currently preparing for the September Guarantee which involves all 2024 school leavers and all young people who left school last academic year, to ensure that all have a suitable offer of learning by the end of September.

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

3. The MACH Team continues to be fully staffed with permanent workers. We are continuing our work with partners to strengthen our Multi Agency Partnerships, and we continue to facilitate Multi Agency Audit on a monthly basis alongside weekly audit with specific audit areas to ensure we know ourselves well. We are also working with STSCP on some dip-sample audits to strengthen our work with partners. We have held our second practice week which commenced 3 June 2024 and we have continued to utilise findings from our practice week Audits and weekly audit activity, and this informs our development sessions with the Team, which are facilitated on a weekly basis. We continually scrutinise our practice to ensure that we know ourselves and look at ways to improve and develop so we can achieve the best outcomes for our children.
4. The Assessment Team have continued to be a relatively stable staff team with 5 Permanent Team Managers. There remain some agency workers in place within the assessment service, however, we have adverts for recruitment, and we are having an event with agency workers to have a conversation in respect of what support and benefits there are, if they were to consider becoming a permanent member of staff. We have completed a further practice week within the assessment service which commenced 17 June 2024, where our dip sample audit reviewed management oversight, quality of visits assessments and planning for us to strengthen and develop our service.
5. Practice week findings from the audit activity has facilitated focussed development sessions to enable us to strengthen and embed our focussed work around visits, assessment timeliness and achieving positive outcomes for children where they are signposted to the most appropriate service timely. Weekly performance is reviewed by the Team Managers and the Service Managers, to enable scrutiny and ensure timely responses for the children of Middlesbrough.

➤ **Learning, Review and Development**

6. As of the 01/08/2024 one of the Independent Reviewing Officer's (IRO) from the Review and Development Team (RAD) formally commenced in the Practice Lead Auditor role to support our Quality Assurance and Practice Development activities. As a result, Learning, Review and Development have gone out to advert to recruit to this IRO post to ensure the RAD team remains within capacity and inside of the recommended case load numbers for children in our care and those subject to child protection plans. Within this we have also made sure to meet the required savings as part of the establishment review.
7. The Quality Assurance Framework has now been finalised and as the second Practice Lead Auditor (PLA) comes into post at the end of this month. Quality Assurance will therefore be fully staff by October and with one PLA already in place we have begun to implement the QA Framework, increasing the QA offer of group audits, alongside increasing the thematic audit activities and direct support to practitioners.
8. Monthly Principal Social Worker drop-in sessions continue to be offered to staff and this month we have started to see practitioners begin to utilise this space to reflect on their casework with the PSW. The PSW has also reached out across Children's

Services to invite staff to share any support needs they may have as a result of the recent riots and community unrest. Our Partners in Practice (PIP) Islington have also offered to provide staff with supportive outlets such as reflective sessions for global majority staff where they can share experiences, offer mutual support, and build a sense of community and belonging.

9. The Senior Social worker for the Social Work Academy also commenced in post this month and work has begun to reshape and strengthen the focus of the SW Academy in supporting our students as they move into their Approved and Supported Year of Employment (ASYE) in September. The ASYE manager who had been off on long-term sick has now completed their phased return and their counter part is due to return from maternity leave at the end of September.

The next Cohort of Approach (formally known as Frontline) student Social Workers have now met with their line managers and begun shadowing and preparation for joining us in September.

➤ **Safeguarding & Care Planning, Children with Disabilities, Aspire and Pre-birth Team**

10. The SCP, Aspire (exploitation) and Pre-birth team continue to be stable however there is a high number of agency staff within the teams. Ongoing work in being undertaken to appoint permanent workers within the service area to create stability and practice improvement. Caseloads are beginning to increase however these remain manageable.
11. The service area holds highly complex cases which are often within the court arena. The court progression officer is now in post who is reviewing children who are subject to Public Law Outline (PLO) and care proceedings alongside a review of the legal gateway panel. Performance with the SCP have improved and is being maintained month on month. Our permanent Service manager is on maternity leave until March 2025 however the individual covering this post has stepped up within the service area which provides stability to the teams and consistency of practice.
12. The permanent Head of Service has now left the local authority an interim HOS is covering the post who has significant experience, and the permanent post is currently being advertised.

➤ **Children Looked After (CLA)**

13. The service continues to be in a more stable position. Care plans are increasingly progressing in a timely manner. The numbers of children allocated to Social Workers remains at a good level, assisting the staff to engage with children and complete relevant tasks. Resolving the drift and delay has taken time to understand and progress the required tasks. The Service Manager continues to develop good practice, enabling stop the clock days, service development sessions and training. The performance data continues to improve, and work continues quality and consistency in the service. There have been worries about the data not accurately reflecting the work of the service and this should have been resolved in July 2024, however, remains outstanding, with work on this continuing. This has also been an issue for Pathways 1. Numbers of compliments are increasing in this area of the

service, regarding the work of our Social Workers with several very complex children and young people.

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

14. The service comprises of 6 children's homes and work is underway preparing for a full inspection in September 2024. There has been a period of instability in some of the homes over the summer period due to a variety of factors such as long-term sickness, seasonal leave.
15. Supported accommodation is in the process of being registered with the Local authority having submitted the required paperwork some time ago. There are no timescales on the completion of this as OFSTED report delays link to their capacity.

➤ **Pathways**

16. Pathways had a focused visit on care experienced young people at the end of July 2024. This was a positive visit from Ofsted, who were pleased with the progress. The letter from this visit is due to be published on the 2nd of September 2024. The additional Personal Advisors are in post. This has allowed all 17-year-olds to be allocated a Personal Advisor and 16-year-olds are being allocated currently. Over the past 2 months strategic and operational housing panels have been implemented, a review with housing colleagues has been completed, with a plan to increase housing options for care experienced young people, including a change in banding. This is in line with the requirements of care experienced being recognised as a protected characteristic by Middlesbrough. Work is progressing with Adult Social Care colleagues to develop an effective Transition Management Group, to enable a seamless transition at 18.
17. Training sessions have continued in the teams around quality of practice with a training programme being developed and implemented specifically for Personal Advisors. Performance data continues to improve, albeit with the issues noted above still occurring. Quality and consistency being further developed. The teams have responded well to the change in leadership and fast pace of work in readiness for the Ofsted visit. They are keen
18. to further develop the service for young people and are taking advantage of the work with Islington in relation to coaching, to support their practice.

HIGHLIGHTS

19. In the July 2024 report, I have highlighted that the difficulties we have experienced over the past few years regarding our service delivery, I have comfortably said that the situation seemed much more settled, and we were making improvement. I was also confident that having appropriate, permanent workforce with necessary skills, knowledge, and the dedications, I was hopeful that we were moving to a right direction.
20. Now I can certainly and proudly confirm that we have received notification that on 2nd September 2024 we will receive the letter to tell us we are out of children's services intervention. This is an excellent news for our children's services and for us all.

21. I would personally like to thank and show my appreciation to all our staff members for their tireless work and strong commitments to children's services, to the council and its town.

THE TIME AHEAD

22. We are continuing to work hard with our partner agencies i.e. Health, Education, Police Youth Justice, other statutory and voluntary establishments, in the best interest of our children and young people, and their families and carers.

NAME: Cllr Zafar Uddin

DATE: 11.09.2024