

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE AND SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was held on 25 October 2021.

PRESENT: Councillor Davison (Chair), Councillors: Hellaoui, Higgins, Uddin and Wilson.

OFFICERS: S Bonner, S Butcher, J Dixon, R Farnham, C Lunn and M Walker.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mawston, M Storey and J Walker.

**** DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillor Hellaoui declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to agenda item 4, Locality Working, as she was Ward Councillor for Newport Ward and Co-Chair of Governors at Newport Primary School - where one of the pilot locality working teams was operational.

MINUTES – 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

The minutes of the previous meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel held on 21 September 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

LOCALITY WORKING FROM A CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERSPECTIVE – FURTHER INFORMATION

S Butcher, Executive Director of Children's Services, R Farnham, Director of Children's Care and M Walker, Head of Stronger Communities, were in attendance to provide the Panel with further information in relation to the Panel's current scrutiny topic 'Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective'.

The Executive Director opened the presentation by emphasising the importance of the 'Middlesbrough Children Matter' branding and Middlesbrough's mission to show Middlesbrough children that they matter. The Panel was informed that work was ongoing to roll out 'Middlesbrough Children Matter' beyond Children's Services, corporately across other Council directorates encouraging opportunities for collaboration and contribution to the Children's Services agenda, and also a longer term ambition to roll out to other partner organisations so that ultimately all agencies were focussing on children. A new addition to the branding was 'Middlesbrough on the Map' which aimed to put Middlesbrough on the map and to promote the innovative work happening in Middlesbrough.

It was acknowledged that locality working was wider than Children's Services and this was a fundamental 'working in partnership' aim of the project, however, the information being provided at the Panel meeting focussed on the Children's Services element of the project.

The Panel was informed that the locality working pilots, in North Ormesby and Newport, had nine key themes, predominantly informed by local residents and analysis of service demand. A key principle of locality working was involving the local community and working with them to achieve the objectives. Individual multi-agency Action Plans had been developed in respect of each of the thematic areas and these were reviewed on a monthly basis. The nine themes were as follows (with the appropriate service lead identified in brackets):-

- Making people feel safe (Police)
- Healthier population (Public Health)
- Better economic outcomes (Education & Partnerships Team)
- Better outcomes for children (Children's Social Care)
- Improved environmental standards (Environment & Community Services)
- Improved physical appearance (Environment & Community Services)

- Improved customer experience (Stronger Communities)
- Improved community capacity (Thirteen Housing)
- Improved perceptions (Thirteen Housing)

In terms of staffing in children's early help and social care within the pilot areas, resources were as follows:-

- Three Early Help Senior Practitioners (two in Newport, one in North Ormesby)
- Five Social Workers (two in Newport, three in North Ormesby). (This was informed by the capacity and demand information obtained for those areas).
- The above staff were overseen by two Team Managers – an Early Help Team Manager, who attended the Design Implementation Group; and a Social Care Team Manager who was responsible for the Children's Locality Action Plan (updated monthly).
- The Design Implementation Group was made up of senior officers from across all of the partners and was established to design and implement the locality model and to ensure that the objectives were on track.
- A Risk and Resilience Team was leading on a multi-agency plan to tackle child exploitation.
- Youth outreach work was delivered in both areas.

Although the project was still in its early stages, the benefits emerging from locality working in relation to children's early help and social care included:-

- Joint visits by Early Help and Children's Social Care Staff to families
- Joint visits by the above and other partners to families together. This meant that families were only being visited once rather than multiple visits and there could be discussions around multi-agency support.
- Families in localities were recognising social workers and this was helping to build relationships.
- Improved relationships with schools.
- Greater knowledge of the communities and partners working within that area.
- More effective use of time.
- Reduction in mileage.

In terms of what was not working as well, the Panel was advised that the impact of Covid and virtual working had made it more difficult to get to know other partners, however, this was beginning to improve.

Staff had indicated that there were not enough locality Early Help Workers to manage demand and some of the work was subsequently allocated to the wider teams, however, locality Social Workers felt that their workloads were manageable. It was highlighted that Early Help Services were operating successfully in Middlesbrough and that children and families were being supported and helped at an earlier stage, however, this meant that there was an increase in demand for such services which had caused some capacity issues within Early Help but the Service was looking at ways to address this.

Promotion of the project needed to be progressed across the organisation to provide an overall knowledge of the project as well as exploring how and when the project could be rolled out to other areas of the town.

The Panel was shown several graphs illustrating the difference being made in North Ormesby and Newport. It was explained that the 'ideal shape' in relation to providing children's social care services was to have the highest number of early help cases, less children in need cases, fewer child protection plans and least children looked after. This meant that more children and families were being helped at an earlier stage with less statutory intervention being required.

It could be seen that in June 2020 in North Ormesby there was little Early Help activity (9%), a high number of children in need (48%), less child protection cases (17%) but higher numbers of children looked after (26%). By May 2021, it could be seen that Early Help activity had increased to 16%, however, children in need (45%) and children looked after (23%) remained high. By September

2021, Early Help had significantly increased (22%), children in need had reduced to 27% and child protection work had increased to 23%. The numbers of children looked after remained high (28%), however, it showed positive progress in that more Early Help work was happening in North Ormesby.

Comparative information for the same time periods in the Brambles and Thorntree Ward were provided and this showed that Early Help activity had increased from 20% in June 2020 to 38% in September 2021. Again, the levels of child protection activity were lower than the numbers of children looked after but showed that Early Help provision had increased in Brambles and Thorntree.

In response to a query regarding higher levels of children in need activity and lower numbers of children looked after, the Panel was reassured that this meant problems were being identified at an earlier stage and that working within the community also increased demand. The Head of Stronger Communities highlighted that virtual weekly meetings were held with all partners which had assisted in identifying early help referrals and allowed referrals to be made in a more joined up way so that children and families were able to access early help support in a timely way. This model supported issues being captured rather than being missed.

Further information was provided in respect of Newport (the other locality pilot area) and comparative information for Berwick Hills and Pallister Ward. It could be seen that in Newport in June 2020 levels of Early Help were already quite high at 29%, this reduced slightly in May 2021 (25%) but increased slightly by September 2021 to 27%, therefore Early Help was stable. Numbers of children in need remained quite high and the numbers of children looked after increased from 25% in June 2020 to 30% in September 2021. From the data, it appeared that the locality working in Newport was not working quite as successfully as in North Ormesby in terms of children's social care and this needed to be examined further.

It was highlighted that there had been more of a focus on crime within the Newport ward and that this may be one of the reasons for the figures regarding children's social care, however, this would be examined. It was stressed that detailed analysis was being undertaken across every ward to understand demand, types of interventions, what was effective in the wards, etc. It was noted that some wards, such as Newport, had transient populations. Middlesbrough had an exponential demand for children's social care, therefore, it was important to ensure resources were placed correctly and that all partners worked together in order to maximise those resources. For example, undertaking joint visits to families meant that people only had to explain their story once, this saved time and partners working together could put the appropriate support in place more quickly. Demand for services was explored in detail on a monthly basis.

In relation to schools, the Panel was informed that there was one primary school located in each of the pilot areas (Newport and North Ormesby). Practitioners based in the locality areas had reported improved relationships with schools, however, when the schools were contacted to ask about locality working, they were unable to provide further feedback other than being aware of the names of the workers. This demonstrated the need to ensure the message about the locality working projects was promoted and championed.

The Panel was informed that Park End Primary School was currently part of a pilot initiative whereby a Social Worker and an Early Help Worker were based within the school. The pilot had provided positive feedback and allowed the Early Help Worker and Social Worker to identify issues within school and to streamline the work they were doing. The initiative was very similar to locality working.

Moving forward with the two locality pilots, it was highlighted that bi-monthly meetings were held with the two Locality Managers to review the Children's Social Care Action Plan whereby they would identify gaps in provision and monitor progress.

It had been recognised that promoting the project was required. It was one of the three Children's Trust priorities, however, when discussed at the Children's Trust, partners were unaware of the

initiative. An extraordinary meeting was scheduled for November to explore involvement of other Children's Trust partners who may potentially be able to contribute resources to the initiative.

Promoting the initiative with school leadership teams, particularly the Chief Executives of the Multi Agency Academy Trusts, was a priority and also promotion at a strategic level and regular reporting to the Council's Leadership Management Team to provide wider understanding.

A discussion ensued and the following issues were raised:-

- A Panel Member raised the issue of continuity of Social Workers supporting children. The Director of Children's Social Care explained that specific staff were now allocated to the locality projects in Newport and North Ormesby. These staff were allocated work from within that locality only. In the case of a Social Worker being on sick leave, a level of continuity remained through the team managers who had knowledge of the cases. In locality areas, where there was a team around the child, this provided further consistency. In the broader service, it was acknowledged that there had been difficulties in recruiting and retaining Social Workers and to address this, a Workforce Development Strategy was under development. It was Middlesbrough's ambition to become an employer of choice and to provide a good offer, including training and development, manageable caseloads, etc, to attract and retain Social Workers. This was a key priority for Children's Services.
- In response to a query as to whether there were any plans to roll out the project to other areas of Middlesbrough, particularly where there were challenges relating to young people, the Panel was advised that as the locality working project was a pilot, it would be essential to evaluate how it was working. The project was still in its early stages and had been somewhat delayed due to Covid. It was expected that an evaluation report would be produced in around six months' time which would include recommendations for moving forward. There may be elements of the pilot that were not as resource intensive and could be implemented relatively easily in other areas. In addition to locality working, communications with other partners had been stepped up, for example, daily calls took place between Community Safety and Police, Thirteen Housing and other partners that often assisted with identifying issues and addressing them quickly. Strategic Partnership meetings were held every three weeks to examine issues and where issues were identified with children and young people, these would be discussed with relevant partners for action.
- A Panel Member queried whether Housing partners worked alongside Social Workers in order to ensure that families had suitable homes to meet their needs. It was explained that within the two locality areas, where a family was identified as having particular needs, weekly meetings were held to discuss actions to support the family. Multi-disciplinary team meetings were also held to discuss individual cases and identify the most appropriate partner(s) to support the family.
- It was queried how this would work for a family that might need adaptations to their home, such as a stair lift. The Head of Stronger Communities advised that the Staying Put Team, as part of Adult Social Care, was also part of the locality working pilot and was responsible for carrying out adaptations to people's homes. Depending on the circumstances of the case, the appropriate partners would be included and the appropriate course of action would be undertaken.
- Panel Members agreed that it was important to communicate with all the partners in the locality hubs and to communicate with residents in the pilot wards and across the town to inform them of the benefits of locality working and that this should include Ward Councillors as they were in a position to raise awareness with residents. The Head of Stronger Communities advised that they had good communication with local residents and that any support from Councillors would be welcomed. The locality hubs had their own Facebook pages and two charitable organisations produced newsletters that were distributed to residents within those wards.

- It was queried how success was being measured within the two pilot areas. The Executive Director responded that in addition to the 'ideal shape' graphic presented to the Panel earlier, a scorecard, in line with the Performance Management Framework, had been developed as a starting point and could be added to. Various elements of data was collected monthly, quarterly or annually. An important measure was local perceptions and an annual survey was undertaken with local people.
- Members asked whether the project would be replicated in other areas of the town. The Executive Director advised that the evaluation of the pilot would need to be examined first and that this model, in terms of partnership working, should be the aim across Middlesbrough so that it was 'business as usual' - bringing communities together and supporting them. The Director of Children's Care added that the Early Help offer, Youth Service and Social Work service continued to be delivered across the whole town.
- The Chair queried how the authority could inform people of the projects and of the good work being undertaken. The Executive Director had suggested that information be regularly provided to the Children's Trust to raise awareness; championing the project by speaking to residents and staff in other directorates; school governors could bring locality work to the schools' attention. The ambition was for everyone within the authority, and its partners, to really get behind the project and support it and eventually put Middlesbrough on the map and to show that Middlesbrough children that they matter.
- In relation to Social Workers being placed in schools, it was queried whether referrals had increased and whether there were plans to place Social Workers in other schools. It was explained that the Social Workers in school pilot commenced at Park End Primary in September 2021, therefore, it was early days in terms of measuring the impact of the project, however, early indications showed schools were receiving support and advice around thresholds and were satisfied they were able to manage cases within school without the need to refer into Children's Social Care. Early Help cases were increasing in Park End and relationships between parents and Social Workers were improving as they could be seen in and around school on a daily basis. It was suggested that an update report in relation to this pilot could be provided to the Panel early in the New Year in relation to its early findings and feedback.

The Chair thanked the Officers for their informative presentation and asked Members how they wished to proceed with the review. Following a short discussion, Members expressed an interest in several areas, which was agreed to be taken forward.

AGREED as follows:-

1. That the Panel note and consider the information provided in the context of its scrutiny topic 'Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective'.
2. That a visit to the locality working hubs in Newport and North Ormesby be arranged for several Panel Members on behalf of the Panel.
3. That representatives of the Panel have the opportunity to meet Social Workers allocated to the locality teams to obtain their views in relation to progress on the project.
4. That Team Managers from the locality pilots be invited to a future Panel meeting to provide updates in relation to Children's Social Care within those areas.
5. That an update report in relation to the Social Worker in Schools pilot at Park End Primary be provided to the Panel early in the New Year.

PROPOSED TERMS OF REFERENCE – LOCALITY WORKING FROM A CHILDREN'S SERVICES PERSPECTIVE

The Panel was asked to consider, discuss and agree Terms of Reference for its current scrutiny review of 'Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective'. Proposed Terms of Reference had been circulated with the agenda for consideration.

AGREED that the Panel approve the following Terms of Reference for its review of Locality Working from a Children's Services Perspective:-

1. To examine how Locality Working will be developed in the pilot areas.
2. To understand how the impact of Locality Working for Children's Services will be measured and how any future roll out of the model in other areas of the town will be determined.
3. To identify best practice from other local authorities where locality working for Children's Services is working well.

UPDATE – COVID RECOVERY IN CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Executive Director of Children's Services advised that there was very little to report currently and that Children's Services was not being significantly impacted by Covid. Although there had been some impact on schools, it was currently half term.

NOTED

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE

A verbal update was provided in relation to the business conducted at the Overview and Scrutiny Board meeting held on 20 October 2021, namely:-

- Executive forward work programme
- Update from the Executive Member for Regeneration
- Chief Executive's Update
- Scrutiny Panels' Chair's Updates.
- Final Report – Culture & Communities Scrutiny Panel – Cultural Events.
- Revenue & Capital Budget – Projected Outturn Position as at Quarter One, 2021/22.
- Strategic Plan 2021-24 – Progress at Quarter One 2021/22.
- Scrutiny Chairs' Training (Two training sessions had been arranged by Democratic Services on Thursday, 18th November at 10am and 5.30pm for Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs)

AGREED that the information provided be noted.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Children and Young People's Social Care and Services Scrutiny Panel was scheduled for Monday, 22 November 2021 at 4.00pm.