

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting11th March 2010

1. Title of Item/Report

EIT Review of Child Placements - Report of Children & Young People Select Committee

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to the Children and Young People Select Committee report of their Efficiency, Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Child Placements, the first in a three year programme of efficiency and improvement reviews. It explored whether the Borough was meeting the assessed needs of looked after children, i.e. was the available provision (either in-house or purchased) sufficient, was the Council getting value for money, and was there potential for commissioning the services in a more cost effective way without compromising the focus on achieving the five "Every Child Matters" outcomes.

In order to provide some structure the review was divided into separate, but linked, workstreams. They were: fostering and adoption services; residential placements; complex needs; and placements with family and friends.

It was identified that the Council's fostering service needed to be able to meet the current and future demand for placements, as well as recruiting more foster carers who were able to take placements of sibling groups, teenagers and who were able to commit to children in the long term. An increase in the number of adopted children being referred to Social Care and the Children and Mental Health Service (CAMHS) was being experienced. Increasingly children were being diagnosed with attachment disorders or difficulties, which in turn could place considerable pressure upon the adoptive family. The expected challenge was to develop a coordinated response to adoption support from all of the agencies who may come into contact with the children.

Stockton Council placed some young people out of borough in variety of settings and for a number of reasons. This time last year, the Authority had 33 looked after children placed out of the area, of these, 15 were placed within external residential placements at an annual cost in excess

of £2.5 million. The placement costs were high in comparison with in-house provision due partly to capacity with only 6 long-term residential placements within Stockton and also due to the complexity of some of the placements.

A number of challenges were recognised to exist within the provision of services for children with complex needs. These included an increase in the number of secondary aged students with increasingly complex mental health needs being referred which was putting pressure on the provision at Redhill; providing for an increasingly diverse and personalised curriculum in a range of settings and across a wide range of ages; the development of a new single hospital with increased emphasis on community based services; and the building at Redhill not being wholly fit for purpose.

Private Fostering Arrangements existed for parents, (or persons with parental responsibility) and the carer without the involvement of the local authority. The Committee was alerted to the tension between the legislation, which promotes family and friends wherever possible, as giving preference over 'stranger' foster carers. Fostering service regulations and standards required that family and friends foster carers be assessed in the same way as 'stranger' foster carers. If a number of family members came forward all were required to be assessed which could be time consuming for social care staff as well as delaying the placement.

RESOLVED that:-

1.The work the Corporate Director for Children, Education, Social Care is doing with the Regional, Improvement and Efficiency Partnership and the work with the Director colleagues in the sub-region continues.

2.The creation of a specific full time officer post be approved to deliver the marketing of the fostering service on a 2 year fixed term contract; the location of the officer to be determined as this post could be part of the Council's centralised Communications team or be located within the Children's Services department.

3.The Council develop a kinship care policy which will identify the levels of advice, information and support that would be available in differing circumstances, with any developments within the policy being subject to available finances.

4.To increase availability of sub-regional provision for "hard to place" children / young people with Complex Needs officers be given the flexibility to develop the appropriate provision on a Borough-wide basis

should this be necessary and that the Children & Young People Select Committee's support and encouragement for the continuing work of the Tees Valley Directors' Group in this regard, be noted.

5. Subject to further appraisal of the financial implications, Stockton Borough Council develop additional local authority residential provision for looked-after children.

6. The Council look to explore with Children's Trust partners opportunities to commission therapeutic interventions for children who have been adopted.

7. The Council and its partners in the Children's Trust explore ways of raising awareness of adoption issues and the role of agencies within the Children's Trust.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The Committee's review was part of the three year programme of efficiency and improvement reviews across all the Council's activities in response to the slow down in the national economy and the impact this would have on the borough's Medium Term Financial Plan, coupled with increased expectations and demand for services. The EIT programme's aim was to maintain high performance, continue to improve satisfaction and enable further improvement across the borough.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

Councillor Mrs Womphrey declared a Personal, Non-Prejudicial interest in respect of the item entitled EIT Review of Child Placements-Report of Children & Young People Select Committee as a result of her role as a member on the Child Placements Panel.

6. Details of any Dispensations

N/A

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

Not later than Midnight on Friday, 19th March 2010

Proper Officer
15 March 2010