

## Overview Report

# Children and Young People Select Committee

## Overview Meeting 2020

### 19 February 2020

### Children's Services

### Context

1. Members are well aware that as a Council we have had to adapt to funding reductions of £68 million over the last seven years and future funding is uncertain.
2. The challenge for all Members is to ensure that decisions about the basis on which services will be delivered are within the resources available, taking account of a number of factors such as the uncertain financial position, changing demographics, increasing demand, new national legislation and policy direction. Members are reminded of the four policy principles that support our decision-making:
  - **Protect the vulnerable by**
    - protecting people who are subject to or at risk of harm
    - helping people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
    - supporting people who are financially excluded
    - assisting people whose circumstances make them vulnerable
  - **Create economic prosperity by**
    - ensuring the businesses and people of Stockton-on-Tees are part of a thriving and productive Tees Valley economy
  - **Tackle inequality through improving**
    - health
    - job opportunities, skills and training
    - educational attainment for all
    - affordable housing and fuel poverty
    - financial inclusion
  - **Help people to be healthier by**
    - providing mainstream services that are available where needed
    - providing preventative services that are available where needed
3. It is within this context that the Select Committee is invited to undertake their overview duties.

### Performance Reporting

4. Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis. This was reported to Executive Scrutiny Committee in July and November 2019, and then forwarded to members of each Select Committee with key issues highlighted by the Chair at their next meeting.

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### Children's Services – Director – Martin Gray

5. Relevant services are:
  - a. Early Help
  - b. Children's Social Care
  - c. Education Improvement Service
  - d. Special Educational Needs and Engagement
  
6. This section outlines some of the key achievements in 2019/20 against the priorities in the Council Plan and the Children's Services Strategy, agreed in 2017.

#### **The best start in life**

7. There continues to be a focus on the uptake of free education for disadvantaged 2 year olds. We have seen a significant increase in take up with the latest figures indicating a take up rate of 94%, now in the top ten in the country.
8. Available childcare places continues to be monitored closely as part of the rollout of the free education entitlement to eligible 3 and 4 year olds.
9. The new 0-19 service continues to see improvements in the rate at which

#### **Focusing on schools and learning outcomes**

##### *Schools and school places*

10. Cabinet agreed a schools investment strategy initially in October 2016, and received a further report on progress in April 2017.
11. The strategy sets out proposals for the expansion of a number of schools. A total of £52m has been successfully attracted from the Government's Basic Need funding, which sets out proposal to meet the demand for additional secondary school places to 2020 as well as working with schools on a range of improvements to conditions.
12. The challenge remains in Thornaby, and in particular Thornaby Academy where take up of places remains considerable below capacity.
13. Reports provided to Cabinet in 2019 indicate that overall performance across Stockton schools is higher than national standards. Gaps for vulnerable children (those in care, with additional needs, from BME communities) are in general closing, though more work is needed in some areas.

#### **Providing early help and support for families**

14. There continues to be a major focus on early help. A review of processes is being undertaken as part of the Smarter Working in Stockton programme. The focus of the review is to reinforce the approach to early help in the context of the new 0-19 services, and in particular the establishment of the new network of four family hubs, with the associated delivery points for outreach.
15. There has been a focus in 2017/18 to reduce the number of families with an early help assessment where the assessment and the associated planning has been open

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for over 12 months. The emphasis has been on stepping down families to universal services where appropriate, and stepping up to social care assessment where necessary.

16. We continue to work with a number of agencies as part of a multi-disciplinary approach – including Citizens Advice Bureau, TEWV, Harbour.
17. The early help problem solving panel meets regularly to discuss and review cases which need additional support, or some advice or challenge.
18. Restorative practice is now an established model of working, including a focus on working with schools on 'restorative circles'.
19. Work continues with Hartlepool BC and the Clinical Commissioning Group to deliver the Future in Mind programme – to change the way support for children and young people is delivered. Excellent progress has been made in the delivery of a pilot project in secondary and primary schools, and this is being taken forward through personal development networks.

### **Safeguarding and protecting vulnerable children, backed by outstanding social work practice**

20. The Ofsted ILACS inspection in May 2019 found many examples of excellent practice and delivery but also identified a number of key areas for improvement, in the overall 'Requires Improvement' judgement. These related in the main to overall 'grip' and management to prevent drift and delay; the extent to which our interventions are resulting in lasting impact for families; our oversight and tracking of cases especially in the Public Law Outline, the effectiveness of supervision and the need for suitably qualified staff to oversee cases. An action plan is in place to deliver against these recommendations.
21. There continues to be demand pressure across children's social care services, with high rates of contacts and referrals, leading to rates of children in need, and in particular rates of children in care which are considerably higher than the national average.
22. The Children's Hub is proving very effective at securing effective partnership involvement and data analysis to support decision making.
23. Performance in relation to statutory timescales for assessments, reviews remains strong and is monitored through regular performance clinics.
24. The arrangements for safeguarding Vulnerable, Exploited Missing and Trafficked children and young people (VEMT) remain strong.
25. There are ongoing issues around the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers.

### **A consistent and relentless focus on better outcomes for children in our care and leaving our care**

26. The number of children in care has continued to increase in 2019/20, although this is primarily caused by a slowdown in the rate at which children leave care, which is significantly below the rates of our regional and statistical neighbouring authorities.
27. The rate at which children left care due to adoption showed a significant increase in 2018/19, as Adoption Tees Valley was able to make long term matches for some children who had been waiting a long time.

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28. The percentage of care leavers who are in education, employment and training continues to be a focus. For those aged 16-18, the rate in Stockton was exactly the same as the regional rate (63%) and although the rate falls to 50% for 19-21 year olds, this again mirrors the regional rate.
29. All of the Council's residential homes are graded 'good' or 'outstanding'. All of the Spark of Genius homes similarly are rated 'good' or 'outstanding'.
30. The More Stuff Like This Please! Programme, funded by the Council and Future Bridge North east, and delivered by ARC and Blue Cabin CIC has continued to bring cultural and creative opportunities to young people and work is underway to continue elements of the programme in future years, building on the evaluation of the programme to date.

### **Work collaboratively, effectively and efficiently**

31. Work continues to develop some transformative proposals for implementation in 2020, including a multi-agency response and assessment function, a new commissioning function and structural changes associated with a new operating model across Children's Services.
32. The Council is playing a leading role in the transformation of CAMHS services through the Whole Pathway Commissioning pilot led by TEWV. Schools in Billingham are also about to benefit from a pilot programme for mental health in schools teams as part of a national rollout of this approach.
33. Voice of the child continues to be a major theme guiding the work of Children's Services. Bright Minds, Big Futures continues to be a successful and developing movement for young people.
34. The newly established Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children Partnership is resulting in an increasing focus on practice for safeguarding, and a culture of action learning is being established.
35. A new Children and Young People Strategy for 2019-23 was launched, and workshop sessions on its themes of resilience, relationships, respect and response are being taken forward through the Children and Young People Partnership. A major conference will be led on 3 April to develop the theme of the '4rs' more fully.
36. We have worked with Darlington Design Lab to develop a systems approach to our priority to reduce the need for children to come into care which has led to a renewed focus on reunification.
37. We have also worked with IMPOWER to test out the use of valuing care, and in particular its application for children on the edge of care, to identify the scope for children to step down from residential care into foster care, and to improve foster care capacity. Anticipated savings are being factored into the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

### **Challenges and emerging issues**

38. The following key challenges have been identified for the consideration of the Committee:
  - a. Although our performance data for early years (in terms of good level of development, take up of early years education, quality of settings) indicates a good level of performance, concerns remain from schools about the lack of school readiness, and basic communication skills from in reception class, especially relating to their speech, language and communication skills.

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- b. Our schools continue to gradually fill up as our population rises. Although the majority of children are able to get into their first choice of school, at both primary and secondary, there are increasing challenges around over-subscribed schools in the south of the borough.
- c. Our schools perform well overall, but there are issues about geographical variations in outcomes, and there are some issues about the gap between those children from poorer backgrounds, those with special educational needs and for children in care where the gap with peers needs to continue to close.
- d. The inspection of the local area around SEND in 2019 identified four key priorities for improvement:
  - i. Co-production and engagement of parents;
  - ii. Quality of Education Health and care plan assessments and plans;
  - iii. Strategic joint commissioning;
  - iv. An outcomes focus.
- e. A monitoring meeting on progress in February 2020 found good progress overall on responding to the recommendations, in advance of the scheduled re-inspection in April – June 2021. However, there is a national funding shortage on the High Needs element of the Dedicated School Grant, and pressures continue to be reported to Schools Forum as appropriate.
- f. Domestic abuse continues to be a significant contributor to demand pressures.
- g. The need for a different model around emotional wellbeing, with a bigger focus on the role of front line professionals, self-service / resilience, and access to support.
- h. Compared to national and regional averages, we have high rates of children in the social care system – who have been assessed as having additional needs, or who are subject to child protection concerns or who are in the care of the Council.
- i. Recruitment and retention issues for social care are likely to be significant ongoing issues.
- j. We have high rates of children in care, with a significant increase in 2019/20, although we remain below the rate for the Tees Valley.
- k. This creates pressure in terms of placement sufficiency i.e. finding suitable places for children. Although there are regional frameworks in place for the commissioning of independent fostering support and residential homes, current commissioning arrangements are unlikely to be able to respond to the needs of some of our most vulnerable young people, and the Council is currently expanding its own residential care provision, and working with Tees Valley authorities on a business base to significantly expand our role as a provider of children's homes

## Council Plan 2019-2022

- 39. The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.
- 40. The 2019-22 objectives for the Children and Young People theme are attached at Appendix 1.

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### Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

41. Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2020-21. Using the information provided as part of the performance updates and this Overview meeting, the Committee is invited to identify potential topics for review within this theme.
42. Potential topics will be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 24 March.
43. The following areas are suggested for consideration as in depth reviews for 2018/19, based on the above analysis and commentary:
  - a. A review of our approach to early years support, with a specific focus on the extent to which we are identifying additional needs early enough, as a means of improving school readiness and reducing demand for statutory assessment
  - b. A review of the issues and business case associated with the development of more in house residential care provision.
  - c. Performance and effectiveness in ensuring that care leavers are able to access education, employment and training opportunities

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### **Appendix 1**

#### **Council Plan 2019-22 – Children and Young People**

Our vision is of a great place to grow up, where children and young people are protected from harm and supported to be the best they can be in life.

Key objectives:

- Giving children the best start in life
- Focusing in schools and learning outcomes
- Delivering effective early – supporting families
- Safeguarding and protecting vulnerable children, backed by outstanding social work practice
- A consistent and relentless focus on better outcomes for children in our care and leaving our care
- Work collaboratively, effectively and efficiently