

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

A meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board was held on Wednesday 28 July 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors M Saunders (Chair), T Mawston (Vice-Chair), D Coupe, A Hellaoui, C Hobson, C McIntyre, J Platt, J Thompson and S Walker

OFFICERS: S Bonner, C Breheny, S Butcher, I Wright, G Cooper, A Hoy, T Parkinson and A Perriman

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors L Garvey and M Storey

20/19 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

20/20 **MINUTES - OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY BOARD - 29 JUNE 2021**

The minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 29 June 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

20/21 **EXECUTIVE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chief Executive submitted a report which identified the forthcoming issues to be considered by the Executive, as outlined in Appendix A to the report. The report provided the Overview and Scrutiny Board with the opportunity to consider whether any item contained within the Executive Forward Work Programme should be considered by the Board, or referred to a Scrutiny Panel.

NOTED

20/22 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S UPDATE**

The Chief Executive was attendance and provided an update to the Board in respect of the following:-

- COVID-19 update
- Executive decisions, July
- Upcoming Executive decisions, August
- Staff communications
- Children's Proxy Indicators
- Middlesbrough Children Matters priorities

In terms of the latest local COVID-19 data, as at 26 July 2021 the rolling seven-day rate of cases per 100k of the Middlesbrough population was as follows:

- 134 new cases had been added to the system on 26 July 2021;
- 1205 new cases had been diagnosed in the last seven days;
- 854.7 rate per 100k of population (last seven days); and
- 280.90 COVID-19 deaths per 100k population.

Reference was made to the vaccination rates and to date 58.4% of over 18's in Middlesbrough had received 2 doses of the vaccine. This compared with 74.5 % in Northumberland, which had the highest rate in the North East region. It was emphasised that the uptake rates by Council area did not take account of the age demographics. Once deprivation and BAME was considered, it became more difficult for Middlesbrough to match Northumberland.

In relation to the Executive decisions scheduled taken in July it was noted that a number of reports had been considered. These included; a report the Community Safety Plan 2020-22;

the Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2021-37 and the ECS Town-Wide Lighting Scheme. A number of Executive decisions were scheduled to be taken in August and these included; a report on the Council's approach to Community Engagement; an update on the Children's Improvement Journey; an extension of the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO's); the Middlehaven option agreement and a number of land disposals.

In terms of staff communication and engagement it was advised that in 2019, staff were asked how valued and connected they felt to the organisation and it was found that:

- almost half of the staff that responded felt undervalued;
- almost a quarter of staff didn't meet with or receive communications from their managers; and
- generally, there was not a consistent understanding of our strategic aims and priorities across the organisation.

It was explained that in January 2020, plans were developed and implemented to address those issues but before any real change could take effect COVID happened. A new staff survey was due to be circulated before the end of July 2021, with the results analysed by mid-September. Following the analysis a consistent set of tools would be developed to share corporate communications with the wider staff audience, regardless of their role with practical templates, materials and methods, suggested key messages for specific audiences and a set of minimum standards of engagement.

Reference was made to the Children's Proxy Indicators and Middlesbrough Children Matters, although further detail in relation to these would be discussed as part of the specific agenda item covering these matters.

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

In terms of vaccinations a Member queried whether these were yet being offered to children aged 15 or if the roll out for those aged 15 to 18 had yet commenced. It was advised that the roll out was currently fixed on those 18 or over unless an individual had serious health concerns.

A Member of the Board wished to commend the staff in Public Health for the fantastic efforts to deliver COVID vaccines in the community, with events held in wards throughout the town to encourage take-up and promote the vaccine. The Chief Executive made reference to the fact that as of the 26 July 2021 the whole of the North East had become an area of enhanced area of support nationally. Although it was unknown at this stage what that would mean fully it was anticipated that Middlesbrough would receive additional support to increase the uptake rates of the vaccine.

A Member queried whether any thought had yet been given to young people starting Teesside University or the Art College in September 2021 and if there would be the opportunity for them to get a vaccine on site. It was advised that the Strategic Co-ordination Group, which included representatives from Teesside University, Middlesbrough College and the Art College was scheduled to meet that afternoon and this item was on the agenda. The Melissa Bus had been used in Middlesbrough and a Middlesbrough Foundation Club Bus had also been used to encourage take up amongst different groups.

A Member queried the number of current staff absences related to COVID and it was advised that the Council's sickness rate as at the 21 July 2021 was at 5.1%, approximately 1/5th of that was COVID related so around 1% of the workforce off with COVID. In terms of self-isolating approximately 69 members of staff were self-isolating whereby there were unable to work from home and were therefore not a cause of widespread organisational concern. However, there had been an outbreak in refuse collection and therefore there had been some issues in that area, as well as some issues in the commissioned care market. Overall these were not causing any significant problems.

In response to the comments expressed and concerns raised by Members in respect of the disappointing results of the 2019 staff survey it was advised that sustained efforts were being made to improve communication and connectivity with staff. Progress had been made and the results from recent surveys about home working and connectedness with the organisation were good. Staff satisfaction with working for the Council had increased by approximately 12

% over the last 3 years, although it was acknowledged that further improvements were needed.

The Chair expressed the view that it was extremely sad to see that half of Council staff felt undervalued and it was queried as to whether the reasons were known. It was advised that the reasons were inevitably varied and it was for management locally to resolve the particular concerns of their staff. The proof would be whether in subsequent staff surveys a higher percentage of staff advised that they felt valued.

The Chair thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance and contribution to the meeting.

NOTED

20/23

CHILDREN'S SERVICES UPDATE - FINANCE & PERFORMANCE

The Executive Director of Children's Services and the Council's Director of Finance were in attendance and provided an update to the Board in respect of progress to date, as follows:-

- Children's Services' was continuing to evidence systemic improvements to outcomes for children, and more effective use of our collective resources, with strong corporate and whole-Council support;
- The positive analysis of collective impact for local people in Middlesbrough was supported by the rigorous scrutiny of our regulators (Ofsted; DfE; Commissioner). Currently on a three year programme of improvement;
- The implementation of robust performance management and the use of data to inform decision-making was an identified strength of local arrangements; and
- Children's Services' was increasingly well-positioned to understand, evaluate and forecast the impact of its services to inform medium and longer-term financial and resource planning.

Reference was made to the recent OFSTED monitoring report in which the inspectors had acknowledged that leaders had introduced and built on a comprehensive audit to excellence programme, enhanced performance management, and demand forecasting. OFSTED had also noted that new practice standards had also been introduced to provide clearer expectations or 'non negotiables' about the quality of social work practice.

In addition the Commissioner had stated that the work undertaken in Middlesbrough on understanding demand and future projections was of a very impressive nature, sophisticated enough to incorporate the challenges of analysing legacy issues whilst also incorporating ongoing COVID related impacts. The quality and clarity of this analysis and forecasting work enhanced leadership credibility and corporate support and engagement in improvement activity. The work had considerable potential to meet the ambition of joining improvement and financial strategies in a comprehensive Medium-Term Financial Forecast for Children's services.

The Board was provided with information relating to placement demand led budgets and it was noted that progress had been made in reducing the number of children in both out of area residential placements and independent foster agency placements where appropriate. It was noted that internal provision and the use of internal provision had increased since 31 March 2021 with positive financial results. It was noted that £1.2 million of the costs incurred for Children in Care was contributed by Health.

It was advised that OFSTED had also acknowledged that there was now an approved, impressive Strategic Workforce Development Strategy with themes covering organisational design, recruitment and retention and workforce training and development. The sophistication and ambition displayed in the modelling work was exceptional. The strategy was clearly aligned with other strategic activity and had impressively sequenced ambitions and desired outcomes. Work was advanced on finalising the approach and determining the financial implications of the approach to enhance recruitment and retention in key roles.

A key comment by the Commissioner in respect of social worker caseloads and the concerns of children about changes to social workers were highlighted as follows:-

Although social worker's workloads were reducing, they remained too high for some social

workers. In addition some children experienced too many changes of social worker. Children told inspectors that if they could change anything they would like to have social workers who stayed with them for a long time. Too many changes of social workers affected relationship-building, as well as an understanding of children's circumstances and needs and the progression of children's plans.

In terms of forecasting and target setting it was explained that 7 proxy indicators had been developed with indicative targets based on Middlesbrough's statistical neighbour averages. These indicators had been built into a scorecard to support the Leadership Management Team's (LMT) decision-making and scrutiny. However, the modelling continued to evolve to take account of unknown and emerging factors in a unique era of national and local pressures.

It was explained that building on the last 12 months progress Children's Services had set an ambition to achieve the statistical neighbour average for the overall rate of looked after children over the next 3 years. It was noted that this would bring Middlesbrough's children in care population in line with the average with its statistical neighbours as follows:-

Rochdale, Stoke on Trent, Tameside, Salford, Knowsley, Blackpool, Kingston-upon-Hull, Hartlepool, Halton and South Tyneside.

In terms of the proposed scorecard for LMT it was advised that the following 7 proxy indicators and targets to be achieved over the next 3 years (2021/22 – 2023/24) had been developed:-

- 1) Number of substantive posts filled with agency social workers - Reduce to National Average of 15%
- 2) Number of children in care (no/rate) – Reduce to Statistical Neighbour Average
- 3) Number of children placed in external residential placements - Reduce to modelled Middlesbrough Target
- 4) Number of children placed in in house residential provision - Increase to modelled Middlesbrough Target
- 5) Number of children placed with in-house foster carers - Increase to modelled Middlesbrough
- 6) Number of children placed with Independent Foster Agency (IFA) carers - Reduced to modelled Middlesbrough Target
- 7) Proportion of placement moves in the reporting period which have incurred less cost (excludes same cost movements) - Incremental Year on Year Increase

Following the update, Members were afforded the opportunity to ask questions.

A Member of the Board extended their congratulations to the Executive Director of Children's Services and all of her team on the miraculous turn around that had been achieved. In the presentation provided the Executive Director had given the Board great confidence that positive progress was being made in Children Services' following OFSTED's judgement in December 2019 when service provision was found to be inadequate. Delighted to see that the number of children in external residential placements had decreased, which was better for the children and in terms of ensuring value for money.

In response to a query it was advised that in terms of the costs of external placement it was advised that the high sums involved were not unusual and some children had exceptionally high levels of need. However, it was emphasised that Executive Directors of Children's Services priority was to ensure that wherever possible Middlesbrough children stayed in Middlesbrough. Reference was also made to the Future for Families Hub, which was focused on preventing children needing to come into care and keeping down the cost of external placements. Needs of children and level of supervision were unique to each child and there was a great deal of market competition for placements. It was emphasised that great emphasis had been placed on increased internal residential provision. For example, Daniel Court had now opened and was operating at full capacity.

The Director of Finance advised that there were currently 57 children in external residential placements and the average cost of those placements was £3,874 per week.

In response to a query it was confirmed that all Elected Members would be provided with a copy of the Commissioner's full report once published.

The Chair thanked the Executive Director of Children's Services and the Director of Finance for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

NOTED

20/24

SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME REPORT 2021-2022

The Democratic Services Officer submitted a report, the purpose of which was to invite the Overview and Scrutiny Board to consider each scrutiny panel's work programme for the 2021/2022 Municipal Year.

The topics for each scrutiny panel were as follows:

Adult Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel

Full Review:

- Adult Social Care Finance - Residential Care and ensuring Value for Money;
- The Role of the Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) in Supporting Adult Social Care (with a focus on COVID-19 recovery); and
- Support for Carers (postponed from 2020-2021; to be recommenced at the end of the Municipal Year if time allows)

Updates:

- Adult Day Care Services; and
- Ageing Better Middlesbrough (ABM) – Update and Future / Legacy Planning

Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel:

Full Review:

- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); and
- The Impact of COVID-19 on Education and the Council's Recovery Plan

Short Review:

- Post 16 Education

Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel

Full Review:

- Locality Working (from a Children's Services perspective); and
- PACE Bed Provision (children/young people held overnight in police custody)

Updates:

- Early Help - To receive an update on the latest position following the Panel's review of EH Service provision in 2019;
- Ofsted/Children's Commissioner – continue to receive regular updates regarding visits, inspections and findings of Ofsted and the Children's Commission and progress on the Children's Services improvement journey; and
- Covid Recovery – continue to receive updates as and when appropriate in relation to Covid recovery in Children's Services.

Task and Finish

- Small task and finish groups to undertake visits to various service areas within Children's Services, on a regular basis and to feedback information to the Scrutiny Panel.

Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel

Full Review:

- Integrated Enforcement and the impact of anti-social behaviour in the Town; and
- Middlesbrough's struggling high street

Updates:

- Regulation of Investigative Powers Act (RIPA);
- Prevent; and
- Selective Landlord Licensing.

Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel Full Review:

Full Review:

- The Green Strategy and the Council's plans for increasing bio diversity in Middlesbrough

Short Reviews/Updates:

- Regeneration of Captain Cook Shopping Centre and House of Fraser;
- Fly tipping and bulky waste collection service;
- Empty/derelict commercial properties;
- Bus Services;
- New Waste Disposal Facility; and
- Broadband Infrastructure.

Health Scrutiny Panel

Full Review:

- Health Inequalities – accessibility to Health Care;
- PFI Scheme at James Cook Hospital;
- Women's Health and Infant Feeding; and
- Dental Health

Short Review:

- The impact of the Covid Pandemic on Mental Health; and
- LGBTQ+ accessibility to health care.

AGREED that the topics put forward by the scrutiny panels for inclusion in the 2021/2022 scrutiny work programme be approved.

20/25

SCRUTINY CHAIRS UPDATE

The Scrutiny Chairs/Vice Chairs provided updates in respect of the work undertaken by their respective panels since the last meeting of the Board.

NOTED