

EXECUTIVE MEMBER REPORT TO COUNCIL Wednesday 24th March 2021

STRATEGIC

Early Help Strategy

1. The Early Help Strategy is currently undergoing a refresh, to ensure that the priorities are up to date and it is reflective of the early help offer across the partnership. This will be reviewed by the members of the Partnership and Prevention Board which includes a wide range of early help partner services including; Health Visiting and School Nursing, Schools, Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations, Police, DWP, Headstart, Drug and Alcohol Services, Domestic Abuse Services, Troubled Families and the Youth Offending Service. All organisations will be contributing to the Early Help Strategy so that we have a comprehensive, partnership-led approach to early help and prevention and the new Youth Service will be integrated within the strategy.

Partner in Practice

2. Our 'Partner in Practice' North Yorkshire Children's Services has already worked in close partnership with us to develop the 'edge of care' Futures for Families service and are now reaching the midpoint of their review of Middlesbrough's Fostering Service. We are already aware that the report is highly likely to recommend additional management capacity so acting up arrangements are being put in place to 'manage the gap' before the review reports in full.
3. The Local Government Association has identified seven enablers for improvement in Children's Service and one of them is 'Engaging and Supporting the Workforce'. A Children's Workforce Development Strategy (2021-24) is being developed within a highly structured programme management framework with implementation planned for April 2021. The three themes at the core of our Workforce Development Strategy provide a clear strategic framework for driving improvement, innovation and impact for children; they are understanding our workforce needs, recruiting and retaining our workforce and developing and growing our workforce. In parallel with the development of the strategy, a Workforce Development Programme is overseeing the delivery of our current workforce development priorities supporting the delivery of Middlesbrough's new strategic plan and the improvement plan. The programme board is chaired by Rachel Farnham Director of Children's Care, with significant input from corporate colleagues.

Middlesbrough Youth Service

4. The Youth Service tender process has now concluded and the successful providers; The Linx, The Junction and MFC Foundation have commenced their mobilisation process to be up and running ready to deliver services from 1st April 2021. An initial mobilisation meeting has been held separately with each of the three providers for updates on their progress, to answer any queries, check whether they need additional support from MBC and to confirm that they are all on track to meet the target date to

start delivery. All providers have confirmed during the meetings that they will be ready to deliver on time and are currently recruiting staff if required and planning for delivery.

5. Rachel Farnham and I will be meeting all three providers in the coming weeks and a press release has been prepared. The successful providers are collaborating with each other to coordinate delivery plans and referral criteria to ensure there is no duplication of services and that the youth offer is comprehensive. A key activity moving forwards is to map the full youth service offer across Middlesbrough and for this to be available and publicised on the Middlesbrough Children Matter website for young people to access.

PERFORMANCE

Practice Standards

6. The Director of Children's Care, Rachel Farnham and Principal Social Worker Siobhan Davies, have launched with staff the co-production of Middlesbrough's Practice Standards. Ten workshops took place throughout February to design the Practice Standards which provided staff and managers with clarity about what is expected at each point of the child's journey from early help to permanence and become a measure for our quality assurance process going forward. The practice standards will be firmly embedded in our Practice Model 'Children and Relationships First' and linked closely to the Council's vision and values.
7. Our Practice Standards was launched during Practice Week, 8th March 2021. This was an exciting time with workshops delivered in-house and by partner agencies such as CAFCASS, Adoption Tees Valley, and Cleveland Police.
8. At the time of writing the average caseload with the usual caveats stands at 19.5 which is a reduction from the figure of 21 noted in my last report. It is well worth noting the current number of Children Looked After which stands at 609. This is an overall reduction of 93 since the all-time high of 702 in August 2020.
9. Isabelle Trowler, England's Chief Social Worker visited Middlesbrough – virtually of course – earlier this month. She spoke to a cross section of staff from Children's Services about her career which she labelled as 'From Anarchist to Whitehall' and her current role. Isabelle believes that her remit is to advise and challenge ministers whilst remaining practice focussed rather than being 'out and about'; she clearly does not see herself as the voice of social work. Isabelle's visit was well received with many attendees describing it as inspirational.

Care Leaver Lockdown Support

10. £80,080.00 has been allocated to Children's Services from the winter grant specifically to support care leavers through lockdown and any further restrictions for the next six months. Nominally each care leaver will have approximately £520 but the exact amount and what it will be spent on will be decided between the Care Leaver and their Personal Assistant in line with individual needs. As corporate parents, we need to ask ourselves 'is this good enough for my child' when compared with the additional support parents are offering their own children to ease their way through the pandemic and reduce feelings of isolation.

Digital Legacy

11. It is crucial that children and young people of school age have the equipment they need to access remote learning. Rob Brown, the Director of Education and Partnerships has led a project to identify children who are in between children from lower income families who have already received IT equipment and children from more affluent families who are more likely to have been provided with equipment by their own family. These may be families where for example parents have recently been made redundant or where sibling groups have only one piece of equipment between them. Schools identified the needs of their pupils, these were costed and the relevant finances been allocated by the council to schools to meet these needs. A total of £350,000 is available. Schools are purchasing the equipment themselves and will have ownership of it thus supporting the provision of a lasting digital legacy for Middlesbrough's children.

INVOLVEMENT AND PROMOTION

Changing Futures

12. Middlesbrough Council is part of a South Tees partnership that is bidding for Changing Futures funding (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/changing-futures-changing-systems-for-adults-experiencing-multiple-disadvantage>). This is a new scheme to help adults across England facing multiple disadvantages like homelessness, domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health issues. Its aim is to provide dedicated money that will enable joined-up support for better outcomes. The good news is that we've been notified that our Expression of Interest has been shortlisted by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), who are leading the programme. South Tees is one of 21 areas to have been successful at this stage with up to 15 being selected for the funding. We are the only area in the wider Tees Valley to have been shortlisted and one of two in the NE region.
13. We need to develop and submit a formal bid before the end of April. This will largely consist of a proposed delivery plan, meeting the core principles of Changing Futures. To assist with this process, a development grant of £15,000 has been offered, which we intend to utilise for dedicated co-ordination capacity on behalf of our South Tees partnership and enable us to meet the timescales. Thanks to all involved in getting us to this stage and fingers crossed that we are successful!

Vulnerable Persons Model

14. On 1st April 2021 the new integrated vulnerable person model will commence its first phase of delivery. This service brings together the provision of domestic abuse, homelessness and substance misuse services and comprises in in house core team and commissioned specialist service providers. The aim of this new approach is to ensure that service users can 'live the best lives they can', via easy access to services that can support them from crisis through to recovery. The services will draw upon individuals' (and their families') strengths - promoting both independence and resilience, rather than creating a dependency on receiving support. This model is viewed as the first phase in the move towards wider integration. Given the scale of the issues faced by our local, vulnerable people, the ambition is to collaborate with key partner organisations to integrate a wider range of important services. These will include developing partnership proposals with mental health, criminal justice, NHS (primary and secondary care) and third sector organisations. Given the complex nature of the people that the model serves, services will offer trauma-informed

practice, whereby they realise the widespread impact of trauma and understand potential paths for recovery. The service will be supported by a new integrated IT system which will assist effective collaboration across the services for the benefit of those who use it.

Project Adder

15. The Home Office (HO) in conjunction with Public Health England (PHE) and other government departments are piloting an intensive, whole system approach to tackling drug misuse. Middlesbrough has been selected as a pilot area, with the potential to access approx. £5m of funding across partners over three financial years, starting in late 2020/21 through to 31/3/22. Project ADDER aims to involve co-ordinated law enforcement activity, alongside expanded diversionary activity and treatment/recovery provision in the chosen pilot areas. This will be complemented by HO and National Crime Agency activity across the country to tackle middle market drugs and firearms supply. The project will build on existing work and look to expand multi-agency partnership working in the local areas to drive sustained, positive health and crime related outcomes. The project is underpinned by an evaluation and monitoring framework which will help to inform the evidence base for future Government intervention and national investment in this field. Over a period of two and a half years, the project will aim to deliver reductions in the:

- Rate of drug-related deaths
- Drug-related offending
- Prevalence of drug use.

16. Interventions will include a mixture of specialist posts, the majority of which will be employed by Middlesbrough Council, and aligned with the integrated service model for domestic abuse, homelessness/housing support and substance misuse; and delivery interventions. In summary, they will provide dedicated capacity to deliver:

- Local Project ADDER Leadership and Management
- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Enhanced, targeted outreach and harm reduction services
- Improved pathways and integration with health and social care services
- Bespoke, local recovery enhancement regarding housing, training/employment and social/community aspects
- Diversion from crime/criminal justice settings
- Enforcement activity
- Research, monitoring