

PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday, 16 September 2024.

PRESENT: Councillors E Clynch (Chair), J Banks, D Jackson, M McClintock, S Platt, S Tranter, G Wilson and L Young.

OFFICERS: M Adams, R Brown, T Dunn, C Jones and C Lunn.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors L Henman and J Ryles.

24/14 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting and explained the fire evacuation procedures.

Following the recent sad passing of Councillor Jeanette Walker, the Chair invited Members to join him in a minute's silence, as a mark of respect.

24/15 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Business
Cllr J Banks	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.
Cllr E Clynch	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.
Cllr D Jackson	Non-Pecuniary	School Governor.
Cllr S Tranter	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.
Cllr L Young	Non-Pecuniary	Employed within education setting.

24/16 **MINUTES - PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL - 15 JULY 2024**

The minutes of the People Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 15 July 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/17 **SETTING THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S WORK PROGRAMME 2024/2025**

The Democratic Services Officers submitted a report, the purpose of which was to assist Members in considering and agreeing the panel's work programme for the 2024/2025 Municipal Year.

At the initial meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel held on 15 July 2024, Members were asked to consider a number of topics suggested by various stakeholders for the panel's 2024-2025 Work Programme. During discussion at the meeting, Members shortlisted several potential items for topics (full reviews) and updates. These were as follows:

Topics:

- Children Missing from Education
- Homelessness
- Obesity
- The Education of Children in the Care of the Local Authority.

Updates:

- Budget and Transformation Programme
- Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection Framework/ Programme
- Integrated Care Board (ICB) Health Matters (including: Special Allocation Scheme; Dental Recovery; Speech and Language Children and Young People's Services; and Children's Mental Health)
- Residential and Supported Accommodation for Children in Our Care and Care

Leavers.

A discussion took place and it was agreed that one topic with a health agenda and one topic from an education agenda should be considered as Scrutiny topics. The Panel agreed that the topics would therefore be confirmed as 'Children Missing from Education' and 'Homelessness'.

Agreed that:

- 1. the Scrutiny topics were confirmed as 'Children Missing from Education' and 'Homelessness', and**
- 2. an update would be provided from the Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys Trust in respect of mental health services.**

24/18

CHILDREN MISSING FROM EDUCATION

The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision presented an overview of Children Missing from Education.

Children Missing Education (CME) is a term used by the Department for Education to identify a particular subset of children who were at increased risk and were not attending school. To be classified as CME, children must have satisfied all three of the following criteria:

- be of compulsory school age
- not be registered at a school
- not be receiving suitable education otherwise than at a school.

Local Authorities had a duty under section 436A of the Education Act 1996 to make arrangements to establish the identities of children missing education, and return them to full time education. Where there was concern for a child's welfare, this should be referred to the Local Authority's Children's Social Care Team. If there was reason to suspect a crime had been committed, the police should also be involved. In Middlesbrough the CME Officer would initiate and pursue appropriate enquiries to trace the pupil and regularly review the case until the pupil was re-engaged in education, or was found to be resident in and known to another Local Authority.

In addition, Local Authorities had a range of other duties, which included:

- Arranging suitable full-time education for permanently excluded pupils from the sixth school day of exclusion.
- Serving notice on parents requiring them to satisfy the Local Authority that the child was receiving suitable education, when it was brought to the Local Authority's attention that a child might not be receiving such education.
- Issuing School Attendance Orders (SAOs) to parents who failed to satisfy the Local Authority that their child was receiving suitable education, if the Local Authority deemed it was appropriate that the child should attend school.
- Prosecuting or issuing penalty notices to parents who failed to ensure their school-registered child attended school regularly.

The various categories of CME were as follows;

1. Children who were referred by schools to the Authority as missing.

The number of referrals that Middlesbrough Council received each month varied, but on average it was around 25. The Council had a dedicated CME Officer who managed these referrals and conducted extensive searches across the local community, other local authorities, the Child Health Information Service, the Child Benefits Agency and Border Force in an attempt to trace the children. In the majority of cases, the children were believed to have left the UK and returned to their country of origin. Roughly half of the referrals were for Romanian children with the rest being made up of Asian, British and other European.

2. Children who were electively home educated, but the Authority had deemed were not receiving an adequate education.

The Elective Home Education team (EHE) reviewed the quality of education that parents were providing for their children. Where this was deemed to be inadequate, the team would make arrangements for the child to return to school. This may have involved use of our statutory powers by way of a School Attendance Order.

3. Children who had recently arrived in the town and were awaiting a school place. There was a shortage of primary school places in the town centre which could result in newly arrived children waiting for a suitable place to become available. There were sufficient places available for all of the children in Middlesbrough but sometimes families found it difficult to travel longer distances to attend school in other parts of the town. In July there were 11 primary aged children who had been waiting for a place for more than a month, but none who had been waiting more than 3 months. There were around 45 secondary aged children waiting for places in July. The majority of these children had received offers of school places before the end of term.

4. Children who had been permanently excluded from school and were not in a full time alternative setting.

Education arrangements for children who had been excluded from school were managed by the Inclusion Team. This team was responsible for the placement of children following an exclusion, regular placement reviews and the quality assurance of alternative provision. In Middlesbrough, sixth day education provision was delivered by several registered alternative provisions/schools.

Most pupils in alternative provision received a full-time education; 39% of children accessed the provision on a reduced timetable basis. These reduced timetables were used to accommodate an assessment/ transition plan or because it was in the child's best interests to reflect their individual needs. At times when exclusion figures were high, some pupils waited for a placement to become available at one of the registered providers. During this period, they received an interim education package which was coordinated by the Local Authority. At present, there were 31 children receiving an interim education package. There were plans for 28 of these children to transition into a school placement over the next six weeks.

5. Children in the Authority's care for whom full time education had not yet been secured.

In July, there were eight children in the care of Middlesbrough Council who were not on a school roll (though all were being provided with suitable education via the Virtual School). The reasons why looked after children may not be in school varied, but they usually fit one of the following criteria:

- They had special needs and were awaiting a suitable specialist provision to become available.
- They had recently come into care and had no school place prior to this, so a suitable school was in the process of being identified.
- They had been moved to an out of town location for safeguarding reasons.

The King's speech in July 2024 set out plans to require Local Authorities to maintain a register of CME children and Electively Home Educated children (EHE). The Head of Access to Education and Alternative Provision informed the Panel that Middlesbrough Council already maintained these registers.

The Panel noted the content of the presentation and agreed to discuss draft Terms of Reference at the next meeting scheduled for 14 October 2024.

NOTED

24/19 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided an update on items discussed at the last Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting, which included the Local Government Boundary Commission Review 2024 and the Scrutiny Work Programme 2024/2025.

24/20 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - 14 OCTOBER 2024 AT 4.30 P.M.

The next meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel had been scheduled for Monday, 14 October 2024 at 4.30 p.m. in the Mandela Room, Town Hall.

24/21 ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

None.