

SCRUTINY REPORT

**CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL CARE & SERVICES
SCRUTINY PANEL**

MONDAY 22ND NOVEMBER 2021

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: DIRECT INVOLVEMENT IN THE LOCALITIES

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Summary

1. To provide a basis for questions, discussions and challenge on locality working in Children's Services.

Introduction

2. This report builds on information previously presented to Children's and Young People's Social Care and Scrutiny Panel and is provided as a basis for questions, discussion and challenge at the panel on 22nd November.

Evidence / Discussion

Stronger Families (Early Help)

3. Stronger Families has three Senior Practitioners working in two localities for the past year, two in Newport and one in North Ormesby.
4. Referrals for a service from Stronger Families for the North Ormesby and Newport wards come through either the Multi-Agency Children's Hub (MACH) or from work with families that is 'stepped down' from the social work teams which means that the family no longer requires social work intervention. The work is allocated immediately however, when the locality early help staff have high cases loads, the additional casework is allocated to other staff across the service. However, the service's team managers and assistant team managers work together to avoid this happening wherever possible.

Social Care (social work teams)

5. Initially one social worker was allocated to each locality however this was soon found to be insufficient and there are now three social workers linked to North Ormesby and two linked to Newport.

6. Referrals to children's social care are made via the MACH from families or professionals working with children. If children are 'new' into referrals and do not have an allocated social worker, they will be allocated to the Assessment service for a child and family assessment if social work thresholds are met and it is considered a proportionate response. When complex needs are identified, the child will transfer to Safeguarding and Care Planning. At this point, the locality area is identified and if it is North Ormesby or Newport the work is allocated to a social worker linked to the appropriate ward. However, to avoid children having changes of social worker, on occasion they are allocated to non-locality social workers. However, as children's cases naturally progress we are now moving into a situation where there is consistency of workers within the locality model.
7. To further improve consistency in November social care managers took a decision to assign a single team to locality working under one team manager who is already involved in the locality working. There may continue to be a need to allocate outside of that team in the immediate future, but again as children move on, the allocation will become more straight forward.

Joint Benefits

What's working well.

8. In general staff feel it is now working well and there some real benefits such as
 - Joint visits with other professionals working in the same area;
 - Families in the respective localities recognising staff when the latter are in the locality;
 - Greater knowledge of the community and partners particularly with neighbourhood wardens and housing;
 - Improved relationships with schools in the locality as practitioners are working with children attending the same few schools and can therefore build up better relationships;
 - A more effective use of professional time;
 - A reduction in mileage.
9. In terms of areas not working so well.
 - The pandemic has made it more difficult to get to know other partners when working virtually but the locality teams are now back in offices and partnership work is improving.
 - From an early help perspective, staff feel that there are not enough staff designated to the two localities to manage the level of demand and that cases are sometimes allocated to the wider early help teams due to caseload pressures on the early help locality staff.
 - The allocation of social workers has already been increased from one in each locality to three in North Ormesby and two in Newport. They will all now be managed by one manager to ensure a consistency of approach. However the one-team approach is yet to be embedded and due to existing relationships with children not all locality work can be allocated to the designated locality workers.

- The expectation and understanding of referral pathways for statutory social work intervention sometimes creates a barrier as the locality approach has led to an expectation that when issues are identified a social worker will become involved. However, the allocation of a social worker must be subject to rigorous screening to ensure that work with a family done is at an appropriate level.
- The weekly multi-disciplinary meetings for all practitioners working in the locality can be useful although the discussion can focus to a large extent on the environment.

Caseloads

Stronger Families

	Senior Practitioner North Ormesby	Senior Practitioner (1) Newport	Senior Practitioner (2) Newport	Totals
Number of children on caseload	34	29	28	91
Number of families	14	14	13	41
Children open under 6 months	22	16	20	58

Social Care (social work teams)

10. All social workers are allocated twenty-five children or under across the town. As referred to above some locality social workers are still working with families outside of their locality and some non-locality workers carry work from the localities. This means that social work caseloads are not yet representative of locality working so cannot be set out as for Early Help.

11. Quotes

From a Senior Practitioner

"I do really think the concept works, or if I put it another way I really would not want to go back to Town Wide working"

From Families

"Brought A out of himself and he is doing a lot better than he was, she was really nice to talk to."

"The support has been well received and everything is going well."

"This time last year I was so depressed, now I am working and have a nice house, I don't struggle to get out of bed anymore."

Action Plans

12. Each area has an action plan with a set of multi-agency actions and performance indicators. There are meetings on a monthly basis with the two locality managers to review the Children's Social Care Action Plan, identify gaps and monitor progress.
13. Actions for Children's Services include promoting the use of Family Group Conferences in localities. Performance indicators include
 - The number of families open to Early Help cases
 - Early Help work closed with positive outcomes met
 - Children subject to Child Protection Plans in the locality
 - Children looked after in the locality
14. The plans need some refining in order to be aligned to those presented to the Children's Services Improvement Board.