

SCRUTINY REPORT

CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

13 JANUARY 2016

**SAFEGUARDING AND CHILDREN IN CARE
RESIDENTIAL CARE**

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SUMMARY

1. To provide the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel with information about residential care provided/used by Middlesbrough Council.

INTRODUCTION

2. The report to the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel on the 9 September 2015 provided information concerning the budget pressures related to children in care and the numbers of children in care - this report provides additional information concerning Residential Care.

EVIDENCE/DISCUSSION

What is the profile of children placed in residential care?

3. Children placed in residential care can be of any age; however, most residential care establishments focus on the 13 – 18 year age group. Younger children are occasionally placed in residential care, but this is only considered in challenging situations, as the case study below demonstrates:

***Child A:** An 8 year old female is currently in a long term foster placement, unfortunately notice has been given. The young person requires a solo placement with 2 carers due to her challenging behaviour towards adults and other children. This is her third placement breakdown. If the Council is unable to find a suitable family for this young person, it may be looking at a residential home. She has been diagnosed as having a disorganised attachment disorder and presents with difficult behaviours and has a high need to control most situations.*

4. The youngest Middlesbrough child currently in residential care is aged 9. Approximately two thirds of those currently placed in residential care are boys, with the majority being White/British.
5. The primary causes identified for children coming into local authority care are as follows:

Need Category	Out of Area	All LAC
N1 ABUSE/NEGLECT	45.8%	43.4%
N5 FAMILY DYSFUNCTION	37.5%	41.0%
N4 FAMILY IN ACUTE STRESS	13.0%	11.1%
N6 SOCIALLY UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR	0.9%	1.3%
N2 DISABILITY	0.9%	1.3%
N3 PARENT ILL/DISABILITY	0.9%	1.3%
N8 ABSENT PARENTING	0.5%	0.3%
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	0.5%	0.3%
All Causes	100.0%	100.0%

6. Where children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, the aim is to find appropriate permanent placements for them, as early as possible, and support them to remain there. Wherever possible, young people are placed within the Local Authority, allowing them to have regular contact with their birth families, where it is safe for them to do so. However, this is not always the case. There are some young people who need, for reasons of their own safety, to be placed away from the town. There are also young people who are very challenging and have complex needs - for some of these young people a very specialist placement is needed.
7. Where young children are placed in residential care, the aim is usually to provide a safe place where work can be done to prepare the child for a move to family based care. For older children the plan is often to provide stability in preparation for an eventual move to a more independent living situation.

Who provides the residential placements used by the Authority? What are their OFSTED ratings and what was the outcome of Local Authority Inspections?

8. Historically, Middlesbrough had a significant number of residential homes for children within the town, including two large establishments - Broomlands and Farndale Road. During a period of modernisation the larger homes were seen as outdated and closed, and some smaller homes also closed as the focus moved to supporting children live in a family setting - either within their own homes, or within a fostering placement.
9. By January 2001 only a small number of homes remained and Middlesbrough Council entered into a contract with Five Rivers Child Care Ltd, following the completion of a tendering process. The homes were transferred to Five Rivers.

10. The Scrutiny Report presented in September documents the rise in the number of children in care around the 2009/10 period. Pressures resulting from this prompted further discussion and in December 2012 Mike Robinson, the then Director for Wellbeing Care and Learning, presented a report to the Council's Executive Committee which recommended that Middlesbrough Council took back delivery of the contract, and undertook a review of the homes.
11. Three homes returned to the Council from Five Rivers in 2014. Currently the homes are registered to take 11 young people across the three homes. Extensive work is needed in relation to these homes and this is in progress. The work includes a full review of the staffing structure, staff training and extensive renovation of the buildings.
12. There is also £400,000 identified which is to be used to create a Home for Children with Disabilities in Middlesbrough - this is intended to prevent children having to be placed away from their local area and to ensure that the Council can offer "In-house Residential Care" to this group of children as it does to other children.
13. In addition to the above there are two homes in Middlesbrough provided by private organisations - one of these being specifically for children with disabilities.
14. Outside of Middlesbrough the Council uses a variety of placements which are provided by private organisations. When it has been agreed that a placement is required for a child or young person, a referral is sent to the Commissioning Team, who have extensive knowledge of the providers and homes available and will search availability and negotiate cost etc. There is a dedicated placements officer who has built relationships with providers and an expertise around recognising and responding to individual needs of young people when seeking a match. Sometimes this can be achieved quickly, but on other occasions this can be challenging as the case study below demonstrates:

***Child C:** A 15 year old male is currently in a solo placement – the Council is looking for a residential school within a 50 mile radius of Middlesbrough. This is to enable family contact to be maintained but he cannot be placed back in the area due to influences from peer group. The residential school must be for males only due to the young person's risk to females.*
15. All Children's Homes are registered with Ofsted and are inspected twice a year. The reports of the Inspections are published and rate the homes as "Outstanding", "Good", "Requires Improvement" or "Inadequate". The Commissioning Team have access to the inspection reports. In addition to this, Middlesbrough Commissioning Team also undertakes an annual service review of all care homes that have a child placed from Middlesbrough in and around the Tees Valley. Information gained from Inspection Reports and from visits facilitates the Commissioning Team being able to provide sound advice to social workers who need to find an appropriate placement.

16. It is essential to ensure that placements for children deliver high quality care at reasonable cost and that children and young people have maximum opportunity to remain close to Middlesbrough, wherever it is safe for them to do so. However, there are significant challenges related to this - as a Local Authority we would hope to place all young people in homes that are rated as "Good", but there are significantly fewer residential placements available, and some homes are taking action to retain a "Good" or better rating by reducing the level of needs and risk of young people placed.
17. A Placement Transformation Board meets quarterly to monitor the work streams which ensure that the Council continuously reviews the placements it has available and work towards ensuring that it has services in place which can meet all children's needs.
18. Middlesbrough also has an effective Provision and Placement Panel which ensures that children do not enter the care system unnecessarily, and that entries to care are planned and matched to placements. This Panel also ensures that unless there are safeguarding reasons (such as risk of CSE or frequent missing) to place children some distance from home, the majority of children are placed within the Local Authority, which facilitates contact and rehabilitation plans where appropriate.

How many children are currently placed in residential care? Where have they been placed, and what are the associated costs?

19. There are currently 63 children placed in residential care. 13 of those children are currently in residential homes within Middlesbrough, with the others being placed outside the area, including homes within the Tees Valley. This figure includes 8 children placed in residential schools, and one child placed in secure accommodation.
20. Middlesbrough Council currently access 18 Children's Homes operated by 12 different external providers, and 5 residential schools provided by 3 different providers.
21. The cost of a placement varies according to the needs of the child or young person - a placement can cost anything from between £2,500 per week for a young person to £6,000 per week for a complex young person who may require a specialist placement because they have a disability, or a secure placement because they are considered at risk to themselves or others. There are significant additional costs where young people are placed a long way from Middlesbrough, including costs related to visits by social workers etc, and arrangements to facilitate contact with families. However, sometimes no alternative is available as the case example below demonstrates:

***Child B:** A 16 year old female with self-harming behaviours was causing increasing concern. A professionals meeting was held and all agreed that the provider was unable to keep her safe due to her high level of self-harm. A secure placement was agreed by the Assistant Director, and the placements officer identified a secure bed. Due to the matching criteria and*

availability of beds she was placed in a secure Unit in Scotland. It is anticipated that she will move closer to home once a bed becomes available.

22. The Children Looked After budget is the highest within Children's Services and the service realises that the spend on external placements creates significant budget pressures, and is striving to reduce this through a number of mitigation measures overseen by the Transformation Board. These include increasing the number of foster carers and the Return to Middlesbrough Project.

What are the outcomes of children in residential care compared to the rest of the Local Authorities Children in care?

23. Outcomes for children in Residential Care can be very good – the Council currently has young people in residential care who are making excellent progress and who are learning to manage their emotions and who are fully involved in Education. Residential care should not always be seen as a "last resort" - for some young people it provides the space in which they can grow and develop without the pressure of trying to be part of a family.
24. However, there are challenges relating to "group living" which are faced by children in residential care, and also a lack of experience of a "family life" at a significant stage in their development. For these reasons the Council always carefully reviews decisions to place children in residential care and always considers whether it would be in their interests to explore other options. Significant work has been undertaken within Middlesbrough to explore how the Council can develop support packages which will help some young people return to their families or move closer to Middlesbrough. The "Return to Middlesbrough" project has supported some young people in returning to their families and this work will continue.
25. Increasing placement stability for looked after children is the major driver for much of the improvement activity within looked after children services. Children and young people who live in stable situations have greater opportunity to achieve good outcomes. The Looked After Children Commissioning Strategy 2015-17 sets out how services in Middlesbrough work to support families to stay together, where it is safe to do so, promoting preventative services and intervening at the earliest opportunity when difficulties arise.

How does the Local Authority's use of residential care compare to other similar authorities?

26. In 2013/14, 18% of looked after children in Middlesbrough were in residential care compared with 12% nationally. The challenge is to reduce the numbers of children and young people in residential care and increase those in family placements.
27. Middlesbrough Council is currently working with Darlington, Hartlepool and Redcar in developing a Tees Valley Residential Framework Contract which

will commence from April 1st 2016. This will enable the authorities to control price and improve quality with all providers that successfully apply for the framework. The 5 Tees Valley authorities meet on a monthly basis and share information about the placements they use.

How is the experience of children and young people in residential care monitored and managed?

28. There are procedures in place which set out the minimum standards which are to be achieved in terms of social work visits to children who are placed out of area. These visits ensure that their views and wishes are listened to and any concerns addressed. All children in care have regular reviews which are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer and which it is expected that the young person attends.
29. Contact arrangements with family and friends are supported.
30. Any young person who is looked after has the option to ask for the support of an Independent Visitor – a trusted adult with whom they can spend time and enjoy recreational activities; they also have access to independent advocates from NYAS (National Youth Advocacy Service)

How is the experience of children and young people who are placed in homes out of the area managed and monitored? What information does the Local Authority receive about how well these children are doing and about the standard of the homes where they live, and what influence does the Council have to improve things?

31. All children who are placed within children's home are visited with the required level and frequency by their social worker and all children in care have regular reviews which are chaired by an Independent Reviewing Officer. The above applies whether the child is placed close to home, or whether the child is placed at some distance.
32. The dedicated placements officer liaises with all providers, homes and social workers and has experience and knowledge with regard to the placements available - both within Middlesbrough and externally.
33. The Commissioning Team have access to the Ofsted Inspection Reports, and also receive additional information about the homes, including the annual service review of all care homes that have a child placed from Middlesbrough in and around the Tees Valley.

What do children in care and young people say about their experience of living in residential care?

34. The views of looked after children and care leavers are central to the planning and development of services and there are a number of platforms in Middlesbrough to achieve this. In-house there is close involvement with the Children in Care Council – children and young people from this group attend

preparation groups, recruitment of new staff through interview and are consulted when documents are revised.

35. Social Workers and Reviewing Officers listen to the young person's view of their placement and work with the wider care team to ensure that they are happy there.

How are complaints about the standard of residential care dealt with? How many complaints are received on a yearly basis, what issues have been raised and what happens as a result?

36. Looked After Children have clear routes for making complaints about the services they receive and Middlesbrough has a complaints officer. They also have access to advocacy services, which are commissioned from NYAS.
37. Should a complaint be received about the standards of care in a residential care home, this would be handled under the appropriate complaints procedure; for example, should the welfare of a child be in question, the children's complaints process would be used; if someone complained about the conduct of a member of staff that did not involve a child's welfare, then usually the corporate complaints process would be followed.
38. Where the home is run by Middlesbrough Council, the Complaints Officer would usually handle the complaint from start to finish; if the service was commissioned, the service provider would initially consider the complaint and then the Complaints Officer would consider it, should the complainant remain dissatisfied.
39. During 2014/15 there were three complaints made - one was a complaint made by a young person about another young person - which was not upheld. Two complaints made by young people were upheld - one was about another young person smoking, and one was about how a concern had been managed by staff. In both cases actions were put in place by the home to address these issues.
40. Children and young people's views are captured through looked after children reviews and visits from the child's social worker. They are generally positive, although there can be times when a placement does not fully meet the young person's needs; this will always be reviewed in the context of the young person's needs and will inform future placements.

What work does the Local Authority undertake to ensure that placements are stable and work well for children?

41. Placement stability is dependent on the good matching of needs to available resources. On most occasions this is achieved successfully - and the role of the commissioning team is central to this. However, there are times when this can be challenging - there are occasions when a placement is needed quickly, or when a provider has suddenly given notice and an appropriate placement cannot be found. In these circumstances the Council has occasionally placed

children in its in-house provision - even though we have been aware that the matching of need to provision was not ideal.

42. This places pressure on the in-house children's homes, but it does mean that the Council has been able to address some challenging situations as the case study below demonstrates:

A 14 year old female was placed in Residential School. Unfortunately, the Council was given immediate notice the week before Christmas, as the young person set the toilets on fire, causing an extensive amount of damage. Negotiation and a close working relationship between the provider, commissioning and operational staff resulted in a day by day extension. During this period the Council approached over 50 providers (with approx 1000 beds) but to no avail.

The only option was to move her into one of the Council's in-house residential homes and arrange for extra support for a temporary period, until a residential school was identified. This was not ideal as the young person had a long history of sexual exploitation in the Middlesbrough area. The young person has now been placed in solo placement.

CONCLUSION

43. Members of the Panel are asked to note the information contained within this report concerning residential care provided/used by Middlesbrough Council.

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