

PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL

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

PRESENT: Councillors E Clynch (Chair), T Mohan, S Platt, S Tranter, Z Uddin and L Young.

OFFICERS: M Adams, C Cannon, E Cowley, T Dunn, C Jones, C Lunn, A McLoughlin and E Scollay.

APOLOGIES FOR

ABSENCE: Councillors J Banks, L Hurst, M Nugent and G Wilson.

24/39 **WELCOME AND FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURES**

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

24/40 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Name of Member	Type of Interest	Item / Nature of Business
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.

24/41 **MINUTES - PEOPLE SCRUTINY PANEL - 11 NOVEMBER 2024**

The minutes of the People Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 11 November 2024 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

24/42 **TEES SUICIDE PREVENTION - STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2029**

The Public Health Practitioner was in attendance and presented the Tees Suicide Prevention - Strategic Plan 2024-2029.

The Public Health Practitioner informed the Panel that the Strategic Plan had been developed using feedback from November 2023's Suicide Prevention Awareness Conference; analysis of real time surveillance data, and the framework set out by the national strategy. The Tees Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan set out the key areas for action and how it aimed to achieve the vision of reducing the rates of suicide. The strategy had been developed with and endorsed by key local partners, organisations, services, and communities who contributed to suicide prevention, postvention and supported vulnerable groups. Where possible, and appropriate, the voice of lived experience had been sought.

The following key areas for action were discussed:

1. Supporting practice through local data collection, research, and intelligence.
2. Providing tailored, targeted support to key priority groups.
3. Identifying and addressing common risk factors linked to suicide.
4. Promoting online safety and responsible media content.
5. Identifying and supporting crisis pathways across sectors.
6. Reducing access to the means and methods of suicide.
7. Providing effective bereavement support to those affected by suicide.
8. Making suicide everybody's business.

During discussion, the increase in children's suicides was considered. The Public Health Practitioner advised that, often, the young person did not show any signs that this would occur. The Public Health Practitioner was involved in Child Death Overview Panels (CDOP) and Joint Agency Response (JAR) meetings, whereby a team of key professionals came together for the purpose of enquiring into and evaluating each unexpected death of a child.

A member queried the demographics of those most at risk of suicide. In response, it was advised that, in Teesside, 75% of suicides were male and between the ages of 30-49; women of a menopausal age were also noted as being at risk.

In response to a query regarding the success of the strategy, the Public Health Practitioner advised that it would be reviewed in four years' time.

The Chair thanked the Public Health Practitioner for her attendance and contribution to the meeting.

NOTED

24/43

TEESWIDE SAFEGUARDING ADULTS BOARD (TSAB) - ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

The Independent Chair of the Teeswide Safeguarding Adults Board (TSAB), Adrian Green, was in attendance and presented the TSAB's Annual Report 2023-24.

The presentation covered the following topics:

- The purpose of the TSAB.
- The composition of the Board.
- The structure of the Board, including details of its five main Sub-Groups and Task and Finish Groups.
- The key achievements made by the Board over the past year.
- Safeguarding data for 2023-24, which included details of the number of concerns and Section 42 enquiries raised, and an overview of their content.
- Communication and engagement.
- Training opportunities provided by the Board, in conjunction with the local Safeguarding Children Partnerships.
- Priorities of the Board and the associated work undertaken.
- Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SAR) data.
- Partner Activity.
- Priorities for the Board 2024-25.

During discussion, Members raised a number of points in relation to the following:

- Modern day slavery,
- The different organisations raising safeguarding issues.
- Key Performance Indicators,
- Training opportunity uptake.
- Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS).
- Learning opportunities across the North East.
- Safe Places Scheme.
- Safeguarding Champions and the recruitment of these.
- Partnership working and the sharing of information.

The Chair thanked the Independent Chair for his attendance and contribution to the meeting,

NOTED

24/44

CHILDREN MISSING EDUCATION (CME) - FURTHER EVIDENCE

The Head of Inclusion delivered a presentation to provide further evidence on the Panel's Scrutiny topic of Children Missing Education (CME). The presentation included information in respect of permanent exclusion.

The national context of permanent exclusion was discussed and the panel was informed that there was a growing rate of permanent exclusion, which was under scrutiny and received significant media attention. SEND and Inclusion were identified as a priority area for education nationally, focussing on mainstream inclusion.

The local context of permanent exclusion was delivered, as follows:

- There was a high rate of permanent exclusion and suspension from Middlesbrough secondary schools.
- The Local Authority had commissioned a range of good quality alternative provision and specialist assessment provision.
- A 0-25 Inclusion and Outreach service had been developed in partnership with and was available to all schools.
- There was a well-established Local Area Inclusion Partnership with schools and multi-disciplinary agencies.

In the 2023/24 academic year, 111 pupils had been excluded from Middlesbrough schools. The reasons for the permanent exclusions were noted as follows:

- Persistent Disruptive Behaviour - 66
- Physical Assault on an Adult - 14
- Physical Assault on a Pupil - 10
- Damage to property - 9
- Verbal Abuse / Threatening Behaviour towards an Adult - 5
- Verbal Abuse / Threatening Behaviour towards a Pupil - 3
- Other - 3
- Use / Threat of an Offensive Weapon - 1.

A Member queried how schools defined 'persistent disruptive behaviour' and the threshold for this when excluding children. The Head of Inclusion advised that there was no nationally recognised definition of persistent disruptive behaviour and that this was down to each individual school to determine, via their behaviour policy.

The Panel was advised that the Local Authority had a duty to arrange suitable full-time education for permanently excluded pupils from the sixth school day of exclusion. In Middlesbrough, sixth day education provision was delivered by several registered Alternative Provisions (AP) / schools.

Alternative Provision offered an adapted or alternative curriculum for children who had been unsuccessful in accessing or engaging with a mainstream education. Alternative Provision also encompassed provision available for children who were unable to attend school because of their physical and/ or mental health needs. A proportion of children in Alternative Provision had additional vulnerabilities or characteristics, often because of trauma and adverse childhood experiences. For the children in Alternative Provision, it offered an opportunity to gain qualifications (both vocational and academic) alongside participating in personal development activities whilst developing transferable skills and knowledge, which supported onward progression into Post-16 pathways after Year 11.

There were currently 279 children accessing education in an Alternative Provision. Of these pupils, 264 were secondary and 15 were primary. Of the 279 children in Alternative Provision:

- 188 accessed as result of being permanently excluded from their mainstream school.
- 108 had identified Special Educational Needs (SEN).
- 42 had an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) for their Special Educational Needs.
- 38 were open to Social Care on a Child In Need plan (CIN).
- 13 were open to Social Care on a Child Protection Plan (CP).
- 8 were Children Looked After (CLA).
- 7 were open to the Youth Justice Service.

A number of the children in Alternative Provision had multiple complexities and vulnerabilities from the list above and received support from numerous external agencies.

Most pupils in Alternative Provision received a full-time education, however, 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 rates were high or there was a high volume of permanent exclusions

over a short period of time, some pupils waited for a place to become available at one of the registered providers. During this period, these children were offered an interim education package which was coordinated by the Local Authority, and they received regular visits from Local Authority staff.

At present, there were 22 children receiving an interim education package; there were plans for 11 of these children to transition into a school placement before Christmas. There were periods of time over the year when there were more children waiting to start their Alternative Provision placements depending on peaks in the rate of exclusion. Admission of these pupils (often with additional needs or behaviour that challenged) into the small number of registered provisions needed to be carefully considered and managed.

The next steps of place capacity and prioritising reintegration were considered. It was noted that because of the high numbers of permanently excluded children, the cohort of children in Alternative Provision had grown significantly from 147 in 2021 to 279 in 2024. To ensure there was sufficient capacity in the system to meet sixth day responsibilities and to allow children to experience their mainstream education entitlement wherever possible, the Local Authority was working with secondary school partners to prioritise reintegration back into mainstream. This allowed children who were in Alternative Provision to move back into mainstream education when they were ready. It also meant that an increased number of newly excluded children were able to be reviewed and reintegrated into another mainstream school quickly to avoid them needing to move into Alternative Provision.

The 0-25 Inclusion and Outreach model had recently been restructured based on feedback from schools to ensure it met local needs. Preventative Alternative Provision pathways were in place, commissioned using high needs funding, to offer opportunity for off-site assessment of children's needs. New preventative Alternative Provision had been commissioned (Latitude at Acklam Grange School) to avoid exclusions. A new primary age support base was being built for children with trauma and adverse childhood experiences to support early identification of needs ahead of a transition to secondary school. The Local Authority was delivering project work in other key areas such as: workforce development, transitions, and support for parent carers as part of the Delivering Better Value programme with the Department for Education (DfE).

In preparation for the next meeting, Members agreed that contact should be made with schools to invite representatives to attend the People Scrutiny Panel on 20 January 2025, to provide their views on how CME affected their schools. It was further agreed that schools should also be invited to provide written commentary to assist with the investigation.

The Chair thanked the Head of Inclusion for her attendance and contribution to the meeting.

NOTED

24/45

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

The Chair provided an update on items discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 23 October 2024, which included:

- An overview of Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA), with the MVDA Chief Executive in attendance.
- An update from the Task and Finish Group, in respect of Community Cohesion.
- Executive forward work programme.
- Scrutiny Chairs update.

NOTED

24/46

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING - 20 JANUARY 2025 AT 4.30 P.M.

The next meeting of the People Scrutiny Panel had been scheduled for Monday, 20 January 2025 at 4.30 p.m. in the Mandela Room, Town Hall.

NOTED

24/47

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

None.