

Overview Report

Children and Young People Select Committee

Overview Meeting 2021

17 February 2021

Children's Services

Context

The Council has a strong track record of sound financial management. In the current economic climate, finances are always going to be a challenge, and we work hard to make our budget go further. We have adapted to unprecedented funding reductions over the last eight years, saving around £53m. Our medium-term financial planning approach has allowed us to continually balance our budget through delivering savings and efficiencies but also to plan ahead and deliver invest-to-save schemes and innovative changes to service delivery models. We carefully target investments to stimulate economic growth, provide great assets and deliver financial returns to offset funding reductions.

Since the initial development of this Council Plan we have and still are experiencing the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. Coronavirus provides huge challenges for us to address in terms of community and economic recovery and dealing with the long-term implications of the pandemic. We have reviewed our priorities for the coming year and have adapted these to reflect the focus that is needed to respond to this challenge.

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 Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

- A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm, where
 - People live in cohesive and safe communities
 - People are supported and protected from harm
 - People live health lives
- A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed, creating
 - A growing economy
 - Improved education and skills development
 - Job creation and increased employment
- A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive, creating
 - Great places to live and visit
 - Clean and green spaces
 - Rich cultural experiences

The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

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Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR>

Children's Services - Director – Martin Gray

1. Relevant services are:
 - a. Early Help
 - b. Children's Social Care
 - c. Education Improvement Service
 - d. Special Educational Needs and Inclusion
 - e. Systems, information and improvement

Children's Services overall

2. We have analysed ourselves in depth following the 2019 Ofsted inspection and the SEND local area inspection and following peer reviews, and work undertaken by external experts.
3. We know that we do a lot of things very well and that our staff are incredibly resilient and flexible. That has been demonstrated by how well we have responded to the Coronavirus pandemic with a range of new initiatives to support children and families.
4. However there are a number of areas we need to improve:
 - a. Our system is fragmented and lacks clarity. This means we are potentially not as effective as we need to be in getting the right support to families as soon as possible, which results in needs increasing.
 - b. We are not as proactive as we could be. Our system responds to a referral or request, and in many cases responds well, but only when concerns have reached a certain level. We are missing opportunities to support and help, despite having resources to be able to do so.
 - c. We are not focused consistently enough on needs. We are not effective enough in identifying needs and responding to them, instead we respond and react to risk and presenting issues.
 - d. Short term and stop start. We open / assess / close / transfer cases too much without considering the effectiveness or sustainability of our intervention or the impact on families.
 - e. We don't have enough substance to our analysis and improvement approach. We are not using data and feedback to continually shape and evolve our approach, including the views of families.
 - f. We continue to have very high rates of children in our care. This makes it increasingly difficult to support children in good placements, and is leading to spiraling financial pressures.

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What we are going to change – cross Directorate

5. We need some changes in how we work across the directorate which can together deliver the type of whole system change we need. This is a step change to make sure we can continue to provide the best support to the children and young people in the Borough and respond to our increasing demand and financial pressures. The changes we need are:
 - a. A clear vision, framework and system wide approach which sets out our ambitions, our culture, our practice model, our ways of working - so we can be clear on what we are trying to achieve and have a consistent practice model and tools we use across the system
 - b. An operating model which is clear about how we work together, and how we are organised to deliver this approach - so our ways of working are clear to staff and partners and we have the best chance of delivering our vision. A new senior management structure is a key element in this approach.
 - c. A workforce strategy which support staff at all levels to understand our approach, our model, and what is required to deliver it - to recruit and develop staff at all levels, have an understanding of what skills and approaches we are seeking to build and a specific plan for social care to manage recruitment and retention
 - d. Develop a coherent improvement approach which draws on data, quality and feedback and means we can review, test and respond coherently - to ensure we analyse where we need to be focusing and avoid reactive solutions
 - e. Clear links between improvement actions in services and the broader plan of change - to ensure focus on key actions, and avoid confusion of trying to do too much

How we will implement the changes

6. The basis of implementing these changes will be the new directorate business plan. This new business plan, which links to the new Council Plan, provides the basis for the work we need to do. This reflects a 2 year programme of change.
7. The key building block is the development of a new operating model which is clear about how we work together and how we are organised. This means a review and re-organisation of the directorate to ensure we have the right functions, services, teams and people organised in the best way. A number of the changes we need to make require a re-design of our services and these have been built into the new operating model.
8. We will carry this out in two phases:
 - a. Phase 1 – a review and re-organisation of the directorate into five new service areas with new senior leadership roles, to commence in November 2020
 - b. Phase 2 - a subsequent review and re-organisation within the five new service areas, to take place during the early part of 2021

Partnerships and impact

9. 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.

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Early help – challenge and opportunity

10. 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 consistently high take up rate of 94%.
11. 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. Our rate continues to be at or nearly 100%.
12. There continues to be a major focus on early help. 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 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.
13. We continue to work with a number of agencies as part of a multi-disciplinary approach – including Citizens Advice Bureau, TEWV, Harbour.
14. Restorative practice is now an established model of working, including a focus on working with schools on 'restorative circles'.
15. Work continues to develop some transformative proposals for implementation in 2021, 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.
16. 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 benefiting from a pilot programme for mental health in schools teams as part of a national rollout of this approach.
17. 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.
18. We continue to have a strong youth offer supporting the local VCS with Youth United for Stockton, low NEETs and Not Known, Targeted Youth Work supporting the reduction for ASB and young people at risk of exclusion and a recently outstanding Youth Offending Team.

Early help priorities for the year ahead

19. Implement a new senior management structure with three main elements: multi agency response; family work and youth work.
20. A clearer guide to our services and how to access them - to ensure families understand what we do, and what is available, ensure staff understand our offer, model and services and to make access and contact with services easier.
21. A stronger focus on the importance of early years - to address fragmentation across the system and reduce the need for more intrusive involvement. 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.
22. Closer working with schools on vulnerable children and an integrated support approach - to identify needs and target resources effectively. This will be based on the ways of working implemented in response to COVID-19.

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23. A more integrated approach to assessment and support, which gets multi agency support to families as soon as possible and helps to build capacity in families - to avoid multiple lengthy assessments instead of providing support, embedding Valuing Care and Valuing SEND within our standard ways of working across as many of our services as possible.
24. The development of a new child wellbeing model and refinements to the current model for delivering 0-19 services.

Children's social care – challenges and opportunities

25. 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, and more long term changes are included in the proposals for our new structure.
26. 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.
27. The Children's Hub is proving very effective at securing effective partnership involvement and data analysis to support decision making.
28. Performance in relation to statutory timescales for assessments, reviews remains strong and is monitored through regular performance clinics.
29. The arrangements for safeguarding Vulnerable, Exploited Missing and Trafficked children and young people (VEMT) remain strong, though we are planning to review these in the context of the increasing focus on contextual safeguarding.
30. There continue to be issues around the recruitment and retention of experienced social workers.
31. The number of children in care has stabilised in 2020/21, though our rates remain high when compared to regional and national rates.
32. The rate at which children left care due to adoption has increased, as Adoption Tees Valley continues to make progress in increasing the number of successful adoptions.
33. The percentage of care leavers who are in education, employment and training continues to be a focus, and is the subject of the current scrutiny review.
34. 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'.
35. 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.
36. The 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.

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Children's Social Care – priorities for the year ahead

37. The key priorities for 2021 are:

- a. Implementation of a new structure which includes a different way we are organised as the front door to Children's Services and which prioritises multi agency assessment AND response.
- b. Development of a workforce strategy which is clear about recruitment, development and retention, and which also ensures that SWs are able to spend as much time as possible working with children, young people and families, with others roles being undertaken by support services and administration.
- c. Implement a new planning framework based approach which is clear about outcomes, practice, service standards and performance management responsibilities.
- a. Continue to ensure the delivery of our sufficiency strategy for children in our care. This includes:
 - i. A clear plan and approach for children in our care - to reduce the need for children to be in care, reduce length of time in care, reduce expenditure
 - ii. The operation of regional frameworks for sourcing placements;
 - iii. Increasing capacity of in house fostering
 - iv. Increasing in house residential care
 - v. Seeking to expand the number of public sector placements, working in cooperation with Tees Valley authorities
- d. A more child centric structure which prioritises the journey and voice of the child - to reduce changes of social worker and ensure greater consistency

Schools – challenges and opportunities

38. 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 challenges around over-subscribed secondary schools especially in the south of the borough.

- a. Our schools perform well overall, but there 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.
- b. The key challenge for many of our schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has been to ensure that children are safe, that they have been able to access an effective remote education where necessary, and that families have been supported to cope with the challenges of lockdown.

Schools – priorities for the year ahead

39. The key challenges for 2021/22 are:

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- a. Continuing to support ongoing responses to the pandemic and to support catch up and recovery;
- b. The specific challenges of continuing to focus on narrowing the gap (for children in care, those with SEN, those on free school meals; gender; BAME
- c. The development of emotional health and wellbeing support for schools, including the launch of a new 'healthy schools framework'
- d. Ongoing work to ensure sufficiency of school places especially in response to the ongoing popularity of secondary schools in the south. This work also includes the responses to where there is significant new housing development such as in the west of Stockton where additional primary and secondary capacity is required.

SEN – challenges and opportunities

40. We have made considerable progress in responding to the local area inspection in 2019, with major developments in areas such as the joint commissioning of speech and language; a redesigned EHCP plan and process.
41. A new outcomes framework has been developed and a new SEND strategy will be prepared for agreement in April 2021.
42. A new Quality Assurance approach has been developed, including the use of a new tool to assess the quality of EHCPs. This will be expanded to focus on reviews in 2021.
43. The implementation of Valuing SEND is a key element in our approach to assessing needs and in preparing schools for the level of support they can and should be providing.
44. Through our remodelled Enhanced Mainstream Schools we are continuing to keep more children in mainstream schools
45. Sufficiency of placements for children continues to be an area of focus. Additional capacity is coming on stream in 2021 in Abbey Hill, and with the development of new places by North East Autism Society. The Tees Valley free school also opens in 2021.
46. The development of the multi-agency front door to Children's Services will enable a more joined up approach to the identification and delivery of help and support to children and families.
47. The implementation of specific support to children and families affected by autism continues. A new pathway referral process has been put in place for neurodevelopmental conditions (ASD and ADHD).
48. We have remodelled provision for those pupils who are at risk of being excluded, through the development of a new support service, and the introduction of a new alternative provision framework.
49. In addition, provision for permanently excluded children has also been remodelled to include a new type of provision – pathway development centres for key stage 2 and 3.

SEN – priorities for the year ahead

50. The key priorities for 2021/22 are:
 - a. Implementing Valuing SEND model which will, over time, enable a sharper focus on needs (to ensure children receive the right support) and the ability of providers to meet needs.
 - b. Local area inspection preparation will continue – a revisit was scheduled for Feb-May 2021, but has now been delayed due to COVID-19.
 - c. Placements – work will continue to develop new forms of provision, including through the potential expansion of the Spark of Genius Joint Venture.

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- d. Reshaped services and approach to SEND and engagement - to address inspection outcomes, support mainstream schools to meet need, develop new provision and reduce HNF overspend
- e. The plans in place to address funding challenges include a focus on earlier intervention, the use of Valuing SEND, and the development of a regional placement function to support placements.
- f. Bishopton Pupil Referral Unit is currently consulting on proposals to become part of the Tees Valley Collaborative Trust

Systems, information and improvement – challenges and opportunities

51. Some of the key challenges and opportunities are:

- a. Design of performance improvement frameworks and a focus on continuous improvement, embedding some of the work we undertook in 2019/20:
 - i. We worked with Dartington 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;
 - ii. 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.

Systems , information and improvement – priorities for the year ahead

52. Key priorities for implementation include:

- a. Implementation of systems – the development of a new system for Adult Social Care, and work to develop the education system.
- b. Implementation of Liquid Logic – further development and implementation of the system, including the use of the early help module as part of our proposed integrated front door.

Potential Areas for In-Depth Review

53. Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2021-22. 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.
54. Potential topics will be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 23 March.
55. Although there are many areas of potential deep dive focus which could be identified as part of the overview report as above, it is suggested that the Committee might like to focus on a major piece of work around child poverty for 2021.
56. Such a focus could include:
- a. An assessment of child poverty rates
 - b. How these have been impacted by COVID-19 (through such programmes as the Free school meal voucher systems and the Winter grant Scheme)
 - c. The work of the local area partnerships on poverty
 - d. The inequalities in access to a range of services and support: financial, digital, food, fuel inclusion
 - e. Poverty proofing initiatives in schools
 - f. The opportunities to consider initiatives such as ‘income guarantees’.

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Appendix 1 – Council Plan - Key Priorities 2020- 2021 – Children’s Services

Making the Borough a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm means creating a place where:

- People live in cohesive and safe communities
- People are supported and protected from harm
- People live healthy lives

We have identified these key priorities for 2020/21 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Plan and implement new ways of improving children’s emotional health
- Improve the support we give to families to help them stay together
- Help schools to improve pupil wellbeing and reduce exclusions
- Improve the consistency and continuity of social work practice
- Reduce the number of children who need to be in care
- Increase capacity in our fostering service and residential children’s homes

Making the Borough a place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed means creating:

- Improved education and skills development

We have identified these key priorities for 2020/21 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- Ensure effective careers provision and support for all pupils, recognising the disruption in education as a result of Coronavirus
- Continue to work with early years settings and schools to raise educational attainment for all pupils, including those with additional needs
- Provide an integrated approach to early language development through reading

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Appendix 2 – Summary of current performance data

The following provide a commentary on the current position:

Social care and early help - key headlines

1. **Referrals** into social care have reduced so far in 2020/21, though rates across the Tees authorities remain high, and this rate is still above the regional average
2. The **re-referral** rate has reduced by 6.6% – this is an indicator of specific interest in terms of addressing the stop / start nature of how we work, as this measures the number of referrals within 12 months of a previous referral and so is a proxy measure for the effectiveness of our work with families. Our rate is now below the regional average.
3. There has been an increase in the **rate of assessments** being undertaken to 731/10000, as is the case with all Tees authorities. The regional picture is more mixed, with some authorities seeing a significant reduction, but the overall regional rate at 662 /10000
4. However 94% of these are still **assessments undertaken within 45 days**, well above the regional rate of 82%
5. There has been a very slight reduction in the **rate of Section 47 investigations being undertaken**, with the rate now at 240/10000 compared to the regional rate of 234/10000
6. There has also been a reduction in the rate at which **initial Child Protection conferences** are being held, to 108/10000, compared to a regional rate of 101/10000
7. Although the **percentage of which child protection conferences held within 15 days** has reduced to 88%, this is still above the regional average of 85%
8. The rate of child in need has increased slightly to 523/10000, significantly above the regional average of 452/10000, though remains well below the rate across Tees authorities
9. There has been a 10% increase in the rate of children subject to a child protection plan, with the rate at 88/10000 compared to a regional rate of 75/10000, though this is below the Tees rate.
10. Encouragingly, there has been a reduction of 7% in the rate at which children become subject to a child protection plan, down to 99/10000 compared to a regional rate of 95/10000. This may be an indication of the effectiveness of earlier intervention avoiding the need for a child protection plan
11. However, the percentage of **repeat child protection plans** remains significantly higher than the regional average of 22/10000, at 38/10000, which is continued evidence of the stop / start nature of our system and the lack of lasting impact of some of our interventions.
12. There has been a significant (32%) reduction in the **rate at which children start to become looked after**. The rate now stands at 33/10000, compared to a regional rate of 41/10000.
13. The **rate of children in care** increased by 2.4% in this period to 134/10000, compared to a regional average of 113/10000. However, this rate of increase was below that seen in the region (5%)
14. There was also a 15% fall in the **rate at which children leave care**, with the rate now 27/10000, lower than the regional rate of 29/10000.
15. Although there was a 7% reduction in the **rate at which children leaving care were adopted**, as 22%, this remains significantly above the regional rate of 13%
16. There has been a 27% reduction in the **time between a child entering care and being adopted**, down to 458, compared to 483 days regionally.

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17. There has also been a 10% reduction in the amount of time between an adoption order being granted and a match being made, down to 205 days compared to 216 in the region.

Special Education Needs and Disabilities

18. In Stockton-on-Tees 15.6% of pupils have a have a statutory plan of SEN (statement or EHC plan) or are receiving SEN support (previously school action and school action plus). This compares to an average of 14.9% across All English county local authorities.
19. Across All English county local authorities, the proportion of pupils with statements or education, health and care (EHC) plans ranges from 1.4% to 4.2%. **Stockton-on-Tees has a value of 3.6%, compared to an average of 3.2%** in All English county local authorities.
20. For SEN support the proportion for All English county local authorities ranges from 9.5% to 13.8%. Stockton-on-Tees has a value of 12.0%, compared to an average of 11.7% in All English county local authorities.
21. Regulations set out that the overall time it takes from the local authority receiving a request for an assessment and the final EHC plan being issued (if one is required) should be no longer than 20 weeks. In Stockton-on-Tees, 93.5% were issued within 20 weeks, excluding exceptional cases where LAs are allowed to exceed the 20 week time limit, compared to the All English county local authorities average of 58.3%. Including exceptions, 72.9% were issued within 20 weeks, compared to the All English county local authorities average of 57.8%.
22. In Stockton-on-Tees, 14.9% of children and young people assessed were not issued with an EHC plan, compared to the All English county local authorities average of 6.5%.
23. The number of mediation cases held in Stockton-on-Tees was 15, and the proportion that went on to appeal was 50.0%. The SEND tribunal appeal rate was 1.0% in Stockton-on-Tees , this compares to the average for All English county local authorities of 2.2% .

Schools

24. The latest proportion of schools Ofsted rating for schools rated good or outstanding are:
 - Primary: 96.7%
 - Secondary: 76.9%
 - Combined: 93.2%