

Commissioner's 6 monthly Review

Executive Director of Children's Services

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Overview

The purpose of this report is to give an overview of our 6 month review in to Children's Services



MIDDLESBROUGH
CHILDREN
M A T T E R



MIDDLESBROUGH
CHILDREN
MATTER

Middlesbrough
moving forward



**Our mission is to show
Middlesbrough children
that they matter.**



Background

- Commissioner Peter Dwyer CBE. Appointed by the Secretary of State in Feb 2020.
- First report submitted April 2020. 'This is not an LA where we should move quickly to consider alternative delivery mechanisms. Recommendation accepted
- Commissioner stayed with us 2/3 days per week until Nov 20
- Second report submitted December 2020. Recommendation again – not move quickly to consider ADMs. Again accepted by Sec of State
- Continuing to work with and through COVID

Methodology.

Three day site visit to LA 9th – 11th November 2020

Meetings with:-

- Executive Members
- Chief Exec, DCS, members of senior leadership team
- Independent Chair of Improvement Board and DCS R/C
- Senior leaders from key partners i.e. police, health, CAMHS
- Focus groups of staff – front line, middle managers,
- Focus groups on relevant key themes
- Engagement through direct communication with frontline staff
- Considered performance data and Improvement against the plan

Report written broadly against the seven enablers of improvement

Leadership

- **Political leadership and accountability significantly strengthened.** Executive Members bring energy and positive worth. Deputy Mayor fulfilling statutory responsibilities.
- **Greater stability in senior leadership arrangements.** Directors experienced in working in LAs in similar circumstances. Calm, focused, confident approach. Heads of Services - some churn but present impressively.
- **LA operates more effectively corporately on the Children's Agenda.** Strong engagement of the Chief Exec and wider council services
- **Restructured senior leadership portfolios bring greater coherence to the organisation**
- **We know ourselves** – enhanced approach to quality assurance and performance management
- **Invested and prioritised resourcing.** Appropriate use of COVID funding, 'invest to save' initiatives and national improvement resources.

Partnership Approach

- **Improvement Board - good oversight of delivering the improvement plan.** Familiar agenda - overarching progress and spotlight reports. Consistently attended. Independent Chair - existing well respected DCS.
- **Reports and analysis have developed overtime,** sophisticated levels of thematic analysis particularly sufficiency planning and locality working
- **Improvement Board operates with existing partnership arrangements.** e.g. Children's Trust Board operates with key wider priorities – not confusing improvement board activity.
- **Better communication with schools** – enhanced through COVID
- **Joint working opportunities being taken** – MACH, FFF, Early Help
- **Front line staff describe improvements in partner engagement** in safeguarding activities
- **Keen to pilot a locality-based approach** within some key communities

Workforce

- **Frontline practitioners positive about targeted training opportunities.** Better placed to deliver improved practice e.g. 16/17 homeless.
- **Also consistently expressed balanced confidence** in the improvement journey
- **Visibility of senior leaders**
- **More use of agency workers** but less than similar authorities.
Successful use of managed teams. Capacity and additional expertise.
- **Embraced opportunities to enhance routes into social work** e.g. frontline
- **Good level of sickness absence**
- **Practice model** – some progress – but not rolled out

Practice Improvement and Innovation

Too many interventions remain inadequate or in need of improvement.

- **Now fully recognised** – shared understanding of deficits – range of targeted activity to support improvement.
- **Additional investments have been made** – MACH - to address specific challenges
- **Disaggregation of MACH.** Not universally support but has delivered improvement
- **Impressive work** developing Sufficiency Strategy
- **Bespoke ‘Innovate’ team.** Improvements at individual level and significant cost avoidance. Contract extended.
- **Success of Futures for Families**
- **Transferring of work with children** to other teams improved
- **External engagement** of others supporting the innovation - PiF



Staff Feedback

I have every Faith in our Leadership

A stable leadership team

Weekly Communication from our higher management team

Little progress has been made due to the LA being unable to recruit to post resulting un high caseloads

On the right track but still have a way to go yet

Our audit system has changed for the better

I feel part of the improvement journey

Current progress is not seen on the front line

Staff are being given work despite not having the experience to deal with them

My main concern is caseloads. I can't complete every single task in timescales

Key Performance Information e.g.



- Clearer evidence of improved screening, management oversight and timely decision making at the front door
- Higher proportion of assessments are now resulting in ongoing social care input (88%)
- Numbers of children on child protection plans are at an all time high although most recently the numbers of new plans is more recently relatively stable.
- Numbers of children in the care system may have stabilised over recent months albeit at an extremely high comparative rate.
- Completion rates of audits needs consistent improvement
- August 2020 saw less cases being assessed as inadequate but still at a very significant level (40%).

Impact of COVID

- Never been used as an excuse
- Assessing the impact of COVID particularly complex
- Increased demand for assessments and interventions
- Throughput on work with children affected, challenges of delivery and availability of court time
- LA and partners highly visible and impressively proactive
- Student enthusiastically returned to school, no tidal wave of additional concerns but heightened concerns about yp already known.
- Increase in domestic violence and impact on children

Next Steps

- Focussed Visit – April 2021
- Next Commissioner's report – May 2021
- COVID, working through and into recovery.

- **PRACTICE**
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- **PRACTICE**

- Managing Expectations

