

Safeguarding and Children in Care

Final Report of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel



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PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the findings of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel following its investigation into Safeguarding and Children in Care (Looked After Children).

BACKGROUND

2. Children in care of the Local Authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect.
3. In 2015, it was reported to the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel that, since 2009/2010, Middlesbrough has had significantly more children in care, and children requiring protection plans, than all other North East local authorities and most of its statistical neighbours.
4. The scrutiny of local authority activities, to support children in care, covers many different areas and responsibilities. Services are directly provided through children's services and social work, foster care, adoption services and children's residential care. It also covers other areas - such as commissioning processes, education and health.
5. In light of the above, the scrutiny panel agreed to use a whole-system approach to consider the impact of services both in terms of what is working well and any gaps and barriers - whilst ensuring the needs of each child are paramount.
6. Listening to children and placing them at the centre of the review was of the utmost importance. Children in care are experts in using services and have valuable insights into how the system works on a day-by-day basis. To ensure the experiences of children in care were highlighted, and in order to champion their voices across the Local Authority, the Chair of the Children in Care Council (CICC) was invited to become an Added Member of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel - for the duration of this particular scrutiny topic.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

7. The agreed terms of reference, for the review, are outlined below:
 - a) To examine how the Local Authority commissions services that reflect the needs of children in care.
 - b) To assess the quality of placements, how stable they are and whether they work well for children.
 - c) To determine how well children in care do at school, how this is monitored and whether there is sufficient support to raise aspirations and educational outcomes.
 - d) To identify how the Local Authority:
 - Promotes physical, emotional and mental health of children in care.

- Acts on any early signs of health issues.
- e) To examine the performance of the Local Authority in finding appropriate adoptive families and establish how outcomes of local adoption processes are monitored.
- f) To identify how the Local Authority promotes an effective local fostering service.
- g) To assess the quality and standard of residential care provided/used by the Local Authority.
- h) To determine the range of support that the Local Authority provides to assist young people leaving care with the transition to independent living.
- i) To examine the profile of the professional workforce of social workers and the effectiveness of care planning across the Local Authority.
- j) To determine the responsibilities of corporate parents and how the role can be enhanced.

METHODS OF INVESTIGATION

8. The scrutiny panel investigated this topic over the course of 7 meetings held on 5 August 2015, 9 September 2015, 30 September 2015, 21 October 2015, 11 November 2015, 13 January 2016 and 25 February 2016. A Scrutiny Support Officer co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the investigation. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer.
9. Visits to Middlesbrough's secondary schools were also undertaken by a sub-group of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel (membership is detailed at paragraph 13).
10. A record of discussions at scrutiny panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Local Authority's Egenda committee management system, which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.
11. This report has been compiled on the basis of information submitted to the scrutiny panel.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY PANEL

12. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as detailed below:
 - Councillors J A Walker (Chair), A Hellaoui (Vice-Chair), R Brady, D Davison, J McGee, L McGloin, G Purvis, B E Taylor, M Walters, Fr G Holland and L Bailey (Added Member).
13. The membership of the sub-group was as detailed below:
 - Councillors A Hellaoui, J McGee and M Walters

THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINDINGS

14. In respect of the terms of reference, the scrutiny panel's findings are set out as detailed below:

Term of Reference: To examine how the local authority commissions services that reflect the needs of children in care.

15. Commissioning is about designing services and devising a system so as to have the greatest impact on the lives of children in care. The commissioning of services should reflect the diverse needs of children in care and ensure that there are a variety of ways to support children. The commissioning process is an important mechanism for meeting the needs of local children.
16. The Local Authority's Commissioning Manager and Placement Manager provided the scrutiny panel with information on the commissioning of services, for children in care, in Middlesbrough.

Commissioning of Services for Children in Care

17. Services for children in care are provided through a mix of in-house local authority provision and commissioned services - from providers in the private and voluntary sector. The scrutiny panel was advised that services for children in care include – accommodation, advice, guidance, counselling, care or supervised activities, home support, respite, occupational, social, cultural and recreational activities, provision of family accommodation, financial help and the maintenance of the family home.
18. The Local Authority's Contracts and Commissioning Unit is responsible for ensuring that there is adequate provision, and choice of services, to meet the needs of children in care.
19. Members heard that the recent introduction of the Care Act has placed a duty on local authorities to develop Market Position Statements for service areas - these are currently being finalised. It was highlighted to Members that the statements detail existing services, identify gaps in provision and outline future demand. It is also the responsibility of the Contracts and Commissioning Unit to ensure market sustainability.

Identifying the Needs of Children in Care

20. Members were advised that children in care have very informative individual care plans, which provide details in respect of what their package of care should consist of and how this should be delivered - this is regularly reviewed by social workers. The scrutiny panel was informed that this information is shared with the commissioned service provider, prior to the placement commencing.

Reviewing Commissioned Services

21. Members heard that all commissioned services receive regular contract monitoring reviews, which are undertaken by the Contracts and Commissioning Unit. It was highlighted that an electronic contracts review tool is used to evaluate the service and covers all areas, including - observations of the surroundings, care plans, provider obligations, complaints and safeguarding, staffing and management, security, health and safety, quality assurance and policies and procedures. The scrutiny panel was informed that when a review is completed, the service provider receives a copy of the report detailing any actions or recommendations for improvement - together with a completion date. The actions and recommendations are followed up to ensure compliance and assistance is offered to support providers in making any changes or raising standards. It was highlighted that, in addition, quarterly monitoring information is provided that details activity and access to the services.
22. Regular business meetings and forums also take place to promote good working relationships, provide updates on relevant legislation and ensure productive, open and honest sharing of information.
23. Members were advised that, at a strategic level, there is a Tees Valley Commissioners Group. It was conveyed that this group involves Directors of Children's Services considering existing services and discussing Tees Valley based opportunities.
24. The Commissioning Manager explained that due to the supply and demand for children's services, the market is in a position to dictate their prices to local authorities. The scrutiny panel was advised that in order to address this issue, the Local Authority has been working collaboratively with other local authorities in the Tees Valley, and in the North East, to commission joint services. By working in this way, local authorities are in a stronger position and are able to challenge fees, strengthen service specifications and improve delivery. To date, the following services have been commissioned jointly with other local authorities – Independent fostering agencies, residential homes and schools, adoption and advocacy. It was highlighted that when services are reviewed, each local authority takes on responsibility for reviewing a particular agency – this avoids duplication and reduces costs.
25. The scrutiny panel was advised that one of the main issues for the Local Authority was the availability of services, for example - places in secure units. It was highlighted that there is also a lack of provision for over 16 year olds. Members were informed that the Local Authority is in the process of developing a demand model that is finance and intelligence led.

Views of Children and Young People

26. As part of the process of informing the commissioning, planning, delivery and evaluation of services - the views and experiences of children and young people are received through liaison with the Children in Care Council (CICC)

and children's social workers, for example - children have recently been involved in the evaluation of the regional NE10 Advocacy Service tender and it is envisaged that they will also be involved in the evaluation of the Tees Valley Residential Framework (see further details at paragraph 223) and the Young Carers tender evaluations.

Term of Reference: To assess the quality of placements, how stable they are and whether they work well for children.

27. Effective commissioning can improve the choice and quality of placements and associated services for children in care. Having the most suitable placements available is a vital factor in improving placement stability, which in turn is a critical success factor in relation to improved outcomes for children in care. Ensuring placements are stable and work well for children and young people is key to their wellbeing.
28. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care provided the scrutiny panel with information in respect of the Local Authority's placements.

Cost of Placements

29. It was highlighted that figures demonstrate a sharp increase in expenditure on placements in 2009/10, following the inquiry into Baby P. In recent years, the rate at which the numbers are increasing has slowed and stabilised. Members were advised, however, that costs continue to rise - reflecting a need to purchase placements from the private sector to ensure there is appropriate provision for some very complex children and young people. It was commented that the costs of placements vary hugely and can range from £200 per week for an in-house fostering placement and £6,000 per week for a complex young person - who may require a specialist placement.

Placements Outside of Middlesbrough

30. The scrutiny panel was informed that in the first quarter of 2015/16, 216 children were placed outside of Middlesbrough out of a total of 371 children, which equates to 58%. Members heard that the most recent comparative data, where figures are available for other local authorities, is 2013/14, when 59% of children were placed outside of the Local Authority boundary compared with 39% across the North East and 38% nationally. It was also highlighted that the average for Middlesbrough's group of statistical neighbour authorities was also 39%.
31. It was recognised that given Middlesbrough's small geographical size, there are other measures that are useful in assessing the level of success achieved in trying to place children close to home as possible - when this is appropriate. Members were advised that in the first quarter of 2015/16, 77% of children were placed in the Tees Valley area, which is significantly better than the 42% achieved for placements in Middlesbrough.

32. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that the age profile, of those placed outside of Middlesbrough, is weighted towards secondary school age or older.

Stability of Placements

33. With regard to the stability of placements, the scrutiny panel found that in 2014–15, 10% of children in Middlesbrough lived in three or more placements during the year, compared to 11% for both similar local authorities and nationally (2013–14). It was explained that the Local Authority's own figure for the year up to 31 September 2015 is 4%.
34. In 2015, Ofsted conducted an inspection of the Local Authority's arrangements for supporting children in care. Ofsted reported that children and young people experience less changes of placement than either the national average or that of similar local authorities, and this is continuing to improve. This means children have an increasingly secure base from which to achieve positive outcomes.

Providing Safe and Stable Placements

35. Members heard that children and young people live in homes that meet their needs and provide safe and stable care for them. It was advised that they are supported to develop secure attachments with their carers.
36. It was explained that the Placement Transformation Board meets on a quarterly basis to monitor the work streams that continuously review the placements available and work towards ensuring that the Local Authority has services in place, which can meet all children's needs.
37. The scrutiny panel heard that 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 Provision and Placement Panel also ensures that unless there are safeguarding reasons 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.
38. Members heard that significant work has been undertaken to explore how the Local Authority can develop support packages, which will help some young people return to their families or move closer to Middlesbrough. It was advised that the "Return to Middlesbrough" project has supported some young people in returning to their families and this work will continue. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that this project has been effective in preventing some children coming into care through the use of detailed support packages. It was commented that effective packages of support are provided to help children remain at home with their families when this is in their best interests and to prevent them becoming looked after when this is avoidable. Ofsted referred to the project as strong practice that demonstrates that the Local Authority is promoting positive outcomes for children and young people.

39. It was highlighted that increasing placement stability for children in care is the major driver for much of the improvement activity within the service. It was conveyed that 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.
40. It was conveyed that the Local Authority is currently working with Darlington, Stockton, Hartlepool and Redcar in developing a Tees Valley Residential Framework Contract (see further information at paragraph 223).

Information Provided to Children and Young People

41. Members heard that all young people coming into care receive a welcome pack. There are two types – one for 16+ and another for younger children. It was explained that these packs help children and young people to become aware of their rights, entitlements and provide other useful information. The scrutiny panel was advised that all Middlesbrough foster carers have a family book that is shared with all new children prior to placement, if possible. For long-term matches, Members heard that the profiles of the foster carers are shared with the young person and they are provided with the opportunity to meet them in advance of the placement - if they wish to do so. It was highlighted that a planned introduction is implemented for the young person and carer to decide whether it is the correct placement for them - if not, the introduction would cease.
42. The Assistant Director indicated that he would like to be able to give more choice of placements but due to the number of children in care there is not always the ability to have a choice of foster carers, who match children's needs. It was conveyed to the scrutiny panel that placing teenagers is a particular challenge.

School Placements

43. With regards to keeping children in the same school, Members were advised that this is judged on a case-by-case basis and with consultation with all parties as to whether it is better for a young person to remain at the current school or move. Consideration is given to the age of the child, length of travel, happiness within the current school and the need to make friends in a new local area. If the child remains in a local school, transport is supported to get them there, paid for by the Local Authority.

Maintaining Relationships

44. Members heard that there is a strong commitment to placing brothers and sisters together.

45. The scrutiny panel was informed that supporting children to maintain relationships with siblings, family members and friends is an important area and probably one of the most complex to manage. It was highlighted that trying to meet the child's needs, the needs of birth parents, siblings, grandparents and also Court directions is difficult. Members were advised that all children and young people have a plan of contact and this is supported by the foster carers and children's homes, and social workers. There is a balance about making sure important contacts are maintained but not to the detriment of the child or foster carers. If contact is important then it happens but the child's needs and safety are paramount.
46. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that the Local Authority facilitates and supports children to have contact with their families, including brothers, sisters and other people who are important to them. It was also commented that careful consideration is given to these arrangements and the quality of recording from supervised contact is good.

Views of Children and Young People

47. Members heard that children's and young people's views are captured through foster carer reviews, looked after children reviews and visits from the child's social worker and supervising social worker. It was highlighted that feedback is generally positive although there are times when a placement does not fully meet a young person's needs. The scrutiny panel was advised when this is the case, the placement will always be reviewed in the context of the young person's needs and will inform future placements. It was brought to the panel's attention that the Children in Care Council (CICC) also work with the Local Authority to provide feedback on placements.

Term of Reference: To determine how well children in care do at school, how this is monitored and whether there is sufficient support to raise aspirations and educational outcomes

48. Local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child looked after by them. This includes a particular duty to promote the child's educational achievement, wherever they live or are educated. The Local Authority must therefore give particular attention to the educational implications of any decision about the welfare of those children.
49. Statutory guidance, published in 2014, describes the framework for promoting the education of children in care¹. Key elements include:
- A requirement for every local authority, in England, to appoint a Virtual School Head (VSH) to ensure the educational needs of children in care are fully met. The role of the VSH is to ensure that effective systems are in place to improve the educational experience and outcomes of the authority's children in care, including those placed outside of the authority.

¹ Department for Education – Promoting the education of looked after children - statutory guidance for local authorities (July 2014).

- The VSH and other partners - including - social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and special educational needs services - must coordinate appropriate education provision, at the same time as arrangements are made for a care placement, in order to ensure that the child does not miss any schooling in the transition.
 - All children will have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) which covers areas including access to schools and nurseries, catch-up support, out of school learning activities and transition support between schools.
50. The 2011 Department for Education report, on raising aspirations and educational outcomes for looked after children, identified the benefits of additional tuition and one-to-one support for children in care.²
51. The Virtual School Head and the Head of Achievement provided the scrutiny panel with information on the education of children in care in Middlesbrough.

Virtual School Roll

52. It was reported that the number of children in care, on roll at Middlesbrough's Virtual School currently stands at 298. It was explained that the number of children in care between the ages of 3 and 16 is 220 (a reduction of 36 students from the previous year). The number of post-16 students currently stands at 69. Members were asked to note that this data reflects a single snap shot in time.
53. Members heard that overall:
- 32% of Middlesbrough's children in care are in mainstream schools (including academies) in Middlesbrough. The previous year recorded that 42% of children in care were educated in Middlesbrough – this demonstrates a 10% decrease in home county education.
 - The proportion of children in care educated outside of Middlesbrough, in any school or setting, is currently 58% compared with 57% this time last year.
 - Special schools and units, make up 20% in comparison to last year where this accounted for 29%. Half of the student population in special schools are located in Middlesbrough (10% of total LAC cohort) and the other half are in placements outside of LA (also 10% of the overall cohort).
 - Only 4% of the whole LAC population of primary school age are in special schools or units compared with 13% of the population of secondary school age. It was conveyed to the scrutiny panel that whilst this is potentially a concern, it may also be that young people who have suffered disruption to their education, as well as to their family relationships, have needs that can be met more easily in smaller schools and units with higher staffing ratios as they go through the turbulent years of adolescence. Members were asked to note that this figure demonstrates a reduction of 18% on the previous year.

² Department for Education – Raising the aspirations and educational outcomes for looked after children (July 2011).

Assessment, Monitoring and Review Procedures

54. All children in care have a care plan, of which the Personal Education Plan (PEP) is an integral part. The scrutiny panel was advised that the PEP is an evolving record of what needs to happen for children in care to enable them to make expected progress and fulfil their potential.
55. Members heard that the PEP contains information on the support and resources required to succeed academically. The PEP is also a useful tool to keep track of a young person's progress towards their own individual targets, whether short, medium or longer term. It was conveyed that the PEP is used to identify success and establish specific areas of concern. It was advised that the PEP is updated at least every six months.
56. The scrutiny panel was informed that PEPs are conducted by virtual school staff with the designated teachers and often with the child's social worker.
57. It was highlighted that, previously, no fixed guidelines were in place that identified who was accountable for the PEP process. Members were advised that the Virtual School will now be responsible for ensuring that all of the relevant people and agencies receive the document, that the document is uploaded to the LCS system and that all PEP submissions are recorded. It was also indicated that each staff member will receive the relevant I.T training.
58. It was suggested that social workers begin to take a central role and facilitate the PEP process, as is done in most other local authorities. It was conveyed that the designated teacher role will involve the completion of targets and pupil premium provision mapping.
59. Members were advised that the Virtual School Head undertakes a quality assurance role in relation to PEPs.
60. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that the quality of personal education plans (PEPs) requires improvement. It was commented that the majority of PEPs are based on targets that are overly focused on the achievement of qualification grades and not on the specific steps that inform pupils what it is they need to do to progress. It was also reported that PEPs do not contain sufficient clarity or direction about how schools will target the use of the pupil premium to raise the attainment of children in care.

Involving the Young Person

61. It was highlighted that it is important that a young person is aware that information is being recorded regarding their personal circumstances. Members were advised that how this is shared with them depends on their age and understanding. It was conveyed that a young person, where appropriate, will be asked to attend the PEP meeting. In order to get the students views the PEP contains two specific pages that the young person is

asked to complete. This ensures that even if the young person cannot attend the meeting, their views are still expressed.

Attainment 2014/15

62. Prior to receiving evidence, the scrutiny panel was informed that the 2014/15 results are provisional and data has not yet been validated. In addition, 2014/2015 national and regional data, in respect of children in care, has not yet been published. Therefore, comparisons were made with 2013/2014 data.

Achievement and Progress – Key Stage 1 (KS1)

All Middlesbrough Pupils

63. It was reported that, at KS1 in 2015, Middlesbrough's pupils achieved broadly in line with national and regional averages, at Reading 87%, Writing, 84% and Mathematics 90%.

Pupils in Care

64. In 2015, the proportion of Middlesbrough's children in care achieving at least a level 2 in Reading was 75%, Writing 50%, Mathematics 62.5%. From the previous year, the scrutiny panel was advised that this demonstrated a 50% reduction in attainment in Writing, a 37.5% drop in attainment in Mathematics and a 25% drop in attainment in Reading. Members heard that 2014/15 data demonstrates a significant decrease in attainment at KS1, however, the scrutiny panel was asked to note that the data reflects a cohort of 8 pupils – therefore resulting in data that is easily skewed. Members were advised that, although KS1 historically has always produced fluctuating attainment - it remains a consistent theme that, by the end of KS2, children in care achieve broadly in line with their peers, suggesting that early interventions have a positive impact on children in care at primary school.

Achievement and Progress – Key Stage 2 (KS2)

All Middlesbrough Pupils

65. Members were informed that in Middlesbrough, for 2015, overall achievement at level 4 in Reading, Writing and Mathematics (RWM) was broadly in line with national and regional averages - at 78%.
66. It was brought to the scrutiny panel's attention that, in Middlesbrough, the proportion of children achieving at least a level 4 in Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (GPS), was broadly in line with national and regional averages, at 79%.

Pupils in Care

67. For Middlesbrough's children in care, the proportion achieving at least a level 4 in RWM, was 73.7% (demonstrating a 13.7% increase on the previous

year). The result of 73.7% compares favourably with the regional figure of 56% and national figure of 48% in 2013/14.

68. The panel found that the gap of achievement between children in care and their peers, at KS2 for RWM, is 4.3%.
69. In 2015, Middlesbrough's children in care, achieving at least a Level 4 GPS, was 73.7% (demonstrating a 13.7% increase on the previous year).
70. The panel found that the gap of achievement between children in care and their peers, at KS2 for GPS, is 5.3%.
71. The gap between children in care and their peers continues to significantly narrow at the end of KS2 and the numbers achieving level 4 has more than doubled in two years.

Achievement and Progress – Key Stage 4 (KS4)

All Middlesbrough Pupils

72. The scrutiny panel was advised that in 2015 the proportion of Middlesbrough pupils achieving 5 A* - C grades (including English and mathematics) was 44.8%.

Pupils in Care

73. The scrutiny panel was advised that in 2015 the proportion of children in care achieving 5 A* - C grades (including English and mathematics), was 15.6%. This demonstrates a gap of 29.2% between children in care and their peers.
74. Middlesbrough's children in care maintain a year-on-year rise in achievement in spite of the general fall in pupil achievement. The current data shows that, in respect of KS4, Middlesbrough's children in care are achieving broadly in line with children in care regionally and nationally. 15.6% of Middlesbrough's children in care achieved 5 A* - C grades (including English and mathematics) in 2015, compared with the 2014 regional figure of 12% and the 2014 national figure of 12%. Members were advised that this year there has been an increase of 1.3% in achievement and this suggests that Middlesbrough's children in care will again achieve higher than both regional and national comparisons.

School Ofsted Ratings

75. It was reported that there are 14 children in care at KS2, none of whom are in a school known to have an Ofsted report lower than Good (5 children are placed in schools that have recently converted to academies, therefore, Ofsted reports are not available).
76. The scrutiny panel was advised that the proportion of those of this age group in schools outside of Middlesbrough did not achieve less well than those who

were in studying in the area. It was conveyed that those educated in schools out of the area are not at any disadvantage in terms of outcomes, however, the numbers are very small.

77. It was found that currently there are 30 children in care at KS4, 5 of which are in a school known to have an Ofsted report lower than a rating of Good. There is 1 child who is placed in a school that has recently been converted to an academy and therefore, no Ofsted report is available.
78. Members were advised that each school below the status of good is monitored by Virtual School Head to ensure that each placement continues to be in the best interest of the child. It was reported that there are currently three children in a Middlesbrough school that Requires Improvement. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that a LAC teacher has been placed in the school, for two days per week, to mentor and monitor progress.
79. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that the Virtual School is effective in supporting children in care who attend schools that are rated less than good.

School Admission

80. Members were advised that the normal school admission processes, outlined by the Local Authority, is the primary course of action to enrol a child in care at any given school. Although, it was explained that when it is in the best interest of the child to attend a particular school and that school is over-subscribed it is still possible for a child in care to gain admission.

Attendance 2014/15

81. The scrutiny panel was informed that the attendance of children in care is generally good across all age ranges both in and out of area. However, it was highlighted that in 2014/15, there was clearly an issue in Year 7 and Year 8 attendance. It was explained that the average is adversely affected by a minority of individuals who have very poor school attendance. Members heard that these children are identified and their attendance and progress are carefully monitored in the current year.

Exclusions 2014/15

82. It was brought to the scrutiny panel's attention that, in the 2014/2015 academic year, a total of 36 (14%) children in care were subject to periods of fixed-term exclusion – this amounted to a total of 119 days. It was explained that although the number of children in care being subject to fixed-term exclusions has remained relatively constant (35 fixed term exclusions in the 2012/2013 academic year) the number of days missed has reduced from 224 to 119 (a 53 % reduction).
83. It was highlighted that where a period of fixed-term exclusion is unavoidable all children in care based in Middlesbrough schools (and those in out of area

schools but within reasonable travelling distance) are allocated an automatic place within the Complementary Education Service Pupil Referral Units to minimising disruption to education and placement alike.

84. Following the inspection, Ofsted reported that there is a good range of alternative provision available, to children in care, who do not engage well in mainstream schools.

Future Plans

85. It was advised that the Virtual School intends to narrow the gap between children in care and their peers, by using the pupil premium plus to improve outcomes.

86. Members were advised that the distribution of the £1,900 funding is currently as follows:

- Approximately half (£300 per child in care, per term) is sent directly to schools to facilitate the support that schools provide for children in care.
- The remaining half is split between employing staff to provide targeted support in schools in a number of ways eg:-
 - A part-time teacher for children in care who attend a school that has recently been judged by Ofsted to be Inadequate. Members were advised that this is the only school equipped meet the social and emotional needs of the students.
 - A part-time teacher of English to provide 1:1 support in school for children. The teacher is currently being deployed to secondary schools as appropriate - including short-term intensive and tailored sessions to re-engage challenging pupils.
 - A teacher of mathematics to be deployed on a similar basis to promote numeracy and mathematics skills.
 - A part-time teacher with particular experience at KS4, across a range of subjects, to provide targeted support for Year 11 students with coursework and exam preparation.
 - A secondary school teacher with numerous years of teaching experience in a variety of subjects, working with children with a large range of academic abilities.
 - A data analyst that records and tracks progress weekly so that any child that is not meeting their progress targets can be identified quickly.

87. The pupil premium for children in care is paid direct to the Local Authority and it is distributed according to need - at the discretion of the Virtual School Head. Members were advised that the Personal Education Plan (PEP) meeting is generally the point where this is discussed and schools need to demonstrate that the £300 per term has been spent to benefit the individual child before additional funds can be released.

Evidence from Middlesbrough's Secondary Schools

88. It was reported, by the Virtual School Head, that the gap between Middlesbrough's children in care and their peers remains and that the gap widens as children get older.
89. With this in mind, the scrutiny panel conveyed that it would be beneficial to visit Middlesbrough's secondary schools - in order to:
- Establish what support is provided to promote the educational achievement of children in care.
 - Identify good practice.
90. The scrutiny panel's sub-group visited the 7 secondary schools in Middlesbrough - Acklam Grange (with 11 pupils in care), Kings Academy (with 11 pupils in care), Outwood Academy Acklam (2 pupils in care), Outwood Academy Ormesby (1 pupil in care) Macmillan Academy (with 14 pupils in care), Trinity Catholic College (with 4 pupils in care) and Unity City Academy (6 pupils in care).
91. The majority of children in care, attending these schools, are Middlesbrough children. Although, it was conveyed that these numbers also include young people from other areas such as – Stockton, Redcar & Cleveland, Hartlepool, Sunderland, Tyne and Wear and Cumbria.

School Admissions

92. Each school explained that children in care are given the highest priority in respect of school admission arrangements.

Status

93. Each school expressed:
- The importance of showing sensitivity in respect of the status of children in care, protecting a young person's need for confidentiality and being respectful of their wishes.
 - That, publicly, they try not to treat children in care differently from their peers.
 - That there is a need to sensitively manage those children in care who display behavioural issues.

Designated Teacher

94. Each school has a designated teacher who has lead responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of children in care and for the development of each child's Personal Education Plan (PEP) within school.

Transition from Primary School to Secondary School

95. In each school visited:

- It was evident that designated teachers play a key role in helping children in care make a smooth transition to their school, including making sure there are effective arrangements in place for a speedy transfer of information.
 - Year 6 LAC reviews and PEP reviews are attended - to determine personal, emotional and academic needs of future students and help the school establish how it can best support progress.
 - Operates a buddy system, which ensures new students have a welcoming experience from the very beginning. Buddy systems are seen to promote friendship and support between peers.
96. Some schools explained that they facilitate an extended transition for children in care, which:
- Enables children in care to meet other young people in similar circumstances - in advance of starting school.
 - Prepares children in care for their first day and helps remove anxiety so that they settle in more quickly.
 - Enables staff to identify children in care prior to their first day.
97. One school highlighted it is currently working with Shape Training to support the transition of one pupil in care to post-16 education. Shape Training provides a range of well-established and flexible training packages to meet a learner's needs.

Appointment of Support for Children in Care

98. Prior to the young person starting school:
- The designated teachers appoint an appropriate member of teaching staff to each young person to offer advice, guidance and support throughout their time at school.
 - The designated teachers assign each young person to the most appropriate tutor group to ensure they receive the support needed to succeed.
99. In respect of the schools visited:
- Pastoral support is provided to encourage the young person's involvement in the wider activities of the school and other out of school learning activities.
 - Children in care are prioritised in one-to-one tuition arrangements.
 - It was highlighted that consistency and seamless support are paramount.
100. A couple of schools conveyed that an enrichment programme is organised for children in care, which focuses on developing confidence, communication and problem solving skills.

Awareness of School Staff

101. Each designated teacher conveyed:

- That they undertake work to help school staff to understand the things that affect how children in care learn and achieve.
 - That a system or process is in place, in respect of school records, which identifies children in care - This ensures the young person receives unified support from all school staff.
 - They have a network of staff that supports their work.
102. One school provided an example of a session that was held, whereby all school staff had the opportunity to receive information and advice on understanding the reasons that may be behind a child's behaviour, and why they may require more support than others. The session also explained the impact that being in care can have on a young person's emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Personal Education Plans (PEPs)

103. In respect of the schools visited, it was expressed:
- That the PEP is crucial in supporting the personalised learning of children in care.
 - The PEP is used as a tool in school to make sure the young person's progress towards education targets is monitored.
 - That the PEP is joint responsibility of the Local Authority and the school.
 - That each PEP is important - as it includes the information needed to plan and deliver strategies that are required to make sure the child gets the support and provision they require to succeed.
 - That it is important for social workers to attend the PEP reviews. However, it was advised that, on occasion, social workers are unable to attend.
 - That each young person has a voice in setting learning targets.
104. One school conveyed that there had been delays encountered with obtaining some PEPs, from the Local Authority, for young people attending their school. Other schools expressed that the process of completing the PEP could be improved by the use of an online/electronic form.
105. From receiving the views of the schools, it became evident that the process would benefit from being streamlined – this could be actioned by each PEP being completed electronically and the document being held in one centralised location. This would enable the relevant people to access, develop, review and update the document as and when required. This will also ensure that the schools have immediate access to the latest version of the document.
106. Schools highlighted that through the PEP process robust arrangements are in place to ensure that special educational needs (SEN) are addressed. It was explained that support provided by SEN specialists includes language/communication skills, 1:1 academic support and tuition, pre-examination assessments etc.

Communication with Carers

107. From discussion, it became apparent that:
- The schools have positive links to each child's carer.
 - That effective communication with carers can help support a child's progress, as can the carer's involvement with the PEP.
 - The appropriate steps are taken to ensure that carers understand the importance of supporting learning at home.
108. One school highlighted that home visits are undertaken as and when required.

Disruption of Education

109. It became evident that the designated teachers have a responsibility to maximise educational stability for the child, especially by finding ways of sharing information through the PEP and providing advice to the Local Authority about the impact of disrupting education. It was conveyed that maximising educational stability is of the utmost importance.

Care Plans – Looked After Children (LAC) Reviews

110. The schools felt that attendance at LAC review meetings is fundamental in receiving information about each child's individual circumstances including their placements, emotional and behavioural development, identity, relationships and self-care skills. In receiving this information, the schools can tailor support to meet each child's needs and arrange interventions when required.
111. It was conveyed by some schools that they are not necessarily invited, as a matter of course, to the LAC reviews for each young person who attends their school.
112. One school also commented that it would welcome guidance on the process that should be followed when scheduling LAC reviews and who has responsibility for co-ordinating arrangements.

Monitoring of Progress and Information Sharing

113. Schools informed the sub-group that:
- Arrangements are in place to share data - to ensure that the educational needs of children in care can be met and understood.
 - Processes are in place to monitor, record, review and report on each child's academic attainment.
114. One school highlighted that recently Middlesbrough had not requested data returns, which are collated on a termly basis. It was highlighted that there is a need for the Local Authority to obtain attainment data in order to track and monitor the progress being made by children in care.

115. Two schools explained that they use CPOMS, which is a software application for monitoring child protection, safeguarding and a whole range of pastoral and welfare issues. Working alongside a school's existing safeguarding processes, CPOMS is a system to help with the management of child protection, behavioural issues, bullying, special educational needs, domestic issues and much more. CPOMS enables schools to improve their management of child protection and similar incidents and actions, whilst reducing staff time, paperwork and administration. CPOMS also enables schools to track referrals to external agencies, such as the NHS/CAMHS, Children's Services, and the Police. Using the incident and logging facility of CPOMS, a school can follow a referral from the initial stage, keep a secure audited record of communications (including letters and telephone calls) and be alerted if timescales are not being met. The system can also securely transfer information, for example - from primary schools.
116. It was conveyed that each designated teacher would benefit from working more closely with other schools and other service providers – including health and children's social care. The sub-group found that the development of a forum would enable schools to share best practice, expertise, take early and preventative action and commission services that improve the wellbeing for children in care – particularly in respect of the emotional, psychological and mental health.

Support to Promote the Wellbeing of Children in Care

117. Where appropriate, schools arrange counselling sessions for each young person who show signs of emotional, psychological and mental health needs.
118. One issue that was highlighted was the waiting times experienced for appointments with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) – for example, one school explained that with several scheduled appointments being cancelled by CAMHS, a young person was required to wait 12 months to see a CAMHS professional. Some schools highlighted that there is a demand for mental health services and expressed concern in respect of the lack of provision available to promote the emotional and social wellbeing of young people. The availability of educational psychologists was also highlighted as an issue. Schools conveyed that the delay in receiving treatment can have irreversible damage on the young person. This issue warrants further investigation by the Health Scrutiny Panel.
119. One school has ARC (Achievement, Reintegration and Care) Services. ARC Services is a child-centred, whole school service, which encapsulates the needs of the individual child and ensures that these are catered for in every aspect of their school life. ARC Services provides a holistic package of support to all pupils, including - welfare provision, such as counselling, and academic intervention, such as one-to-one tuition.

120. Some other schools explained that they offer a calm nurturing environment for those young people who require additional emotional support. Staff working in these areas include a school nurse, counsellors and teaching staff.

Pupil Premium

121. Funding is provided to help improve the attainment of children in care and close the attainment gap between this group and their peers.

122. The schools highlighted:

- That funding had previously been used to provide a variety of support - including one-to-one tuition, one-to-one reading support, one-to-one therapy sessions, trips, I.T equipment, counselling, piano lessons, extra art materials, residential breaks and careers advice etc.
- The benefits of additional tuition and one-to-one support for children in care.
- That bids can be made, to the Virtual School Head, for additional funding.

123. One school conveyed that it is crucial that the pupil premium is spent on providing support for the young person entitled to the funding. Evidence received suggests that this may not always be the case.

124. All schools viewed one-to-one tuition as extremely beneficial.

125. One school conveyed that additional support is available through charities, such as MIND, who provide learning programmes to promote self-esteem and confidence.

Local Authority Support

126. Overall, schools were positive about the support provided by the Virtual School.

Term of Reference: To identify how the local authority:

- **promotes physical, emotional and mental health of children in care.**
- **acts on any early signs of health issues.**

127. Local authorities have a duty, under section 22(3)(a) of the Children Act 1989, to safeguard and promote the welfare of the children they look after, including eligible children and those placed for adoption, regardless of whether they are placed in or out of the authority or the type of placement. This includes the promotion of the child's physical, emotional and mental health and acting on any early signs of health issues.

128. Under the Children Act 1989, CCGs and NHS England have a duty to comply with requests from a local authority to help them provide support and services to looked-after children. Members were advised that local authorities, CCGs

and NHS England can only carry out their responsibilities to promote the health and welfare of looked-after children if they cooperate³

129. The Director of Public Health and representatives from the South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and the South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) provided the scrutiny panel with evidence in respect of promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care.

Health Assessments and Plans

130. The scrutiny panel was informed that local authorities are responsible for making sure a health assessment of physical, emotional and mental health needs is carried out for every child they look after, regardless of where the child lives. Members were advised by the Specialist Nurse for Looked After Children (LAC) with South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, that children in care generally receive a health assessment by a Paediatrician within 20 working days of coming into care and a six-monthly assessment up to the age of five, undertaken by a health visitor. From the age of 5 to 18 they received an annual health assessment performed by the School Nurse or the Specialist Nurse for LAC. This is undertaken in partnership with the child and their parent/foster carer. It was conveyed that the importance of enabling children in care to participate in decisions about their care, and taking into account their wishes and feelings about how to be healthy, is paramount.
131. It was highlighted that information is gathered from a variety of sources and a health plan is produced, which contains actions and review dates. Members were informed that the health plan forms part of the child's overall care plan.
132. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that the health needs of children and young people who come into care are well considered and met through timely and thorough health assessments.

Health and Wellbeing of Children in Care

133. Members heard that most children become looked after as a result of abuse and neglect. It was highlighted that although they have many of the same health issues as their peers, the extent of these is often greater because of their past experiences.
134. The Designated Nurse for Safeguarding and Looked After Children with the South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) advised the scrutiny panel that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) has provided positive feedback on the arrangements that are in place.
135. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that the LAC Nurse - based with the Pathways Team, is readily available to care leavers - who drop in for medical check-ups, immunisation, pregnancy testing and advice on healthy

³ Promoting the health and well-being of looked-after children - Statutory guidance for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and NHS England (March 2015)

living. It was also commented that the in-house LAC Practitioner for CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) has a positive impact on working with referred care leavers to identify the mental and emotional barriers that prevent them from making progress. It was also explained that counselling for drug and alcohol dependency is readily available through a commissioned service.

136. It was explained that, in Middlesbrough, there are currently good arrangements in place to maintain the health of children and young people in care. The scrutiny panel was advised that this is supported by 2014 data collected in respect of health checks:

Health care and development assessments of children who have been looked after for at least 12 months

	Number of children looked after for at least 12 months	Number of children whose immunisations were up to date	Number of children who had their teeth checked by a dentist	Number of children who had their annual health assessment	Number of children who had been looked after for at least 12 months, aged 5 or younger at 31 March 2014	Number of these children whose development assessment were up-to-date
ENGLAND	47,670	41,510	40,240	42,140	8,760	7,600
NORTH EAST	2,840	2,700	2,450	2,690	510	480
Middlesbrough	250	245	245	240	40	40

Substance misuse by children who had been looked after continuously for at least 12 months

	Number of children looked after at 31 March who had been looked after for at least 12 months	Number identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year	Number who received an intervention for their substance misuse problem during the year	Number who were offered an intervention but who refused it during the year	Percentage identified as having a substance misuse problem during the year.
ENGLAND	47,670	16,680	940	570	3.5
NORTH EAST	2,840	120	90	20	4.2
Middlesbrough	250	20	15	5	8.4

Emotional and behavioural health of children looked after continuously for 12 months for whom a Strengths and Difficulties (SDQ) was completed, by the Local Authority

	Number of children looked after for at least 12 months aged 5 to 16	Number of children looked after for at least 12 months aged 5 to 16 with a SDQ score	Percentage of children for whom an SDQ was submitted	Average score per child	Banded SDQ Score (%)	Banded SDQ Score (%)	Banded SDQ Score (%)
					Normal	Borderline	Concern
ENGLAND	34,770	23,650	68	13.9	50	13	37
NORTH EAST	2,170	1,410	65	13.9	50	13	37
Middlesbrough	180	170	92	13.3	51	15	33

Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and scores are banded in the following way – under 14 is considered normal, 14-16 is borderline cause for concern and 17 or over is a cause for concern.

137. It was highlighted that local authorities are required to use the Strengths and

Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess the emotional wellbeing of each child in care. The LAC Practitioner for CAMHS, commented that an analysis of the SDQ has illustrated that, whilst these are being completed, the questionnaires are not being utilised. Training has been delivered to social workers and school nurses to ensure that staff are aware of what is required. SDQ scores help to quantify the needs of the children in care population and should be used by local authorities and CCGs as they develop their Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (JHWS).

138. Members heard that work is being undertaken to improve transitions for children with complex needs. There are a high proportion of children in care with complex needs.

Mental Health Services

139. Members were informed that child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) play a crucial role in assessing and meeting the needs identified as part of the of the SDQ screening process. The scrutiny panel was advised that children in care are fortunate to have a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), Children Looked After Team in Middlesbrough.
140. Following a recent inspection, Ofsted reported that effective commissioning of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and other services that provide emotional support to children ensures that the emotional health and well-being of children in care is well considered and addressed. It was commented that CAMHS support extends to children and young people up to the age of 21, to ensure that vulnerable care leavers receive services to support them in the community. It was highlighted that the maximum waiting time for an initial CAMHS assessment is four weeks, but children looked after are typically seen within two or three weeks. It was also reported appointments for follow up are offered immediately and there are currently no children waiting to receive a service.
141. The scrutiny panel was informed that challenges are experienced in respect of children in care placed out of area. These children could be seen by a generic CAMHS Team and it was identified that there are some delays in accessing the service. This is something that social care and health need to address. It was highlighted that it is vital that professionals work together with the child to assess and meet their mental health needs in a tailored way. The scrutiny panel was advised that delays in identifying and meeting their emotional well-being and mental health needs can have far reaching effects on all aspects of their lives, including their chances of reaching their potential and leading happy and healthy lives as adults.
142. In response to questions from Members, the Director of Public Health and health representatives advised that the emotional mental health of children is a high priority. The scrutiny panel was informed that if the bid for funding for Headstart (a programme to support the mental, social and emotional development of children) is successful, an additional £10 million will be available for early intervention initiatives to help children with their mental

health and emotional wellbeing. It was highlighted that the CAMHS would have a role to play in this work.

Early Intervention

143. It was highlighted that in terms of mechanisms to pick up at an early stage signs that a child may need to go into care - universal services, such as schools and health visitors, play a key role and can seek support from other agencies when required. Members were informed that work is undertaken with families where a child is in danger of neglect. In some cases, however, a child can come into care as a result of a non-accidental injury, when there has been no concerns previously.
144. In respect of health appointments, if appointments are missed there are systems to flag this up and if there is a safeguarding concern a referral will be made to social care.

Views of Children and Young People

145. The Chair of the Children in Care Council (CICC) conveyed that children in care are most definitely a priority group in respect of access to health services.
146. The Chair of the CICC highlighted that as part of the leaving care service, pathway plans include a section relating to health and wellbeing - this is completed on a 6 monthly basis. Members heard that drop-in sessions are available to young people on the first and third Tuesday of every month with the LAC Practitioner for CAMHS.
147. The scrutiny panel was advised that the Specialist Nurse for LAC plays a very important/fundamental role in promoting the health and welfare of children in care. It was highlighted that the support provided to those age 16 plus, is crucial. Members heard that young people are able to access advice and support in a friendly environment, they relate well to the Specialist Nurse and relationships are built on trust and respect.
148. Members were advised by the Chair of the CICC that there are Kickstart Groups. The LAC Practitioner added that Kickstart Groups have previously held six summer sessions to raise the self-esteem of girls through a mix of activities and paperwork. The activities received good feedback and will continue. The Chair of CICC also highlighted that joint working with CAMHS allows young people to receive specialised help - this can be behavioural or cognitive.
149. It was also highlighted by the Chair of the CICC that:
 - Social workers monitor children and young people's health by observational techniques when carrying out statutory visits.
 - Children and young people influence the development of health services by healthwatch consultation and views are submitted via the Forum of Looked After Children (FLAC).

- The CICC has created the health “passport” document. The scrutiny panel heard that the health “passport” has been developed for young people over the age of 18 years. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that the information in the passport is tailored to each young person’s health needs and includes details of previous family illness and the young person’s birthweight.

Proposed Relocation of Specialist Nurse for LAC

150. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children’s Care explained that the Specialist Nurse for LAC may be relocated to health premises.
151. Further clarification was sought, in respect of the proposed relocation, and in response the Head of Nursing (Safeguarding) at South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (the Trust) explained that there are a number of drivers behind the current review of the Looked After Children (LAC) service, which includes location of the service. It was conveyed that:
- There is a lack of resilience in current arrangements during periods of sickness and leave, which has caused significant problems over the last year and the Trust has a duty of care to practitioners to address this.
 - In 2015, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) highlighted that there is a need to ensure that there is adequate resource within the role of the LAC specialist nurse service, so that there is sufficient capacity to undertake commissioned services, including quality control, timeliness of health assessments and development work.
 - The Local Authority charge rent for current accommodation and if accommodation can be located within health premises (not necessarily James Cook University Hospital), at no cost, this must be seriously considered.
 - The Trust provides a service to Redcar and Cleveland as well and needs to review the service model to make the best use of resources to the greatest number of children – the Trust is currently undertaking work with the CCG in respect of this.
152. Members expressed concern with this proposal as:
- The CICC provided extremely positive feedback in respect of the fundamental role that the Specialist Nurse for LAC plays - in promoting the health and wellbeing of children in care.
 - Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that the range and level of support for care leavers through the Pathways Team is very good. It was commented that this level of planned and integrated service provision is good practice and results in care leavers being able to access services quickly and when they need them most. It was also reported that the co-location of these professionals from a range of agencies also helps ensure that social workers and personal advisers develop a better understanding of what each of these services can offer and this in turn makes a positive difference for care leavers.

Term of Reference: To examine the performance of the local authority in finding appropriate adoptive families and establish how outcomes of local adoption processes are monitored.

153. The scrutiny panel was advised that the best possible care involves ensuring that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. It was highlighted that there are a range of permanent care options which can do this. But in many cases adoption is the best option – particularly for younger children, but also for some older children⁴. Adoption gives vulnerable children, including many with complex needs and a history of ill-treatment, the greatest possible stability, in a permanent home with a permanent family.
154. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care and the Team Manager of Family Placement Service provided the Members with detailed information on adoption processes in Middlesbrough.

Responding to Prospective Adopters

155. Members were advised that services are provided to people who live within 100 mile radius of Middlesbrough and who wish to adopt a child from within the UK. It was conveyed that services are also provided to people who wish to adopt a child from outside of the UK, but in these instances, the applicants must be resident within the area of Middlesbrough Council. Members were advised that prospective adopters often come to the Local Authority through other adopters' recommendation.
156. Often people who want to adopt did not mind whether they used a voluntary agency or went to their Local Authority. Middlesbrough recommends potential adopters to look at the Government's website "First4Adoption". First4Adoption is the dedicated adoption information service for people interested in adopting a child in England.
157. The adoption process consists of the following stages:
- **Pre-stage One Exploration** - enquiries are responded to by a member of the Adoption Service who requests basic details and answers any initial questions. It was conveyed that, upon receipt of an enquiry, an information pack is sent out within 5 days. The Manager or Assistant Manager then arrange for an initial visit to be undertaken by two social workers within fifteen working days. Members were advised that these timescales are, in most circumstances, adhered to.
 - **Stage One Registration & Checks** – This stage lasts 8 weeks. Prospective adopters are invited to attend preparation groups with other prospective adopters, which explore the benefits and challenges of adoption. As well as key parenting skills, the preparation groups cover the special skills adoptive parents need to care for children who may have

⁴ Department for Education - An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay (2011)

experienced neglect and abuse. The aim is to provide prospective adopters with the skills they will need in the future.

- **Stage Two Assessment, Training & Approval** - Stage Two, is 4-month long process during which time the prospective adopter will be assessed on whether they are suitable to become an adopter. A Prospective Adopter Report (PAR) is completed by the social workers and this is submitted to the Family Placement Panel (FPP) for consideration. The FPP discuss all the evidence and then make a recommendation in respect of suitability. The FPP is mostly made up of volunteers, including foster carers, adopters and adoptees as well as professionals from health and social care. This recommendation is then approved (or not) by the Agency Decision Maker, the Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Children's Care.
- **Stage Three Matching with the Right Child** - Once approved, the search for the right child(ren) can begin. The Local Authority has several adopters approved and ready so that when children are ready to be placed they can be matched. The Local Authority will not give prospective adopters details of a child until a Placement Order has been made.
- **Stage Four Moving In** - Once matched as the right family for a child, and the match has been approved, the family can get to know each other - this is supported by a social worker. Evaluations are completed after the first initial visit. The Adoption Assistant Team Manager also completes an evaluation visit once the placement order is granted.

158. All the Tees Valley local authorities work closely together and if one authority feels that prospective adopters are not suitable for them, they will always suggest, in the first instance, that they approach another local authority. Members were advised that a bid for funding has been secured with a view to forming a Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency - so that the expertise and knowledge can be shared.

Placing a Child for Adoption

159. Members were advised that with some adoptions the match can be done very quickly once the Court grants the Placement Order, where there are no specific circumstances for the child. It was highlighted, however, that some children might have significant health issues and more time is needed to make the right match. The scrutiny panel found that whilst the Local Authority tries to work within the timescales, prescribed by Government, this is not always possible due to the overriding needs of the child or children being placed. The Local Authority tracks all adoptions from the date that the Placement Order is made - to try and ensure there is no delay.
160. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that, in respect of adoption, the systems for tracking the progress of individual children's cases after process meetings are not robust enough to ensure that agreed actions always happen as quickly as they could.
161. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that sometimes, when the Local Authority puts a plan for adoption to the Court it is overruled by the Judge and a child would be returned home. The Local Authority then has to work with the

child and parents in their home in a situation that it does not feel is satisfactory. In some cases, the Local Authority has gone back to the Court because the Judge's direction has been tried and has not worked.

162. However, it was clarified that when a Judge makes a judgement that the Local Authority is not confident in, they provide a rationale for it. It was conveyed that it is very difficult for the Local Authority to challenge that because the rationale will be legally sound. When a child is placed back home they will remain subject to the Independent Review System. It was highlighted that a new Senior Judge has recently been appointed and that Judge will set the policy locally.

Adoption - Profile of Children in Care and Adopters

163. The scrutiny panel was advised that there are currently 20 children waiting to be adopted. This includes:
- 1 set of 3 siblings - ages 1, 3, 4
 - 1 set of 2 siblings – 1 set of twins under 1. 1 twin with significant health issues
 - 1 set of 4 siblings to be split into 2 sets of 2 siblings – 1 set of twins aged 1 and siblings 3 and 4 years
 - 11 individual children - all under 18 months
164. Members heard that the Placement Orders are not yet in place for all of these children but the potential plan is adoption. It was brought to the panel's attention that current approved adopters are as follows:
- W - 1 child 18 months – preference for a girl, but would consider either gender
 - R - 1 child 18 months either gender
 - Rw - sibling group or 1 child up to 18 months
 - D - 1 child 18 months, either gender
 - B - sibling group up to 5 years
 - C - 1 child 18 months - preference female
 - G - Sibling up to 3 years.
165. It was conveyed that the likelihood of adoption reduces as the child ages - the upper limit for boys is generally age 5 and for girls generally age 7. Not being able to place a child within these windows makes adoption more difficult.
166. The scrutiny panel was advised that siblings that are accommodated at the same time are generally placed together unless there are specific reasons why they should not be. It was highlighted that larger sibling groups are more difficult to place and often consideration has to be given to splitting them up. It was found that where an agency is making a placement decision on two or more children from the same family, it is based on a comprehensive assessment of the quality of the children's relationships, their individual needs and the likely capacity of the prospective adopter to meet the needs of all the siblings placed together. It is not a natural assumption that siblings should always be placed together and sometimes siblings have to be placed

separately. However, it was conveyed that, when siblings are not placed together the Local Authority considers the need for children to remain in contact and arrangements are put in place to support this.

167. In addition to issues regarding ages and sibling groups, it is likely that many of the babies will have issues of drug or alcohol abuse by parents. Older children often have issues regarding attachment and work is being undertaken to address this.
168. With regard to adopters, there are two distinct groups who apply. Some adopters are looking for a new family, as young as possible, and others who feel they have something to offer a child of any age. The Local Authority will not start looking for a placement until the Court grants permission with the making of a Placement Order.

Actions Taken to Address the Imbalance

169. The scrutiny panel was advised that the Local Authority can “sell” and “buy in” adopters and it was clarified that this is about widening the pool of adopters that are available. It was highlighted that government funding is available to pay for adopters for children who are more difficult to place and meet a set criteria which includes children who - have been waiting for 18 months, are aged five or over, are in a sibling group of two or more, are from a black and minority ethnic background, are disabled. The Government has introduced legislation to ensure that local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies charge a set amount of £27,000 per child. This sum can be reclaimed by the Local Authority where a child is placed externally. It was highlighted that Middlesbrough is disadvantaged by being a tight knit community and it is always a risk that adopters might accidentally meet birth parents. Therefore, the Local Authority prefers to recruit adopters who live outside of the Middlesbrough area even though this increases the costs.
170. Members heard that voluntary adoption agencies recruit adopters for the sole purpose of selling them. Voluntary adoption agencies can be very beneficial to the Local Authority if there is not an in-house match for a child. It was noted that voluntary adoption agencies tend to have a theme and might, for example, recruit adopters more willing to take children whose potential is unknown.
171. Middlesbrough tends to use flyers rather than magazines to advertise if there are no potential matches for a child among the pool of in-house adopters. It was stressed that this option is only used when all other avenues to find an adoptive parent has been exhausted.

Adoption Fairs

172. In response to a query about Adoption Fairs, the Assistant Director commented that this is a very sensitive issue in terms of local authorities and staff being comfortable with the concept. The Team Manager explained that she attended an event hosted by Barnardo's and found it to be better than she

had anticipated. There were safeguards in place. For the children and the younger ones it was seen as a day out as it was run like a party with lots of activities. However, the older children had a clear understanding of why they were attending and for this reason, the Team Manager decided that she would not use such events for older children. The scrutiny panel noted that the Adoption Fairs are devised by Government and are currently run by an independent company called Coram. Coram charges £475 per child.

Children Placed for Adoption within National Timescales

173. The scrutiny panel was advised that a sample of 7 children was considered - 4 were under the national average and 3 were over the national average. The Team Manager explained to Members that the more easily available figures had been used in the sample. It was highlighted, however, that over a period of a year approximately 21 adoptions would be completed and, therefore, the Team Manager felt this was a reasonably accurate sample. The Team Manager stated that every adoption has a different set of circumstances and the Local Authority always tries to get it right for the child even if that means going outside of the timescale. The right match is the primary consideration. It was also conveyed that it would only take one placement with a delay to impact on the overall average, as numbers are small.

Monitoring the Local Adoption Processes

174. Members were informed that adoption processes and outcomes are monitored through the Adoption Scorecard, Adoption Annual Report, live tracking sheet, supervisions, questions asked and recorded at the Family Placement Panel, evaluation forms given to prospective adopters after initial visit and evaluation visit after adoption order granted. It was conveyed that information is also recorded through the Team Manager Performance Clinics.
175. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that the FPP functions effectively in meeting adoption and fostering requirements

Views of Prospective Adopters

176. The scrutiny panel was advised that in respect of the FPP, the Chair always asks prospective adopters what they think of the adoption approval process and whether they have any comments or questions. It was highlighted that the majority of feedback is extremely positive, focusing on the support provided throughout the process. It was conveyed that whilst most prospective adopters are positive, there will always be some exceptions. If people have their heart set on adopting it is devastating if the Local Authority does not support their application. The Assistant Director explained that the length and intensity of the process is designed to test prospective adopters' commitment.
177. In 2016, Ofsted reported while FPP gives and gains verbal feedback from applicants, this is not systematically collated and disseminated to support continuous practice improvement.

178. The scrutiny panel was asked to note that there are appropriate complaints and appeals processes in place, which can be utilised by prospective adopters throughout the process.

Views of Children and Young People

179. Members were informed that the national age of children being adopted is 4 years and under, therefore, it is very difficult to record their views. The Adoption Team, however, have had older children adopted by their foster carers - who are positive regarding being adopted, but get frustrated with the process.

180. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that there is effective work with children to prepare them for permanent placements. It was also commented that the planning and management of transition to permanent placements is thorough, and children's wishes and feelings are well considered.

Term of Reference: To identify how the local authority promotes an effective local fostering service.
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181. The scrutiny panel was advised that fostering services must ensure that the welfare, safety and individual needs of looked after children are central to the care provided by foster carers, so that each looked after child is treated as an individual and given personal support tailored to their individual needs, and taking their wishes and feelings fully into account. But, at the same time, foster care provides an opportunity for looked after children to grow up in a family, and to learn to take account of the needs of other family members and to make compromises.⁵

182. It was conveyed that foster families can play a valuable role in stabilising and caring for children for both short and longer periods of time, but nationally there is a shortage of people willing to take on the role.

183. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care and the Team Manager of the Family Placement Service provided the scrutiny panel with information on local foster care arrangements.

Demand

184. The Local Authority recognises that its resource of foster carers is not sufficient to cope with demand. The following measures are being taken to address this situation:

- Development work is underway in respect of targeted recruitment campaigns, for example - parent and child, sibling groups, teenage placements.
- Joint working with Tees Valley, pooling financial resources.
- Roadshows and media coverage.

⁵ The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations, Volume 4: Fostering Services (2011)

- Highlighting the need for a corporate approach by promoting fostering within the Local Authority.
185. In respect of the turnover rate of foster carers, in 2013 there were 13 approvals and 4 deregistrations, in 2014 there were 21 approvals and 6 deregistrations and as reported on 11 November – 12 approvals and 3 deregistrations in 2015. In respect of the 13 deregistrations over the past 3 years, further details were presented to the panel and it became evident that the majority of deregistrations were a result of retirement.
186. The scrutiny panel was advised that the retention rate for foster carers is good and that there are no underlying issues related to practices adopted by the Fostering Service. However, Members were informed that analysis of the foster carer age profile shows 16% of carers are currently in the age group of 60-70 years old.
187. The Assistant Director commented that one of the best ways of recruiting adopters and foster carers is through networking. Local Authority allowances for foster carers are in line with Independent Fostering Agencies. One of the reasons why the Local Authority is struggling to increase the number of foster carers is due to people retiring.

Recruitment

188. It was advised that the Local Authority primarily wishes to recruit foster carers who live with the area. The fostering service aims to recruit sufficient foster carers to meet the needs of the children for whom it provides care. The fostering service is proactive in assessing the current and likely future needs of the children for whom placements are requested. This informs the Fostering Recruitment Strategy, which used to inform recruitment activity. It was advised that recruitment activity is undertaken on different levels:
- Nationally, for example - Foster Care Fortnight and inclusion of the Local Authority's details on various websites.
 - Locally, for example - the use of adverts placed in various publications, distribution of posters and leaflets, selected dates across the year for adshel posters placed at 10 key areas in Middlesbrough, inclusion of fostering information on Middlesbrough's web-site and other specialist web-sites.
189. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that the key ways in which the Local Authority promotes an effective local fostering service, include:
- A clear, informative and interactive webpage that contains filmed testimonials from current foster carers, adverts produced and shown on ITV featuring current foster carers, opportunities to request a call back, opportunities to request an information pack and the opportunity to complete an online enquiry form. In addition to this, case studies from current foster carers/adopters are a feature on the Middlesbrough Council website's homepage.
 - Clear and concise information packs available to post out to enquirers.

- Advertising – planned organised campaigns to promote fostering and adoption services:
 - Award winning production of adverts for the purpose of TV, Internet, electronic notice boards, Sky Ads.
 - Targeting specific needs and audiences, for example 35 years old plus - to care for older children .
 - Opportunities to target specific geographical areas, for example - Ingleby Barwick/Eaglescliffe/Yarm, Marton/Acklam/Coulby Newham.
 - Local magazines, on-line magazines and newspapers, which feature case studies of current foster carers/adopters.
 - Social media – the production of action plans for planned posts and tweets to ensure a regular presence.
 - Planned roadshows in appropriate geographical areas, which are staffed by members of the team, foster carers and adopters
 - Preparation Groups – foster carers, adopters, children in care/left care and professionals with specific knowledge in key areas are involved in delivery of these sessions.

190. The scrutiny panel was informed that, in respect of the Fostering Service, there is a robust assessment process, careful matching and effective support in place to ensure placement stability.

Supervision and Support for Foster Carers

191. Members were informed that given the central role that foster carers play, as members of a wider team, in helping to safeguard vulnerable children and promote good outcomes for them, it is essential that all foster carers receive high-quality supervision and support. It was found that support which is effective in helping foster carers to meet the needs of children in placement includes practical, financial and emotional support in addition to training and the provision of information. It was highlighted that the Fostering Service provides a robust support and retention system to approved foster carers, utilising the following measures:

- Regular supervision and support from an allocated social worker from the Fostering Service.
- Foster carer annual reviews.
- Targeted support – an induction period with additional support etc. recognising the importance of support in the first year of fostering
- Practical support (such as transport and activities for children) from a support worker, according to need.
- A regular newsletter specifically for foster carers registered with Middlesbrough Fostering Service.
- Access to a secure on-line notice board.
- Membership of Fostering Network.
- Support groups and social events for foster carers, for example – the Foster Carer Forum, Foster Carer Consultation Group and Foster Carer Association

- A foster carers resource directory containing information on policies, procedures and practice guidance.
 - Access to independent advice and mediation when necessary.
 - A programme of induction training for newly approved foster carers.
 - A programme of post-approval training specifically for foster carers.
 - Financial support for placements, using a banded payments scheme.
 - Loan of essential equipment or household items to support specific placements.
 - A peer mentoring scheme, provided by foster carers who have had relevant training.
192. The scrutiny panel was advised that the following support is provided to prospective foster carers:
- Information and advice about fostering.
 - Initial visits to people expressing an interest in becoming foster carers.
 - Preparation training for applicants.
 - Competency-based assessment of applicants.
 - The opportunity to attend the Family Placement Panel when their application is presented.
193. It was brought to the panel's attention that the Fostering Service has an ethos of Team Around the Child, for example:
- Joint working with children, young people and foster carers.
 - Co-working with the child's social worker and other agencies involved in the care of each child.
 - A needs led service - responding to the needs and care evolving and adapting to current trends and pressures within the LAC system.
194. It was added that delegated authority, in respect of day-to-day decisions about each child, is discussed and agreed at the placement planning meetings. It was advised that delegated authority is regularly reviewed to ensure it reflects current practice.

Views and Feedback from Foster Carers

195. Members were provided with a series of comments taken from minutes of the Family Placement Panel. Comments demonstrated the positive feedback received from foster carers in respect of the fundamental support network that is in place.
196. The scrutiny panel was advised that once a foster carer is approved, they are asked to complete an evaluation form. Previously submitted forms demonstrated that potential foster carers found:
- Staff very helpful and approachable.
 - Home visits very informative and help alleviate any fears.
 - Staff to be flexible and accommodating when arranging appointments.
 - Their own children were appropriately involved in the assessment process and were significantly prepared for fostering.
 - The assessment process to be empowering and a positive experience

- Attendance at the Family Placement Panel to be a positive experience
- The fostering information pack to be very informative.

197. It was also reported that potential foster carers didn't find the assessment to be a lengthy process.

Areas of Development

198. Members were advised that, in terms of the fostering service, there is a need to financially invest in order to recruit and support more foster carers. It was highlighted that this will reduce the reliance on the use of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and ultimately save the Local Authority money and ensure that children are cared for by their home authority.

199. In terms of the foster carers – it has been reported that improvements are required in respect of:

- Relationships and partnership working with the child's social worker and joint planning around the care of the child and contact arrangements.
- The co-ordination of contact - communication, planning, being equipped for contact.
- The monitoring of contact with birth parents and families - food issues, supervision of contact - safety - advice and guidance, behaviours - handling of children.

200. The scrutiny panel was informed that the Contact Team is part of the Resources Service and is specifically designed to manage contact arrangements for children with birth families. A major restructure of the Service has taken place and there has been a high turnover of staff. However, improvements have now been made and the Service is working closely with foster carers to resolve any issues.

Views of Children and Young People

201. The scrutiny panel received information on the comments received from children and young people in foster care placements:

- Age 8 - I like my own bedroom, C gives me nice rewards, I would like to ask if I can stay long-term.
- Age 5 - C is kind, I like the dog.
- Age 16 - I get help with homework, I get pocket money and clothes, I get help to understand what is going on, I feel safe.
- Age 17 - I am supported with college, my carers looked after me well.
- Age 12 - I get everything I need for school, they help to keep me safe, they take me to the doctors.
- Age 10 - I have quiet space to go to, I have been with them for a long time but I know why I still live here.

Term of Reference: To assess the quality and standard of residential care provided/used by the local authority.

202. For some children and young people, placement in a residential home may be a more suitable option than a foster home. For example, they may find it hard to cope with family-based life as result of their experiences or they may have highly complex and challenging needs.
203. Their abilities and individual stage of development will determine their starting point when they arrive at the children's home and the home may need to support them through a complex and extended period of transition before they are able to positively engage and develop. This should not limit the home's ambitions for each child⁶.
204. Local authorities should ensure they have a range of residential placements available to allow placements to be matched to each child's individual needs⁷.
205. In 2011, Ofsted produced a report that analysed how a small sample of 12 children's homes achieved and sustained outstanding status over a period of three years. The key characteristics, which set apart consistently outstanding children's homes include:
- Leaders who are hands-on, who unite their staff behind a shared purpose, and who are transparent and open in their expectations and pursuit of excellence.
 - Clarity of vision, which is absolutely focused on the experience of children and young people and uncompromising in its ambition.
 - A commitment to continual improvement, always being willing to learn and ask 'what could we do better?'
 - The passion and energy of staff who are deeply committed to their work, and the recruitment, training and management systems which identify these staff and support them to grow and develop.
 - Understanding which young people will benefit from living in the home and creating the conditions, from their first contact with the young person, which are most likely to make the placement a success.
 - Meticulous planning that engages young people and responds in detail to their individual needs so that their experience of care is highly personalised, combined with a commitment to never 'give up' on a child or young person and to do everything possible to maintain the placement.
 - Time spent with the children and young people individually and in groups so that they are able to develop meaningful secure relationships with the adults in the home, and with each other.
 - Absolute consistency in the management of behaviour so that young people understand and respect the boundaries that are set and respond positively to encouragement, rewards and meaningful sanctions.

⁶ Department for Education - Guide to the Children's Homes Regulations including the quality standards (April 2015).

⁷ Department for Education - The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations, Volume 2: care planning, placement and case review (June 2015)

- An unwavering commitment to support children and young people to succeed, and a belief in their ability to do so, translated into active support for their education both in the homes and in their partnerships with schools and other professionals.
- Working with each child or young person to build their emotional resilience and self-confidence, to prepare them for independence and enable them to withstand difficulties and set-backs in the future.⁸

206. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care and the Service Manager for Support and Development provided the scrutiny panel with information on the quality and standard of residential care provided and used by the Local Authority.

Children Placed in Residential Care

207. Members were informed that 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. It was explained that this figure includes 8 children placed in residential schools, and one child placed in secure accommodation.

208. It was highlighted that the Local Authority currently has access to 18 residential homes operated by 12 different external providers, and 5 residential schools provided by 3 different providers.

Use of Residential Care

209. It was explained that, in 2013/14, 18% of children in care in Middlesbrough were in residential care - compared with 12% nationally. It was highlighted that the challenge is to reduce the numbers of children and young people in residential care and increase those in family placements.

Costs of Residential Placements

210. As previously stipulated, the scrutiny panel was advised that the cost of a residential placement varies according to the needs of a child or young person and could cost anything from between £2,500 per week to £6,000 per week for a complex young person who may require a specialist placement because they have a disability, or secure placement because they are considered at risk to themselves or others. Where young people are placed a long way from Middlesbrough there are significant additional costs including expenses related to visits by social workers and arrangements to facilitate contact with families.

211. The budget for children in care 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

⁸ Ofsted – Outstanding Children's Homes (2011)

measures overseen by the Transformation Board. These include increasing the number of foster carers (see paragraphs 188 to 190) and the Return to Middlesbrough Project (see paragraph 38).

212. It was noted by the scrutiny panel that, wherever possible, efforts are made to seek contributions from Education and Health. In some cases, the level of need can be reduced over time but there are some young people with profound or complex disabilities who continue to require a high level of support.

Profile of Children Placed in Residential Care

213. Members were advised that children placed in residential care can be of any age; however, most residential care establishments focus on the 13 – 18 year age group. It was highlighted that younger children are occasionally placed in residential care, but this is only considered in challenging situations.
214. It was explained that:
- 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.
215. The scrutiny panel heard that 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.

Residential Placements

216. In relation to Ofsted ratings, the scrutiny panel was advised that the Local Authority had three residential establishments - one has an outstanding rating, one has a good rating and one requires improvement. Members were advised that residential provision had previously been outsourced and since taking the service back in-house the ratings have improved for all three homes. It was advised that in-house provision was excellent value compared with purchasing placements from elsewhere.
217. It was highlighted that extensive work has been undertaken in relation to the homes and work is still ongoing. Work has involved undertaking a full review of the staffing structure, staff training and extensive renovation of the buildings.
218. Members heard that currently the homes are registered to take 11 young people across the three homes.
219. In addition to the homes outlined, it was highlighted that there are two homes in Middlesbrough provided by private organisations - one of these being specifically for children with disabilities.

220. It was explained that outside of Middlesbrough, the Local Authority uses a variety of placements which are provided by private organisations.
221. Members were informed that 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.
222. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that it is essential for the Local Authority to ensure that residential placements, for children and young people, deliver high-quality care at reasonable cost. However, it was explained that there are significant challenges related to this. Members heard that the Local Authority would hope to place all children and young people in homes that are rated as “Good”, but there are significantly fewer residential placements available. It was conveyed that some homes are taking action to retain a “Good” or better rating by reducing the level of needs and risk of young people placed.
223. It was conveyed that the Local Authority is currently working with Darlington, Stockton, Hartlepool and Redcar in developing a Tees Valley Residential Framework Contract, which will commence from 1 April 2016. The scrutiny panel heard that this will enable the authorities to control price, and improve quality, with all providers that successfully apply for the framework. Members were advised that the five Tees Valley Authorities meet on a monthly basis to share information about the placements they use. The Assistant Director commented that local authorities have better negotiating powers when they combine and aspire to do this at regional level.

The Outcomes of Children in Residential Care

224. It was explained that outcomes for children placed in residential care can be very good – the Local Authority 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.
225. Members were advised that 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.
226. However, the scrutiny panel was informed that 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. It was explained that for these reasons the Local Authority is always careful in reviewing decisions to place children in residential care and other options are always explored.

Residential Care Provision

227. Members were informed that £423,000 has been identified to purchase and secure a property that will be used as a residential home for children with disabilities - this is intended to prevent children having to be placed away from their local area and to ensure that the Local Authority can offer "In-house residential care" to this group of children as it does to other children.

Monitoring Residential Placements

228. The scrutiny panel was advised that all children who are placed within residential care 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. These visits ensure that their views and wishes are listened to and any concerns addressed. It was explained that this applies whether the child is placed close to home, or whether the child is placed at some distance. In addition:
- Contact arrangements with family and friends are supported.
 - Any young person in care 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).
229. Members heard that the 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. It was also explained that the Commissioning Team has access to the Ofsted inspection reports, and receives 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.

Placement Stability

230. It was conveyed that placement stability is dependent on the good matching of needs to available resources. Members heard that 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 - 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 Local Authority has occasionally placed children in its in-house provision - even though the matching of need to provision was not ideal.
231. The scrutiny panel was informed that this places pressure on the in-house residential homes, but it does mean that the Local Authority has been able to address some challenging situations.
232. The scrutiny panel was informed that children in care have clear routes for making complaints about the services they receive.

233. Members heard that 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.
234. Children and young people’s views 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 and will inform future placements.

Views of Children and Young People

235. It was explained that the views of children in care 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.
236. It was highlighted that social workers and Independent 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.

Term of Reference: To determine the range of support that the local authority provides to assist young people leaving care with the transition to independent living.

237. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 introduced new requirements on local authorities to plan for looked after children, so that they have the support they need as they make their transition to the responsibilities of adulthood. As corporate parents, responsible authorities should provide support to care leavers in the same way that reasonable parents provide support for their own children.
238. Local authority provision of continuing leaving care support must ensure that throughout the period that each care leaver is provided with leaving care services, his/her needs are subject to on-going assessment and review, so that the authority’s intervention puts them on the pathway to success as they make their transition to adulthood⁹.
239. The Pathways Manager and Personal Adviser, Stronger Families, provided an overview of the assistance provided to young people leaving care and the transition to independent living, to respond to any queries.

⁹ Department for Education - Children Act 1989: transition to adulthood for care leavers, Volume 3: statutory guidance for local authorities on helping care leavers aged 16 and 17 prepare for adulthood.

Current provision

240. Members were advised that the Local Authority has a team dedicated to care leavers, named by care leavers as, the Pathways Team. It was noted that for young people leaving care, who have additional needs, there is the Transitions Team. The Transitions Team is managed by Adult Social Care - with input from Children's Safeguarding. The work of each team is underpinned by legislation, chiefly, the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 (Volume 3) and the Care Act 2014.
241. It was explained to the scrutiny panel that the Pathway Team and the Transitions Team work directly with young people to assess need and to plan for their individual transition to adulthood. The planning is person-centred and aims to ensure that the young person has maximum opportunity to live a happy, healthy and fulfilling life and to make a positive contribution to their community.
242. The Pathways Team comprises of a Team Manager, Assistant Team Manager, Social Workers, Personal Advisors, the Specialist Nurse for LAC, the LAC Practitioner for CAMHS, Stronger Communities Worker, Development and Accommodation Officer and a CICC apprentice.
243. The scrutiny panel heard that one of the practices that Ofsted inspectors were impressed with was the range of multi-agency staff co-located within the Pathways Team (see further detail at 152). However, it was highlighted that discussions are currently ongoing with the South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust regarding the re-location of the LAC Nurse to a health facility (see further details at 151). Members acknowledged that young people are very appreciative that the LAC Nurse is based in the Pathways Team and is available to them. The CICC representative endorsed the view that the LAC Nurse is an important asset to the Pathways Team.
244. Members were informed that the Pathways Team is:
- Currently working with 106 care leavers.
 - In touch with 29 of 31 young people who left care in the last year.
 - Currently in touch with 58 of 62 care leavers aged 19 or 20.
245. It was found that the Social Worker/Personal Advisors make every attempt to engage with care leavers. However, sometimes care leavers (usually due to lifestyle choices) decide they no longer want to engage with services and therefore refuse to provide up-to-date information regarding their current circumstances and contact details.

Outcomes

246. In respect of the 106 care leavers that the Pathways Team are currently working with, outcomes were reported as follows:

Destinations	Age 18	Age 19	Age 20	Age 21	Age 22	Age 24	Total
College	11	6	4	1	0	0	22
Employment	2	5	4	0	1	0	12
NEET	8	15	15	3	0	0	41
Training	8	9	2	0	0	0	19
University	2	0	2	4	2	2	12
Total	31	35	27	8	3	2	106

247. The scrutiny panel was informed that overall 61% of care leavers are in education, training and employment (ETE), which is above the national average of 60%. 11 % of care leavers are in higher education, which is nearly double the national average of 6%. Members were advised that there is an increase in young people in employment and in those young people accessing college.
248. It was reported that the Pathways Team has 41 care leavers who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), which equates to 39% of care leavers.
249. It was explained that reasons for care leavers being NEET include:
- Parenting.
 - Claiming Job Seeking Allowance and looking for progression.
 - Lifestyle choices (Including serving prison sentences).
 - Health (including emotional health).
250. It was explained to the scrutiny panel that some young parents are undertaking Access Courses and those in prison will be receiving some form of training, however, they did fall into the NEET category.
251. The Assistant Director assured Members that measures are being taken to reduce NEET numbers, for example - some young people have been mentored within the Local Authority's Legal Services Team, coaching has been provided for job interview preparation and Environment Services are also actively seeking apprenticeships for children in care.
252. The scrutiny panel was also advised that the Local Authority has included a clause in the recruitment process to ensure that all children in care receive an interview for any Local Authority job they applied for.

Support for care leavers

253. The scrutiny panel was advised that the Pathways Team has implemented a number of measures to support care leavers, including:
- A young person friendly building, with kitchen, shower, laundry and activity rooms.
 - Pathways assessment of need focusing on future career planning, family, general support, finances/budgeting, activities/social and housing.
 - A Pathway Plan, which is reviewed every six months.
 - A post-16 Personal Education Plan (PEP).
 - The employment of a full-time worker to support the reduction of NEETs.

- The allocation of a personal adviser / social worker to each young person.
- Access to the Specialist Nurse for LAC and the LAC Practitioner for CAMHS.
- Access to a duty worker available during office hours Monday – Friday.
- FromCare2work Employability scheme – The Pathways Team is dedicated to the From Care2Work Scheme and has secured the quality mark for the second time. The aim of the scheme is to narrow the gap between care leavers and their peers by creating opportunities and raising aspirations. The quality mark recognises best practice in engaging with young people and developing local solutions to meet the employability support needs of young people.
- The employment of a full-time therapeutic worker who offers educational sessions, drop-in support sessions for foster carers and residential staff, direct 1-1 work with care leavers, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Kick Start group and training.
- Group activities for young people in the evening and during holidays.
- Access to Middlesbrough Children in Care Council (CICC).
- Financial support.
- Access to accredited training.
- Advice, information and guidance
- Peer support; e.g. food shopping, paying bills.
- Links and access to other agencies and organisations.
- Staying put and supported lodgings scheme in Middlesbrough.
- Access to appropriate accommodation and support (The Pathways Team has a joint working protocol with the Thirteen Group).
- Access to regional and national consultation events, training opportunities and projects with the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS).
- Participation and involvement in service development tasks.

Future Improvements

254. The scrutiny panel was advised that in order to ensure that care leavers views are heard and that work continues to improve opportunities for care leavers to successfully engage in education, training and employment - the Pathways Team will be focusing on the following areas of development:

- To support, mentor and encourage young people to continue to run their Children in Care Council.
- To work with stronger communities and other providers to set up a pre apprenticeship training programme, which will incorporate preparation for independence.
- To progress links and ensure care leavers have a 'marker' with the Department of Work and Pensions.
- To monitor the Middlesbrough Care Leavers Charter.
- To produce a newsletter in order raise awareness of issues and ascertain views of care leavers

- To ensure care leavers complete post 18 and 21 questionnaires, in order to ascertain their views, and that the feedback received is collated and analysed to improve service delivery.
- To continue to improve and develop the 'From Care2Work' employability scheme by supporting and sustaining placements and exploring ways to secure follow-on employment and training opportunities, in keeping with the fromCare2work action plan.
- To run a breakfast presentation for local businesses to increase working experience for care leavers.
- To roll out the new rights and entitlements booklet and make sure it is available on the web site.
- To run an emotional wellbeing group.
- To produce a Leaving Care Standard Operational Procedure to provide clear processes around delivering health assessments and Passports.
- To continue with the 'Axxess' support group for young people who are preparing to leave or who have left care.
- To continue to build on the Peer Support mentoring role and independence group within the team.
- To work in partnership with Teesside University to run a motivational day to raise aspirations and to encourage further / higher education and sign up to work experience.
- To monitor the staying put and the supported lodgings schemes in relation need (sufficiency) and to outcomes for young people.
- To ensure that our young people have access to the 'Get Ready for Adult Life' DVD or pack.
- To implement the newly reviewed Middlesbrough Pledge.

Support for disabled young people

255. It was explained that when children in care, who are supported by the Local Authority's Children with Disabilities Team, are approaching the age of 14 - their circumstances and needs are presented to the Transitions Forum, which establishes what support they may need through adolescence and up to the age of 25. On establishing need, the Transitions Team will then allocate a social worker whose role is to co-ordinate services to ensure that the young person receives specialist support throughout their journey to adulthood.
256. The scrutiny panel was informed that, in line with the Care Act 2014, the young person will have a 'person-centred plan' prior to them becoming 18 – this will include an indicative allocation of budget. It was conveyed that, by this time, there will also be an awareness of their eligibility for specialist provision - through the development of the plan and via the 'Tracking Group', which follows the individual's progress after their presentation to the Transitions Forum.
257. The scrutiny panel ascertained that care leavers, who have additional needs, have the same rights to leaving care services - as do any other care leavers. If appropriate, they can receive services up to the age of 25 years and after that any service being provided will remain under review. Members were

notified that if they require ongoing support, they will be referred to the adult services Intervention Team.

The Views of Children and Young People

258. It was highlighted that during the recent Ofsted inspection, care leavers had been very complimentary in respect of the support and the service they receive from the Pathways Team. Members were advised that the views of care leavers are obtained through:
- The completion of post-18 and post-21 questionnaires.
 - Recording the views and opinions at six-monthly reviews of the Pathways Plans.
 - A 'Suggestion Box' being located in the reception area of the Pathways building.
 - The Children in Care Council (CICC) regularly holding events for young people.
 - Encouraging care leavers to participate in service development tasks.
259. The scrutiny panel recognised that care leavers have the opportunity to voice their opinions and share their experiences of leaving care and the support provided.
260. A CICC representative, speaking from personal experience, stated that he wished he had listened to the advice he was given by the Pathways Team with regard to leaving his foster placement at eighteen years of age. He explained that several people at Pathways had tried to encourage him not to move out of his placement but he had not been convinced and left - he now regrets his decision. It was suggested that perhaps other young people might listen to his point of view and take on board his advice more readily than that of the Pathways Team. The Assistant Director added that young people know their own minds and it is not always possible to influence them. However, the Pathways Team will still be there to pick up the pieces if mistakes are made.

Term of Reference: To examine the profile of the professional workforce of social workers and the effectiveness of care planning across the local authority.

261. It is essential that each child has a personalised care plan, which is based on a thorough assessment of their needs, and this is the responsibility of the allocated social worker. Nationally, many local authorities have struggled to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of suitably qualified social workers to do the difficult job of working with vulnerable children. This can be a key cause of poor performance that will also have an adverse effect on the experiences of the children and their carers. Children find it distressing to have a frequent change of worker and can feel uncared for as a result¹⁰. Nationally, children's services are under exceptional pressure with many local authorities reporting a lack of social workers able to deal with growing and complex caseloads.

¹⁰ http://www.cfps.org.uk/domains/cfps.org.uk/local/media/downloads/CfPS_10Questions_web_version.pdf

High staff turnovers and difficulties in hiring experienced staff are only compounding the problem¹¹.

262. The Lead Executive Member for Children's Services, the Executive Director Wellbeing, Care and Learning and the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children's Care provided the scrutiny panel with information on the professional workforce.

Care Planning

263. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that when children are at risk of significant harm, cases transfer swiftly to the duty teams. It was commented that most child protection investigations are undertaken in a timely and focused way. It was explained that child protection conferences lead to effective child protection plans, of which 96% are reviewed within timescales; this is better than similar local authorities.
264. The scrutiny panel was advised that Ofsted also found that there are manageable caseloads in the Assessment and Care Planning Teams, which allows social workers to spend more time with children and their families. This supports stronger and better relationships, leading to interventions that are more effective. It was conveyed, however, that within services for children in care, care plans were judged not to be good, as they lacked detail, clear actions and timescales for outcomes. In the context of the social work workforce, this would suggest a lack of consistency and a need to improve planning. Members were advised that this is being addressed within the Post Inspection Implementation Plan.

The Professional Workforce of Social Workers

265. The scrutiny panel received information on the levels of social work staff vacancies, turnover, stress-related sickness, use of agency and temporary staff, and ratios between newly qualified and experienced social workers – this is outlined below:

Social Work Staff Vacancies	7 Vacancies out of 126 Social Workers, plus 2 maternity leaves
Social Work Staff Turnover	Between September 2014 and September 2015, there were 30 starters and 25 leavers
Stress Related Sickness	During the course of December 2015, 12 Social Workers had a period off work due to sickness ranging from 2 days to 21 days. Whilst some of these were stress related the returns do not differentiate between work related and personal stress.
Use of Agency and Temporary Staff	Historically, the service has rarely used agency staff. Over recent weeks there has been up to 5 agency Social Workers providing cover until vacancies are filled.
Ratio between Newly Qualified and Experienced Social Workers	Of the 126 Social Workers, 46 are recently qualified – 36.5%

¹¹ <http://www.westminster-briefing.com/home/event-detail/newsarticle/effective-recruitment-retention-strategies-for-childrens-social-workers/>

266. The Assistant Director stated that anecdotally the Local Authority has a higher proportion of relatively inexperienced staff but other local authorities tend to use more agency staff. Members were advised that a regional survey is underway in relation to a number of staffing issues - with the aim of enabling local authorities to work together rather than in competition with each other. There are some variations across the region and agency staff were generally paid at a higher rate.

Measures and Strategies to Address Issues

267. It was explained to Members that following recent consultation with staff, to consider staff retention and recruitment, two measures have been introduced:

- Nine Day Fortnight – the opportunity to compress 10 days working into 9; this has been very positively received. Social workers work their contracted hours over fewer days.
- Progression – The service has reviewed its timescales for progression; the historical timescales have been removed and social workers can now progress through pay bands when they can demonstrate, through evidence and assessment, that they have the skills and expertise to progress.

Continuity of Social Worker Support

268. It was highlighted that the Looked After Children Team and Pathways Team are relatively stable; this provides continuity and consistent support for children and young people.

269. However, it was explained that there is less consistency in the Assessment and Care Planning Teams - as there is more likelihood that social workers will move on to more specialist posts.

Social Worker Caseloads

270. It was conveyed that the target average caseload for social workers is 21; at the present time the service is running at 24.4. The average figure reflects newly qualified social workers with protected caseloads of up to 15 and experienced social workers who may have caseloads of 30 plus. Meaning that currently, 46 social workers have a caseload of up to 15 and 80 social workers have caseloads of 30 plus.

271. Ofsted described the caseloads in the Assessment and Care Planning Teams as 'manageable'.

272. The Assistant Director explained that when all Social Worker posts are filled, the caseload is 19 to 20 per social worker. For the first time in five years, the Local Authority is employing agency staff who can pick up the larger and more complex cases. The use of agency staff is a stop gap until the department is fully staffed and the Local Authority is in the process of actively recruiting to vacancies.

Independent Reviewing Officer Caseloads

273. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) caseloads average 100-120, which exceeds the statutory guidance recommendation of 50-70. It was commented that despite the high caseloads IROs are committed and prioritise their work, although, high caseloads have an impact on the IROs' ability to meet with children before reviews and monitor their progress between reviews. It was also reported that the recorded outcomes of these meetings lack detail.

Face-to-Face Work with Children in Care

274. It was noted that social workers spent a significant part of their working week on non-contact activity and national surveys suggest that only 16-17% of their week is spent directly working with service users. The Assistant Director commented that this figure does not include time spent on planning, in Court or writing reports and is based purely on face-to-face contact rather than the whole range of duties. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that social workers have meaningful relationships with children, and assessments of the circumstances of children in care are good and that case recording demonstrates effective work is achieved during statutory visits. However, Ofsted also commented that the timeliness of statutory visits is not good enough to support children and young people and monitor their progress.
275. It was highlighted to the scrutiny panel that the recent introduction of the Liquidlogic database and recording system should release social workers to spend more time with service users; as yet it has not been able to quantify whether contact time has improved.

The Views of Social Workers

276. It was explained that it is difficult to gauge the attitude of social workers to their work without access to the, yet to be available, staff survey. Recent reviews and inspections have shown that the Local Authority has a committed workforce who are very positive about working in and for Middlesbrough.
277. Social workers at all levels are provided with training through in-house provision and through the Middlesbrough Safeguarding Children Board.
278. Members were informed that newly qualified social workers have a mandatory assessed and supported year of employment - during which they receive training, extra supervision and mentoring.
279. It was explained that experienced social workers can and do access a range of training which includes advanced court skills and joint training with the police to "Achieve Best Evidence".

Delivery of What Children in Care Need

280. It was advised that across the service there are strong and positive working relationships with the police, colleagues in health - particularly CAMHS, housing, the voluntary sector and there is evidence of positive working relationships with some schools.
281. It was found that staff work together through the development and implementation of Children in Need Plans, Protection Plans, Care Plans and Pathway Plans. The plans should ensure there are clear, achievable targets and provide the opportunity to review progress against agreed objectives.
282. There are well developed working arrangements to address the needs of children and young people who are at risk of being vulnerable, exploited, missing, or trafficked (VEMT).

Views of Children and Young People

283. Members were told that this is a challenging area for the Children's Services to comment on. The Local Authority receives very few formal complaints from children and young people. Some young people are very positive about their social workers and some are less complimentary. It was identified that further work is required to provide a more definitive response.
284. Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that full consideration of the views of children, parents and all relevant people in the children's lives, is sought and used by social workers to inform assessments. It was also commented that direct work with children and young people is used well, especially to ensure that their views are considered in assessments. However, it was detailed that, although historical information is routinely reported in assessments, chronologies are not regularly used to help analyse or identify patterns of risk. It was also commented that the views of children and young people do not inform care plans well enough and that care plans lack timescales and detail.

Term of Reference: To determine the responsibilities of corporate parents and how the role can be enhanced.
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285. Looking after other people's children is one of the most important things local authorities do. It is the responsibility of all councillors, not just the lead member for children's services and officers¹². Although councillors will not all have the same level of direct involvement with services for children in care, they all share responsibility as the corporate parent for satisfying themselves about the quality and effectiveness of the system¹³.
286. The Lead Executive Member for Children's Services, the Executive Director Wellbeing, Care and Learning and the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and

¹² http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=ed411531-cef8-4382-8824-a05c9363cc80&groupId=10180

¹³ http://www.cfps.org.uk/domains/cfps.org.uk/local/media/downloads/CfPS_10Questions_web_version.pdf

Children's Care provided the scrutiny panel with information on the role of corporate parents.

Corporate Parenting

287. Councillors do not receive formal training regarding their roles and responsibilities as corporate parents, although a Members' Briefing had taken place on 13 July 2015. It was suggested that offering a stronger range of training opportunities for Councillors would be a positive way forward.
288. It was explained that corporate parenting is different from being an 'ordinary' parent and Councillors sometimes struggle to know what they can actually do to demonstrate their commitment - some choose to become a member of the Forum for Looked After Children (FLAC). Following the recent inspection, Ofsted reported that FLAC is highly effective in ensuring that issues for children, young people and care leavers in Middlesbrough are addressed. Councillors also have the opportunity to take part in Regulation 33 visits and other arranged visits to residential homes.
289. It was highlighted that all Councillors, whatever role they take on, should champion the cause of children in care and care leavers when carrying out their duties.

Meeting with Children and Young People

290. At present the CICC does not meet regularly with Councillors. However, it can be arranged for Councillors to attend CICC sessions to speak to children in care and young people, or arrangements can be made for them to meet children and young people from the Children Looked After and Pathways Teams.

Advocacy Services for Children in Care

291. As previously mentioned, the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) has been commissioned to provide a service to all children and young people in care and provide an independent perspective in terms of advocacy and complaints.

The Pledge

292. A copy of Middlesbrough's Pledge was tabled for Members' information (see attached at [Appendix 1](#)). The Pledge is a promise by Local Authority to children in care and was developed and approved by young people.

Fulfilling the Local Authority's Responsibilities as a 'Corporate Parent'

293. All Councillors should take an interest in their role as corporate parents and commit themselves to ensuring they have information about the following issues:

- The role and function of the corporate parent and the current structures and processes to support the corporate parenting function.
- Identifying the range of diverse needs and experiences of local children and young people for whom the corporate parent role is designed.
- Finding ways to embed the voice of children in care and young people and establish a child-centred approach to corporate parenting.
- Developing key lines of inquiry and key challenge questions to ask about the different aspects of looked-after children's wellbeing.
- Exploring examples of good practice for corporate parenting and indicators of an effective local approach including approaches to monitoring outcomes for local children.

CONCLUSIONS

294. Based on the evidence, given throughout the investigation, the scrutiny panel concluded that:

Commissioning Services

- a) Services for children in care are provided through a mix of in-house Local Authority provision and commissioned services – from providers in the private and voluntary sector. The Local Authority views the commissioning process as an important mechanism for meeting the diverse needs of children in care. The commissioning process includes the assessment of need, the development of a plan to meet those needs, the procurement of services and then the comprehensive monitoring and reviewing of those services, which results in an audit trail. It is evident that there is a commitment to working in a child-centred way - the views and experiences of children and young people inform the commissioning, planning, delivery and evaluation of services. When complete, the Market Position Statement will provide details of existing services, identify gaps in provision and outline future demand. Once developed, it would be beneficial for the Market Position Statement to contain measures and strategies that will be used to - develop a shared perspective of supply and demand for services and seek active cooperation of providers.

Placements

- b) In Middlesbrough, there is a strong focus on providing placements that are stable and work well for children and young people. Placement stability is good with placement breakdowns being low, which in turn is a critical success factor in respect of improving outcomes for children in care. Good working practices are in place to ensure children and young people live in homes that meet their needs and provide safe and stable care for them. In Middlesbrough, children in care are supported to develop secure attachments with their carers and there is a strong commitment to placing brothers and sisters together. Furthermore, the Local Authority facilitates and supports children to maintain relationships with their families and other people who are important to them, however, this is a complex area of work and arrangements require careful consideration. Placement stability is supported by good matching, high quality assessment and planning, regular supervision and

comprehensive training. Increasing placement stability for children in care is the major driver for much of the improvement activity in Children's Services.

Education

- c) The role of the Local Authority's Virtual School is to ensure that effective systems are in place to improve the educational experience and outcomes for children in care. The Virtual School has responsibility for ensuring all children in care have a Personal Education Plan (PEP), which is an evolving record of what needs to happen for children in care - to enable them to make expected progress and fulfil their potential. In respect of the PEP process, further action is required to ensure that - the PEP process is streamlined, PEPs detail specific steps that inform pupils what it is they need to do to progress, social workers undertake a central role and information is included on how each school uses the pupil premium to raise the attainment of children in care - evidence demonstrates the benefits of additional tuition and one-to-one support.
- d) In Middlesbrough, evidence suggests that early interventions have a positive impact on children in care at primary school and it remains a consistent theme that, by the end of KS2, children in care achieve broadly in line with the wider cohort of children in Middlesbrough schools. To ensure attainment levels continue to increase, the sector would benefit from a review being undertaken of the support that is offered in primary schools with findings being analysed to implement best practice across the sector. Good practices, that promote the educational achievement of children in care, are evident throughout the secondary school sector. At KS4, Middlesbrough's children in care achieve better results than their looked-after peers across the country and maintain a year-on-year rise in achievement. However, the number of Middlesbrough's children in care achieving 5 A*-C grades (including English and mathematics) needs to be improved. There is a need for further work between the Local Authority and the secondary school sector to discuss, formulate, share and embed best practice across the sector - particularly in respect of improving the PEP process; ensuring a smooth transition between primary and secondary school; monitoring, recording, reviewing, reporting and sharing information and ensuring that the Pupil Premium is primarily used for additional tuition and one-to-one support.
- e) There is evidence of collaborative working between professionals and services, which helps in promoting high-quality and consistent support for children and young people in care. However, partnership working could be further enhanced by the implementation of a joint working protocol and a system, which is used across partners, for tracking the progress of individual children's cases – such as CPOMS, which is a revolutionary software application for monitoring child protection and safeguarding issues.

Health and Wellbeing

- f) The Local Authority has a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children it looks after; this includes the promotion of the child's physical,

emotional and mental health. In Middlesbrough, the health needs of children and young people who come into care are well considered and met through timely and thorough health assessments. There are good arrangements in place to maintain the health of children and young people in care and this is supported by 2014 data collected in respect of health checks. However, challenges and delays are experienced for accessing services for children in care placed out of the area. Work needs to be undertaken to ensure that children, who are placed outside of Middlesbrough, receive timely access to appropriate health and mental health services.

- g) The contribution of health services is good. There are dedicated highly skilled professionals from the South Tees NHS Foundation Trust and the South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group whose primary role is to promote the health and wellbeing of children and young people in care and those leaving care. The co-location of the Specialist Nurse for LAC and the LAC Practitioner for CAMHS, in the Pathways Team, is strong practice and must continue - as it is a fundamental/crucial integrated service that results in care leavers being able to access services quickly and when they need them most. Evidence suggests that schools would benefit from being able to access expert advice and guidance from the Specialist Nurse for LAC and the LAC Practitioner for CAMHS. Some secondary schools highlighted that there is a demand for mental health services and expressed concern in respect of the lack of provision available to promote the emotional and social wellbeing of young people. This issue warrants further investigation by the Health Scrutiny Panel.
- h) The Local Authority uses the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to assess the emotional wellbeing of each child in care. Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) play a crucial role in assessing and meeting the needs identified as part of the SDQ screening process. In Middlesbrough, whilst the SDQs are being completed, evidence suggests that the questionnaires are not being utilised. Measures must be implemented to ensure that SDQ information is used and analysed effectively. SDQs are fundamental in determining the scale of the emotional/ behavioural problems of children in care in the area, therefore helping to inform the appropriate levels of service provision. In the longer term, data from SDQ returns can provide an indication on how effective the service provision provided is in meeting the needs of children in care.

Adoption Process

- i) Adoption gives vulnerable children the greatest possible stability, in a permanent home with a permanent family. The Local Authority demonstrates a strong commitment to pursuing adoption. Adoption is considered at an early stage for all children who may benefit and parallel planning is well established. For children and young people, the planning and management of transition to permanent placements is thorough and their wishes and feelings are considered. The Local Authority's adoption process is comprehensive and the length and intensity of the process is designed to test the commitment of prospective adopters. Local support and arrangements are in place to ensure the adoption process is a success and that outcomes are monitored; however,

the systems for tracking the progress of cases need to be improved. A bid for funding has been secured, with a view to forming a Tees Valley Regional Adoption Agency. It is anticipated that the development of this agency will speed up matching, improve adopter recruitment, develop adoption support and reduce costs.

- j) The Local Authority has successfully achieved adoption for children, despite this taking longer than national thresholds for some harder-to-place children. Every adoption has a different set of circumstances and the Local Authority always strives to get it right, even if that means going outside of the national thresholds - the right match is the Local Authority's primary consideration. The Family Placement Panel is vital in the process and functions effectively in meeting adoption and fostering arrangements. However, the Local Authority would benefit from collating and analysing feedback from applicants - to support continuous improvement.

Fostering Service

- k) The Local Authority's Fostering Service ensures that the welfare, safety and individual needs of children in care are central to the care provided by foster carers. Foster families play a valuable role in stabilising and caring for children for both short and longer periods of time. In respect of the Local Authority's Fostering Service, there is a robust assessment process, careful matching and effective support in place to ensure placement stability. Positive feedback is received from foster carers in respect of the fundamental support network in place, however, there is need to further develop and support relationships between foster carers, social workers and the contact team.
- l) The Fostering Service provides a robust retention system by ensuring foster carers receive high-quality supervision and support. However, there is a shortage of people willing to take on the foster carer role. The Local Authority recognises that its resource of foster carers is not sufficient to cope with demand and actions are being taken to address this situation, for example - the Local Authority has increased the allowances for foster carers so that they are in line with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). One of the best ways of recruiting adopters and foster carers is through networking and there is a need for the Local Authority to financially invest in order to recruit more foster carers, particularly for older children and teenagers.

Residential Care

- m) For some children and young people, placement in a residential home may be a more suitable option than a foster home, for example – they may find it hard to cope with family-based life as a result of their experiences or they may have highly complex and challenging needs. The Local Authority is committed to ensuring it has a range of residential placements available, for children and young people, which deliver high-quality care to match each child's individual needs. Extensive work has been undertaken to improve the ratings of in-house provision and work must continue to achieve and sustain improvement for each home. The Local Authority is currently working with Darlington,

Stockton, Hartlepool and Redcar in developing a Tees Valley Residential Framework Contract, which will commence from 1 April 2016. This will enable the authorities to control price, and improve quality, with all providers that successfully apply for the framework. In addition, £423,000 has been identified to purchase and secure a property that will be used as a residential home for children with disabilities – this will ensure that the Local Authority is in a position to offer in-house provision to this group.

- n) A challenge for the Local Authority's is to reduce the number of children and young people in residential care and increase those in family placements. The Local Authority is striving to achieve this reduction through a number of mitigation measures overseen by the Transformation Board, including increasing the number of foster carers and embedding the Return to Middlesbrough Project in mainstream provision.

Young People Leaving Care

- o) The Pathways Team and the Transitions Team are committed to ensuring that the transition to adulthood is effectively and sensitively planned. The planning is person-centred and aims to ensure that the young person has the maximum opportunity to live a happy, healthy and fulfilling life and make a positive contribution to their community. The co-location of professionals from a range of different agencies ensures that young people leaving care receive the necessary support required to achieve their full potential. The number of Middlesbrough care leavers in education, training and employment (ETE) is above the national average; however, work needs to continue to achieve a further increase in numbers. In respect of the feedback from care leavers, it was recognised that further work is required to ensure completion of the post-18 and post-21 questionnaires and the analysis of findings - to improve service delivery.

Professional Workforce of Social Workers

- p) Middlesbrough's workforce of social workers is relatively stable and there are initiatives in place to retain staff. This stability enables social workers to develop meaningful relationships with the children and families they are working with. However, there is a need for the Local Authority to continue to recruit to vacancies - this will alleviate current caseload demands on staff, therefore improving capacity to undertake statutory visits within expected timescales. There is also a requirement for the Local Authority to undertake work to ensure all care plans are sufficiently specific and measurable to drive progress and enable effective monitoring and review. Furthermore, work is required to address the current demands on the under-resourced IRO Service - a review of the current staffing structure needs to be undertaken, with a view of recruiting additional staff. Furthermore, the need to work with other local authorities in the region, to identify and address recruitment and retention issues, is seen as crucial.

Corporate Parenting

- q) Although Councillors do not have the same level of direct involvement with services for children in care, they all share responsibility as the corporate parent for satisfying themselves about the quality and effectiveness of the system. Middlesbrough's Pledge demonstrates the Local Authority's strong commitment to corporate parenting. The Local Authority recognises the importance of strong corporate parenting and embedding the voice of the child in care in local practice. The Children in Care Council (CiCC) provides a valuable mechanism for enabling children in care to have a voice in the decisions and priorities of the Local Authority. The CiCC is well supported, mentored and encouraged by the Local Authority. To support Councillors in their role - formal training should be accessible, which provides an overview of the role and functions of the corporate parent and supports them to champion the needs and interests of children in care. Councillors should have access to ongoing training and regular briefings. Furthermore, there is a need for the Local Authority to develop practices to ensure corporate parenting responsibilities are considered across all services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

295. The Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel recommends to the Executive:
- a) That the Local Authority's Market Position Statement contains detailed information on strategies and measures that will be used:
 - To develop a common and shared perspective of supply and demand for care services.
 - To seek active cooperation of providers.
 - b) That the Virtual School conducts a review of the support that is offered to children in care in primary and secondary schools and works to implement best practice across the sectors, using the sub-group's findings as a basis for evidence gathering.
 - c) That the Virtual School facilitates and supports the development of a forum, whereby designated teachers are invited to meet with key professionals from the Local Authority and the health sector to share best practice, expertise, take early preventative action and commission services.
 - d) That the Virtual School works with schools to facilitate and effectively manage an extended transition between primary and secondary education, ensuring children in care are provided with effective and seamless support.
 - e) That the Local Authority engages with schools to:
 - Actively promote the use of the pupil premium to access additional tuition and one-to-one support
 - Ensure that the pupil premium is primarily used to improve the educational attainment of those entitled to the funding.

- f) That the Virtual School put measures in place to ensure:
- That the PEP process is streamlined – each PEP being completed electronically and the document being held in one centralised location, enabling all the relevant people to access, develop, review and update the document as and when required.
 - That each PEP details specific steps that inform pupils what it is they need to do to progress.
 - That social workers undertake a central role in the PEP process (this links with recommendation h)
 - That each PEP contains information on how the school uses the pupil premium to raise the attainment of that particular child in care.
- g) That the Local Authority works in partnership with CPOMS :
- To encourage every Middlesbrough school to sign-up to CPOMS.
 - To investigate whether CPOMS could be used by the Local Authority to track the progress of individual child cases.
- h) In respect of all the organisations involved in providing services for children in care - that a joint working protocol is developed that outlines the responsibilities of each professional, what each organisation can expect from the other, how the work will be managed and when and how information should be shared across organisations.
- i) That the Local Authority works with the health sector to:
- Investigate ways to improve access to services for children and young people placed outside of the Middlesbrough area, therefore, ensuring timely access to appropriate health and mental health services.
 - Implement mechanisms to ensure schools can gain access to expert advice and guidance from the Specialist Nurse for LAC and the LAC Practitioner for CAMHS - in respect of Middlesbrough's children in care.
- j) That the Health Scrutiny Panel investigates the provision of services to promote the emotional and social wellbeing of all young people.
- k) That the Local Authority implements measures to ensure that information obtained from strengths and difficulties questionnaires (SDQs) is used and analysed effectively to:
- Determine the scale of the emotional/ behavioural problems of children in care in the area, therefore helping to inform the appropriate levels of service provision.
 - Provide an indication on how effective the service provision provided is in meeting the needs of children in care.
- l) That the Specialist Nurse for LAC remains located in the Pathways Team.
- m) That the feedback received from applicants, attending the Family Placement Panel, is collated and analysed to support continuous improvement in Children's Services.

- n) That the Local Authority reviews arrangements to ensure that working relationships are improved between foster carers, social workers and the contact team.
- o) That the Local Authority financially invests in networking to recruit more foster carers, particularly for older children and teenagers
- p) That the Local Authority continues to work with children's homes and that a working group is established to identify, discuss and implement best practice across the sector. The primary aim of the group being to achieve and sustain an outstanding status for children's homes - using Ofsted's research and analysis documents. Furthermore, that Children's Services facilitate Regulation 33 visits, therefore ensuring visits are undertaken regularly.
- q) That the Local Authority develops a detailed action plan to improve the participation of care leavers in education, employment and training.
- r) That the Pathways Team makes every effort to ensure completion of post-18 and post-21 questionnaires and that information obtained is collated and analysed in order to improve service delivery.
- s) That the Local Authority:
 - Implements a recruitment campaign to actively recruit to the social worker vacancies.
 - Undertakes a review of the current staffing structure of the IRO service.
 - Works with other local authorities in the region to identify and address recruitment and retention issues.
- t) That the Local Authority develops a more efficient monitoring system and parallel support mechanisms to ensure that all care plans are sufficiently specific and measurable to drive progress and enable effective monitoring and review.
- u) That the Local Authority arranges formal training for Councillors, which provides an overview of the role and functions of the corporate parent and supports them to champion the needs and interests of children in care.
- v) That the Local Authority implements practices to ensure corporate parenting responsibilities are considered across all services.

ACRONYMS

296. A-Z listing of common acronyms used in the report:

- ARC – Achievement Reintegration Care
- BME – Black Minority Ethnic
- CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- CCG – Clinical Commissioning Group
- CICC – Children in Care Council

- CQC – Care Quality Commission
- ETE – Education Training Employment
- FPP – Family Placement Panel
- GPS – Grammar Punctuation Spelling
- IFA –Independent Fostering Agency
- IRO – Independent Reviewing Officer
- JCUH – James Cook University Hospital
- JHWS – Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- KS – Key Stage
- LAC – Looked After Children
- NEET – Not in Education Employment Training
- NHS – National Health Service
- NYAS – National Youth Advisory Service
- PEP – Personal Education Plan
- RWM – Reading Writing Mathematics
- SEN – Special Educational Needs
- SDQ – Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
- VEMT – Vulnerable Exploited Missing Trafficked
- VSH – Virtual School Head

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- L Bailey – Chair of the Children in Care Council (CICC)
- R Broad – Director for Wellbeing, Care and Learning
- J Bunn - Virtual School Head
- M Carr – Lead Executive Member for Children’s Services
- A Coulson – Pathways Manager
- J Dalby - Service Manager, Support and Development
- H Dean - Looked After Children Practitioner, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
- C Fallon - Head of Achievement
- A Ferguson. - Designated Nurse, Safeguarding and Looked After Children - South Tees Clinical Commissioning Group
- E Kunonga - Director of Public Health
- R Mawer - Commissioning Manager
- L McLaughlin - Personal Adviser, Stronger Families
- C Nugent - Specialist Nurse, Looked After Children - South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- N Pocklington - Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Children’s Care
- N Scott - Placement Manager
- H Smithies - Head of Nursing (Safeguarding) - South Tees Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- J Wiles - Head of Nursing (Neonates, Children and Young People)

- L Woodhouse - Team Manager, Family Placement Service

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- Acklam Grange
- Kings Academy
- Macmillan Academy
- Outwood Academy Acklam
- Outwood Academy Ormesby
- Trinity Catholic College
- Unity City Academy

BACKGROUND PAPERS

299. The following Council sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Agenda papers and minutes of the Children and Learning Scrutiny Panel meetings held on 5 August 2015, 9 September 2015, 30 September 2015, 21 October 2015, 11 November 2015, 13 January 2016 and 25 February 2016.

COUNCILLOR JEANETTE WALKER

CHAIR OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

Contact:

Georgina Moore
Scrutiny Support Officer, Legal & Democratic Services
Telephone: 01642 729711 (direct line)
Email:georgina_moore@middlesbrough.gov.uk

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