

EXECUTIVE MEMBER UPDATE TO COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Luke Henman – Executive Member for Children's Services

DATE OF MEETING: 15th July 2026

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members on areas of activity within my portfolio including performance against strategic priorities.

COUNCIL PLAN PRIORITIES

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.

Update:

- **Number of children accessing early help via Middlesbrough Council:** 630 open episodes and 1251 episodes open to partners (as of 3 July)
- **Number of foster carers with Middlesbrough Council:** 74 foster carers, 31 connected carers
- **Number of children in our care:** 538
- **Children in our care attending school (since the start of the school year):** 379:
 - 11 children do not have a school place, with 2 receiving education in a non-school setting (referred to as EOTAS)
 - The percentage of children actively attending their education placement is 97.1%

1. HIGHLIGHTS

1.1 General

- 1.1.1 Our new Service Directors joined our team in June. Mandy Davis, Service Director – Quality Assurance & Practice joined us on 1st June from her previous role in Redcar & Cleveland. Chris Rooney, Service Director – Safeguarding & Operations joined us on 22nd June from his previous role in Hartlepool. Both Mandy and Chris bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their roles and are already making a positive impact for our children and families. We now have a stable and permanent senior leadership team for children's social care, which will lead to secure and stable service delivery, positive outcomes for children and young people, and a key part of developing sustainable strategic plans for the future. I'd like to wish both Mandy and Chris a warm welcome to Middlesbrough.
- 1.1.2 An Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) was carried out across our services in June. The feedback and outcome of the inspection are expected to be published at the end of July. I will circulate a briefing note on the date of publication. As part of the process, I met with the inspection team and attended the verbal feedback session which concluded the visit. I'd like to thank staff who supported and facilitated the inspection.

- 1.1.3 As part of our commitment to improving participation of our children and young people we have been capturing the successes, achievements and celebrations of our children and young people. On 19th June one of our care experienced young people turned 18. Alfie has been supported by our children with disabilities as a child in our care for a long time and spent a period living in our Holly Lodge children's home. Alfie loves buses and celebrated his special birthday with a special cake. He asked to spend his birthday with people he cares about and requested the Holly Lodge team, his previous and current social worker and his independent reviewing officer. He had a fantastic time at his birthday lunch and was keen to share his pictures with everyone. Thank you to all of the professionals who have made such a difference to Alfie.



1.2 Early Help

- 1.2.1 We deliver early help to children via our Stronger Families Service. The service supports families early in order to reduce the number of young people being taken into care. Providing early help to families in order to keep children in a safe home is better for the child's wellbeing and it improves their long-term outcomes.
- 1.2.2 The table below demonstrates that the number of children in Middlesbrough accessing early help has increased month on month from March 2026 to May 2026.

Early Help Service data	March 26	April 26	May 26
No. of EH - Internal	638	628	603
No. of EH - External	1263	1258	1272

- 1.2.3 The average caseload for Early Help practitioners is currently 16 - 18 children. Our case supervision completion rate in Early Help currently sits at 100%. All team managers have completed supervision training, to ensure supervision within Early Help is reflective and meets practice standards. Personal supervisions are at 100%, ensuring that staff are supported with their workloads and wellbeing.
- 1.2.4 Most of our early help cases (69%) are held by the partnership. The cases held by partners are tracked by the Early Help team so that we can effectively coordinate the proportion of children being supported at an Early Help threshold. Early Help Coordinators are situated in the MACH and attend daily triage, this helps us to identify children, young people and families who would benefit from Early Help services.
- 1.2.5 In May internal cases decreased by 25 compared to the previous month. External cases increased by 14 compared to the previous month. The increase in external cases was a result of an increase in the range of different partners taking on the lead practitioner role.
- 1.2.6 Team scorecards tell us My Family Plans completed within timescale are 97%, demonstrating family needs being assessed in a timely way.

- 1.2.7 Family Plan Reviews completed within timescale were 87%. These reviews are multi agency so that Early Help partners can contribute to the plan.

1.3 Front Door: MACH and Assessment Services

- 1.3.1 The Multi agency Safeguarding Hub (MACH) is the single front door, comprised of a multi-agency partnership that screens all safeguarding contacts received by the authority, to consider the most appropriate and proportionate response and support for our children and families. The Tees Framework of Need identifies children in need of support, with referrals to the Assessment service.
- 1.3.2 The duty assessment service complete timely child and family assessment and intervention to ensure that effective safeguarding is completed and the child's voice informs planning and intervention.
- 1.3.3 The number of children being referred has remained high throughout the year. The assessments inform the planning and threshold of intervention, with ongoing support with Child Protection plans, Child in Need and Care proceedings concluding with Children becoming Looked after.
- 1.3.4 The service is stable with agency staff joining the Assessment service to provide a fully permanent staff cohort. The MACH and Assessment teams are now fully staffed, with some agency staff for the additional capacity required to support the service on its improvement journey.

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

- 1.4.1 The Safeguarding & Care Planning team support children on a Child in Need and Child Protection plans, as well as children that are looked after who experience care proceedings. Children move on from the service when permanence is determined, either within their home, family or through care and/or adoption. In addition we have a tailored response to children who are vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking or falling into criminal activity, through our Aspire Service, Risk and Resilience, and Missing teams.
- 1.4.2 The number of children allocated to each social worker remains high. We have continued to prioritise allocation from assessment to ensure there is no gap in provision, and that risk and need are clearly managed. This enables relationships to be built quickly and momentum in the planning process to continue, increasing the likelihood of meaningful engagement. It is recognised that improvements in assessment practice are beginning to reduce the number of children requiring allocation to a longer term social worker, this will take some time to have a marked impact on the number of children in our service.
- 1.4.3 There are some delayed timescales in some areas. A process is in place to ensure that any delays do not compromise children and their safety or progression of plans, whilst we strive to improve our approach to reviews. Practitioners are clear that the time spent with children, understanding their lived experiences cannot be compromised and visiting remains a priority.
- 1.4.4 A review is underway within our Children with Disabilities services to look at the quality of short breaks for children and families. Further work is taking place to

explore how we can increase our capacity and reach more families, including collaboration with our Parent Carer Forum to provide more opportunities for parents and families to contribute to our improvement priorities.

1.5 Cared for Children and Care Leavers

- 1.5.1 Within Middlesbrough there are currently 538 children who are cared for across our teams. Reunification continues with children progressing to Court change Orders. The panel which reviews children's permanence planning actively looks at reunification or lesser Orders when the time is right for the child. Plans for all cared for children are reviewed at the monthly Permanency Monitoring panel.
- 1.5.2 There are 246 care leavers who are being supported by personal advisors (PAs) in our Pathways Team. There are currently 53 children who will turn 18 within the next 8 months. This number will increase if other young people become eligible to access the leaving care service during this period. In addition to the allocated cases, each PA is also co-allocated to 4 or 5 16-17 year olds.
- 1.5.3 Our care leavers now co-chair our Corporate Parenting Board with me. At their request we have moved our meeting approach to be thematic and focus on key areas which they want corporate parents to focus on. In April our meeting focused on residential support and accommodation for children in care and care leavers, which input from our children's homes team and other services providing access to support. In July we focused on education, employment and training and signed off the annual report of our Virtual School. Looking ahead we are now planning our celebration event for care experienced children and young people for Autumn 2026.

1.6 Residential and Supported Accommodation

- 1.6.1 All seven of our children's homes remain rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted as we await this year's inspections. Occupancy across residential and supported accommodation services has increased, demonstrating continued improvement. A key priority for us has remained the successful housing of siblings together wherever possible, ensuring children maintain important family relationships. Supported Lodgings occupancy has also increased, reflecting the positive impact of targeted marketing and recruitment activity to expand provision for young people aged 18 and over.
- 1.6.2 Engagement of our children and young people in residential settings in education, employment and training remains positive. Young people are exploring careers within the Armed Forces, securing NHS bursaries and receiving university offers. Staff continue to provide personalised support that promotes independence, raises aspirations and enables young people to access opportunities.
- 1.6.3 Family Group Conferencing is continuing to develop with a recent increase in referrals and the majority progressing within timescales. This has enabled families to develop sustainable, family-led solutions and improve outcomes for children. In one very positive example a strengths-based approach was taken which included supervised family time, parenting support and interpreter involvement to rebuild family relationships, improve communication and increase parental confidence. Despite significant challenges, including language barriers and disrupted family

connections, the intervention restored trust, strengthened family networks and improved the children's sense of identify and belonging. As a result the children were successful reunited with their family and the need for social care involvement was significantly reduced, enabling a planned and sustainable step-down from services.

2. THE TIME AHEAD

- I will continue to work with the Corporate Director of Children's Services and her team to support Children's Services with its work to improve practice and outcomes for children and young people in Middlesbrough.
- I will continue to contribute to our Children's Services Improvement Board and work with the board to agree updated improvement plans in response to our recent Ofsted inspection.
- I will build on improvements made in our Corporate Parenting Board, ensuring our young people's voices are heard and they have input in shaping the support we give them.
- I would like to thank all of our staff for their hard work in keeping young people safe and giving them the best start in life.