

**Children and Young People Select Committee**  
**Overview Meeting 2023**  
**19 July 2023**  
**Children's Services**

**Context**

Members are reminded of the Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm where:

- This means the Borough will be a place where:
  - People live in cohesive and safe communities
  - People are supported and protected from harm
  - People live health lives
  
- This means that the Borough will have:
  - A growing economy
  - Improved education and skills development
  - Job creation and increased employment
  
- This means we will enjoy:
  - 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.

**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 / Elaine Redding**

Relevant services include:

- Children's Help and Support Services
- Children's Social Care
- Education
- SEND and Inclusion
- Strategy, Quality and Improvement

## **Council Plan 2023-2026**

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The key priorities for the Children's Services are attached at Appendix 1.

### **Children's Services: transformation, change and improvement**

1. We continue to develop and implement our approach to change which was initiated in 2020 with a major reorganisation and reshaping of services.
2. Our focus remains on the best way Children's Services can continue to provide the best support to the children, young people and families within the Borough. This is set within a context of increased demand for services; increasing threats to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, increased pressure on families with cost of living rises and economic uncertainty, external inspection outcomes and financial pressures on the Council.
3. The demands on Children's Services are complex and increasing, and there are well recognised national challenges around capacity and funding across the whole system. Through an iterative process of data analysis, engagement with key stakeholders including external partners and system wide thinking, we have developed and refined our improvement approach.
4. We have developed a strategic planning framework as the basis for how we plan, do and review across the Directorate. This is a simple framework which describes:
  - a. What we are aiming to achieve;
  - b. How well we are doing
  - c. What else do we need to be doing

*What we are aiming to do*

5. The starting point for the development of our priorities are:
  - a. The Council Plan – which sets out our high level actions to contribute to strategic priorities for Council
  - b. The Children and Young People's Plan Strategy which is the partnership focused Borough wide strategy to support the wellbeing and success of children and young people in the Borough.
6. From this we have drawn up a set of key commitments which describe how we want to work, and the things which are most important to us:

- A child focused approach**
- A partnership with families**
- A caring system**
- A focus on local high-quality support**
- A joined-up system**
- A drive for impact**
- A commitment to reflect, review and refine**
- A drive for value for money**

7. These commitments provide the framework for our other strategies and actions plans, which include:
  - a. From Conception to Reception – our strategy for the best start in life;
  - b. Our SEND Action Plan, as reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board on 28 June 2023;
  - c. Our forthcoming refreshed early help framework
  - d. The new Corporate Parenting Strategy which was last reported to Corporate Parenting Board on 16 June 2023, and will be presented for approval on 11 August.

*How well we are doing*

8. We have developed performance systems which collate information, feedback and qualitative data and tell us how well we are performing. From these we draw out information on what is working well and what we want to improve and review these through a series of performance and accountability meetings.
9. We focus on:
  - a. Data
  - b. Qualitative reviews such as audit
  - c. Feedback

*What else we need to be doing*

10. Our analysis of this information helps us to identify our key priorities for action. We have three types of priorities:
  - a. System wide priorities where we are seeking to transform or make fundamental changes and where this usually includes working with partners
  - b. Directorate Improvement Priorities. This includes our Improvement Priorities for Ofsted.
  - c. Service Improvement Priorities which are more specific to each service area and are included in Service Plans.

## **Inspection and Planning**

### **ILACS inspection**

11. The most recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services was undertaken in February and March 2023, with the report published on 9 May.
12. The inspection resulted in an overall judgment of 'Requires Improvement'.
13. Ofsted require an action plan to be developed in response and to be submitted to them by 16 August.
14. The Good and Beyond Board was already established as an independently chaired body charged with providing effective oversight and drive for continuous improvement planning. This Board was already providing leadership and focus for actions emerging from the September 2022 Focused Visit. The Board will continue to provide this oversight role for the revised improvement plan.
15. The key areas for improvement identified by Ofsted are around:
  - a. The quality and effectiveness of plans for children and care leavers, including safety plans agreed with parents.
  - b. Sufficiency of suitable foster homes for children.
  - c. Frontline management oversight across the service, in relation to the quality of assessment and plans and the impact of interventions.
  - d. Opportunities for more children and care leavers to have a voice and to influence the development of services.
16. Other key areas around the need for further action were:
  - a. for placement sufficiency, especially for children with complex needs
  - b. More capacity for foster care
  - c. Evidence of the impact of challenge from Independent Reviewing Officers
  - d. The need for more opportunities for participation for children and young people in care and care leavers
  - e. Consistency of PA support
  - f. Better arrangements for health information for care leavers
  - g. The visibility of the care leavers offer
  - h. The need for a refresh of the corporate parenting approach
17. The inspection also detailed the considerable amount of progress since the previous inspection and several areas of good and positive practice:
  - a. There are clear signs of progress and improvement since the 2019 inspection and since the September 2022 Focused Visit;
  - b. Leaders know the services well and are realistic about them;
  - c. Positive statements about the front door responses;
  - d. Skills and ability around issues such as domestic abuse;
  - e. Thoroughness of child protection investigations;
  - f. Improving quality of assessments;

- g. Effective legal planning in deciding when children need to come into care
- h. Sensitive responses for disabled children
- i. Effective arrangements around child exploitation
- j. Tenacious responses for missing children – interviews and responses
- k. A focus on school attendance
- l. Effective responses to homeless young people
- m. Good approaches to family and friends placements
- n. Effective adoption arrangements
- o. Good management of out of area placements
- p. Good support for unaccompanied asylum seeking children
- q. High levels of ambition from the Virtual school for children in our care
- r. High quality working and commitment from personal advisers
- s. Arrangements for apprenticeships for care leavers
- t. Good feedback from the Courts and from CAFCASS

#### *Governance and oversight*

- 18.** One of the key actions we have implemented is to engage an independent adviser, brokered through the Department for Education. This role is held by an ex DCS from Telford and Wrekin Council, who chairs our 'Good and Beyond' Board and provides independent challenge on implementation of improvement activity, supported by the Board which includes the Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and a range of key partner, including Cleveland Police, Hartlepool BC, Department for Education, Local Government Association.

#### *Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Inclusion (SENDI) inspection*

- 19.** Work is underway in preparation for the forthcoming SEND and AP inspection which will take place in the next 3 years. This is a new inspection framework, and will take an approach much more like the inspection framework outlined above. It will not result in a graded judgement, but will categorise the local system.
- 20.** As we were only inspected under the previous regime in 2022, we do not anticipate this new inspection immediately, but there is significant work to do to prepare the evidence and ensure we have systems in place to be able to respond.

#### **Opportunity and challenge**

- 21.** The sections below describe the opportunities and challenges for all services areas in the Directorate

#### ***Help and Support – Opportunities and Challenges***

- 22.** The Help and Support offer continues to evolve in line with the relationship-based practice model.
- 23.** The introduction of the Liquid Logic Early Help Module allows for clear access to information for both our CHUB and Children's Social Care. Our current diagnostic of

our use of the system being undertaken via North Tyneside Council will identify how we can use this system to help drive data, intelligence and improvement further.

24. The Stockton Multi-Agency Response team (SMART) which acts as our Early Help Hub ensures all referrals into early help are triaged in a timely way by experienced practitioners. This has developed over the past 6 months into a key part of our system.
25. Our Family Hub offer continues to evolve. A recent addition is the implementation of multi-agency drop-in sessions for families, which are focused on seeking to meet the needs of families who may be unaware of support available or who are struggling to cope for a variety of reasons.
26. The strategic partnership with Family Action, a national charitable organisation who have considerable expertise in delivering a range of community led family support, is embedded and now over 12 months old.
27. School Support Advisers Workers are working proactively across education settings to respond to early identification of issues within school. This team uses our Vulnerable Children's Database to support the targeting of their work.
28. Our Integrated Project and Interventions function is continuing to work with social care teams and is being successful in reducing waiting lists and clearly direct work to the right practitioner at the right time.
29. The Family Solutions team provides more intensive family support and intervention for both for families who need more intensive or long of loving term support. Referrals are allocated in a timely way and with increased management oversight and supervision there is a stronger bigger focus on impact and outcomes.
30. We have continued to focus on the importance of early years, through the 'From Conception to Reception' strategy, including through the development of the Stockton-on-Tees Talks programme, for early years education setting and families which seek to reduce the need for specialist intervention.
31. The Youth United Stockton consortium is working to develop a long-term investment strategy for young people. This will support both additional activity and the establishment of new physicals youth hub. We are also opening a Stockton town centre base in 2023.

### ***Help and Support priorities***

32. Our priorities for 2023 include:
  - a. The development of a shared partnership plan for early help.
  - b. Better reporting capacity from our systems.
  - c. Increasing the quality and quantity of Early Help Assessments
  - d. Engaging with communities to ensure that Family Hubs are reaching the most vulnerable.
  - e. Further refinement of our support offer to schools, integrating with the expanding Mental Health Support Teams.
  - f. Continued development of SMART as an early help hub, including new approaches to triaging contacts to prevent them from escalating through the system.
  - g. Secure investment for new and refurbished youth facilities
  - h. Expand our strategic partnership with Family Action

- i. Ensuring more young people are diverted away from crime, and from exploitation.
- j. Deliver on commitments in the Stockton Attendance Strategy to work with children and families to promote and encourage school attendance

### ***Children's Social Care – Opportunities and Challenges***

33. There continues to be significant demand pressure across children's social care services, (see Appendix One for a snapshot of performance data and regional comparisons at the end of March 2023).
34. The Children's Hub (Chub) continues to provide an effective service. This was recognised in the ILACS report which referenced timely referrals and effective processes. Cleveland Police have committed to improving their processes, and we are also exploring the development of a more integrated triage approach, based on good practice models from elsewhere.
35. We have refreshed our People Strategy which sets out the key areas for us to invest in the recruitment, development and retention of social workers. We have retained our 'Grow Your Own' initiative, expanded continued our successful apprenticeship programme and supported the national Step Up to Social Work programme. We have recently been successful in securing funding for the development of a new Academy for newly qualified social workers which we feel will help develop their potential and help retain them. We have also implemented a market forces supplement of 15% for new experienced social workers, and an equivalent retention payment for existing staff. This has had some success in retention, but we continue to face challenges in the recruitment of experienced staff.
36. The Hartlepool and Stockton Safeguarding Children Partnership is leading an increased focus on practice for safeguarding and identified child neglect as its key priority for the current year. This work has been taken forward through dedicated resources and has supported training, awareness raising and a media campaign. We continue to develop an effective system for multi-agency audit and for case reviews. The partnership will also be expanding its focus on the views and experience of children and young people in 2023.
37. The number of children in care has stabilised since April 2020. A more recent development in 2022/23 has been the significant increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) allocated to the Borough as part of a national transfer scheme. There are currently 28 UASC in our care. We have been very successful in being able to keep a much higher proportion of children in care with kinship carers.
38. We are the highest performing authority in the country around keeping children and young people as close to home as possible.
39. We are developing new children's homes, supported by some funding from the DfE capital funding.
40. We are participating in the regional foster care programme which is designed to generate more potential foster carers. It will also support the expansion of the Mockingbird model.
41. ILACS criticised our approach to participation and engagement of children and young people and revised proposals were presented to Corporate Parenting Board to address this on 16 June through a new strategy. Our children and young people-led Let's Take Action group is central to this new approach.

### ***Children's Social Care – priorities for the year ahead***

42. The priorities for the remainder of 2022/23 are:
  - a. Implement the action plan arising from ILACS
  - b. Implementing our recruitment and retention plan to attract experienced and high quality social workers including a new social work academy model
  - c. Evolve our approach to contextual safeguarding taking the CYP Select recommendations into account
  - d. Deliver on commitments in the Stockton Attendance Strategy to work with children and families to promote and encourage school attendance
  - e. Continue to focus on embedding our practice model
  - f. Lead on the development of a new strategy for children in our care and care leavers (including a refreshed approach to corporate parenting)
  - g. Expand our offer for foster carers and secure the benefits of the regional foster care programme
  - h. Ensuring that the needs of CIOC with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are being consistently reviewed, in a more joined up way
  - i. Open new children's homes
  - j. Refresh our approach to care leavers, including reshaping the support to them, developing a new offer, and undertaking a review led by the DfE adviser.

### ***Schools – Opportunities and Challenges***

43. The majority of children are able to get into their first choice of school, at both primary and secondary, and the admission round in spring 2023 resulted in a high proportion achieving their top 3 choices: primary 99.46% and secondary 98% achieving one of their 3 preferences.
44. There is sufficient capacity in primary schools to meet the demand for places, though the reducing birth rate suggests there will be additional surplus capacity in the primary sector for many years, and some schools will be forced to reduce their admissions numbers in the next 2 years, as some have done over in the last 2 years.
45. Overall, there are also enough secondary school places in, though there are challenges around over-subscribed secondary schools especially in the south of the borough. The number of in-year admissions requested by parents/carers continues to increase, as well as movement into the Borough from out of area and overseas, causing further challenges for over-subscribed secondary schools. However, this is expected to ease from 2023/24 when the lower cohorts currently in Year 6 transition into secondary and allow more capacity for in-year admissions
46. Our schools perform well overall, being the best performing in the region, and above national averages on most measures. We reported on progress on educational outcomes to Cabinet in October 2022 and in January 2023, the latter report focusing on gaps for more vulnerable children and young people with 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.
47. We continue to implement the schools capital programme with major projects on site at Outwood Bishopsgarth and Bishopton PRU. Detailed planning work is also underway



for the refurbishment of Oxbridge Lane Primary School. Additional improvements are planned for Ian Ramsey, St Michael's and for North Shore, the latter as part of plans to expand the PAN and to create additional provision for children with Special Educational needs.

48. There are currently:
  - a. 18 maintained schools and 42 academies in primary phase
  - b. 1 maintained and 12 academies in secondary phase
  - c. 5 academies – special schools and alternative provision
49. Although the main provisions of the Education White Paper in 2022 have been withdrawn by Government, schools are continuing to convert to Academy status and this trend is projected to continue. We are continuing to work with existing maintained schools on their future options.
50. Our Teacher training provision, the SCITT, continues to perform well and is graded good by Ofsted.
51. We continue to work with Tees Valley Music Service as the national music plan is refreshed. Proposals for the further development and implementation of music hubs were announced

#### ***Schools – priorities***

52. The priorities identified for the remainder of 2023 are:
  - a. A strategic review of education functions.
  - b. The specific challenges of continuing to focus on narrowing the gap (for children in care, those with SEND, those on free school meals; gender; BAME). This is the subject of a scrutiny review in 2023/24.
  - c. Continued development of the emotional health and wellbeing offer for education settings including Healthy Schools.
  - 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.
  - e. Continue to work with schools and Academy Trusts to ensure an effective school improvement system. This will include consideration of the scope for a Council led Multi Academy Trust.
  - f. A sustainable future and vision for the Tees Valley Music Service following submission of an application for the next phases of the programme in September 2023.

#### ***SEN and Inclusion – challenges and opportunities***

53. The local area SEND strategy was launched in 2021 and sets out commitments across six key priorities. Progress against this is monitored through the multi-agency SEND strategic group and reported through Health and Wellbeing Board. In 2023, we will evolve this governance into a Local Inclusion Partnership, in line with the recommendations in the SEND Green paper in 2022, and we will agree a strategic action plan for the partnership in advance of a fully fledged new Local Inclusion Strategy being developed in 2024.

54. In line with our strategic priority to ensure that most children and young peoples' needs can be met in local, inclusive mainstream schools, we have remodelled our Enhanced Mainstream Schools (EMS).
55. Sufficiency of placements for children continues to be an area of focus. We have expended places at Abbey Hill and we are also developing and expanding provision for children from local special schools to be educated in satellite provisions in mainstream settings, building on the successful Abbey @ North Shore model.
56. The implementation of specific support to children and families affected by autism continues to be a significant priority and remains a challenge. Referrals into the new Neurodevelopmental pathway have significantly increased and work is ongoing with colleagues in the Integrated care Board to reduce waiting times for diagnosis. There is an extensive menu of support which can be accessed without the need for a diagnosis.
57. We have been working as part of the national Delivering better value (DBV) programme in 2022/23 which involves external analysis of our spend on high needs. This has resulted in a submission for additional funding for 2023-24, and will focus on:
  - a. Work to support mainstream choices post 16;
  - b. Testing new approaches to tackling anxiety, ASD and trauma where it effects school attendance
  - c. Improving the data we use to project future demand
58. 2023 will see the launch of a new Attendance Strategy for the Borough which responds to the requirements of the DfE and focuses on reducing persistent and severe absence in our schools. This has been coproduced with multiagency partners promoting attendance at school everyone's business.
59. We have developed and refreshed arrangements around Fair Access and In Year Transfers, jointly with schools.
60. The Virtual school has strengthened their oversight of children with a social worker by appointing 2 additional members of staff to the service. This will focus on promoting the educational achievements of CiN and CP children.

### ***SEN and Inclusion – priorities***

61. The priorities identified for the remainder of 2023 are:
  - a. Implementation of our Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision (SENDAP) Action Plan, delivered through a new Local Area Inclusion Partnership
  - b. Ongoing and improved communication with parents / carers ensuring that our services are accessible and responsive
  - c. Continued support and challenge to mainstream schools and settings in relation to their ability to meet needs
  - d. Continued work alongside schools and settings to increase the quality of SEN support plans
  - e. Working with the Integrated Care Board to ensure therapy services follow a needs led approach, and that support can be provided as early as possible to reduce the need for specialist intervention wherever possible
  - f. Working with the Integrated Care Board to further refine the neurodevelopmental pathway to ensure that children and young people's

needs are being met and, where needed, access to a diagnostic pathway is timely, to include the ADHD pathway

- g. Understanding the impact of COVID-19: school refusal / anxiety / developmental delay / parental impact
- h. Responding and implementing changes as they emerge from the Green Paper 'SEND review: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time' including our role as part of the newly established Regional Expert Partnerships.
- i. Implement the Delivering Better Value programme as part of our SENDAP action plan
- j. Deliver the new Attendance Strategy
- k. Develop data sets to enable more accurate forecasting of need
- l. If awarded by DfE, work with Delta MAT to develop an Alternative Provision Free School
- m. Work towards the implementation of the new EYES system across all services

### ***Strategy, Quality and Improvement– Opportunities and challenges***

- 62. A Performance and Improvement framework has been launched across the Directorate which increases the breadth and range of quality assurance activity taking place and which supports service improvement and an increased focus on impact and outcomes for children, young people and families
- 63. We have strengthened our scrutiny of performance data at a senior management level as part of our strategic planning framework and are embedding the use of a performance dashboard which provides real time data outside of the Liquid Logic reporting system to service leads, team managers and practitioners to support workload prioritisation, planning, and performance management.

### ***Systems, information and improvement – priorities***

- 64. The priorities identified for the remainder of 2023 are:
  - a. Undertaking an external 'diagnostic' of systems for early help and social care to maximise their effectiveness for front line practitioners.
  - b. Further work to ensure data is meaningful and accessible to managers.
  - c. Working with an external partner to test our quality assurance processes.
  - d. Ensuring that the implementation of the EYES module remains on track for Spring 2024 go live and that a suite of reports are available from the outset
  - e. Continuing to embed our approach to quality assurance as set out within our Performance and Improvement Framework including in response to external inspection.
  - f. Delivering our second Practice Week which focuses on identifying and celebrating examples of good practice.
  - g. Continue to model and ensure sufficient school places
  - h. Continuing to ensure efficient transfers for those moving school during the year

- i. Respond to the national changes around early years childcare and wraparound school provision
- j. Leading on SEND placement sufficiency – to ensure enough of the right type of places are available

## **APPENDIX 1: COUNCIL PLAN – KEY PRIORITIES 2023-2024 (CHILDREN’S SERVICES)**

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm means the Borough will be 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 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- support achievement for all pupils including a focus on narrowing the gap in outcomes
- deliver improvement programme focusing on workforce, practice and partnerships for children and families in need
- continue to develop and enhance provision and support for children and young people with additional needs or accessing alternative provision
- implement the investment proposals for children in our care, including new provision and new models of delivery
- develop a new model for the health and wellbeing of children and young people 0-19 (25 for SEND), working across key partners and including service commissioning
- work with our communities and partners to develop our approach to healthy places, in the context of regeneration plans and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- work with our partners in the VCSE sector and the Community Partnerships to tackle food poverty in the Borough
- continue to prevent and relieve homelessness

A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed means that the Borough will have:

- a growing economy
- improved education and skills development
- job creation and increased employment

We have identified these key priorities for 2023 to 2024 to help us achieve this vision. This year we will:

- continue to develop the successful Employment and Training Hub Model