

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

11 MARCH 2010

**REPORT OF CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE SELECT
COMMITTEE**

CABINET DECISION

Children & Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Cunningham

EFFICIENCY, IMPROVEMENT AND TRANSFORMATION (EIT) REVIEW OF CHILD PLACEMENTS

1. Summary

The Children and Young People Select Committee undertook an 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 is meeting the assessed needs of looked after children, i.e. is the available provision (either in-house or purchased) sufficient, is the Council getting value for money, and is there potential for commissioning the services in a more cost effective way without compromising the focus on achieving the five “Every Child Matters” outcomes.

2. Recommendations

The Children and Young People Select Committee recommend:

1. That 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 to deliver the marketing of the fostering service on a 2 year fixed term contract. The location of the officer is to be determined as this post could be part of the Council's centralised communication 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. Any developments within the policy would be subject to available finances.
4. To increase availability of sub-regional provision for "hard to place" children / young people with Complex Needs and that officers be given the flexibility to develop the appropriate provision on a Borough-wide basis should this be necessary. The Committee support and encourage the continuing work of the Tees Valley Directors' Group in this regard.
5. That, 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 Recommendations/Decision(s)

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

4. Members Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting considering the business is being held -

- in a case where the Member is attending a meeting (including a meeting of a select committee) but only for the purpose of making representations, answering questions or giving evidence, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under statutory right or otherwise, immediately after making representations, answering questions or giving evidence as the case may be;
- in any other case, whenever it becomes apparent that the business is being considered at the meeting;

and must not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc; whether or not they are a Member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting (unless the interest arises solely from the Member's membership of, or position of control or management on any other body to which the Member was appointed or nominated by the Council, or on any other body exercising functions of a public nature, when the interest only needs to be declared if and when the Member speaks on the matter), and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room, subject to and in accordance with the provisions referred to above.

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SUMMARY

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Young People Select Committee recommend:

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DETAIL

1. Providing residential, fostering and adoptive placements for children is a low-volume, high cost and high reputational activity. The issue explored was whether the Borough could meet the assessed needs of the individual children in a more cost effective way without compromising the focus on achieving the five "Every Child Matters" outcomes.
2. 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.
3. It was identified that the Council's fostering service needs to be able to meet the current and future demand for placements, as well as recruiting more foster carers who are able to take placements of sibling groups, teenagers and who are able to commit to children in the long term. The Committee recognised that recruitment and marketing is a specialism but that it is often an added pressure for social workers and, as such, the Council may well improve its ability to recruit and compete with other providers if its recruitment and marketing strategy was professionalised.
4. For the adoption service 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 are being diagnosed with attachment disorders or difficulties, which in turn can place considerable pressure upon the adoptive family. The expected challenge will be to develop a coordinated response to adoption support from all of the agencies who may come into contact with the children.
5. Stockton Council places 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 are 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. The Committee supported the view to extend in-house provision as such provision has been shown to be cost effective in comparison to the private and voluntary sector and average costs when compared to other local authorities. There will continue to be a need for emergency placements, however more planned placements in residential care would make it easier to plan and manage supply and demand in the market.
6. A number of challenges are recognised to exist within the provision of services for children with complex needs. These include an increase in the number of secondary aged students with increasingly complex mental health needs being referred which is 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. As a result the Committee supported an increase in the availability of sub-regional provision for "hard to place" children/young people with Complex Needs

7. Private Fostering Arrangements exist 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 require 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 are required to be assessed which could be time consuming for social care staff as well as delaying the placement. The Committee was therefore keen to see a kinship care policy developed to address the identified issues in order that advice, information and support would be available to deal with the differing circumstances.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

8. It is estimated that Recommendation 2 could cost approximately £52,000 with potential net savings of £48,000. This recommendation will be cost effective if it reduces Independent Fostering Agency use by at least 2 child placements.
9. Recommendation 4 could lead to savings of up to £200,000 per annum from the Dedicated Schools Grant and at a possibly similar level from the SBC budget.
10. Recommendation 5 has the potential saving of between £11,000 and £443,000 per annum.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

11. There are no specific legal implications emanating from the review at this stage.

RISK ASSESSMENT

12. This review of child placements is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

13. The services covered by this review impact upon ensuring effective arrangements for safeguarding and dignity in care, a key improvement priority for health and well-being.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

14. This report has been subject to an Equality Impact Assessment and the recommendations have been assessed as having, in the main, a neutral impact. A positive impact will be achieved for equality of opportunity for looked after children. The impact of the recommendations will need to be subject to an ongoing monitoring process, and this will be included in the associated action plan. The full EIA is available on request.

CORPORATE PARENTING

15. This review deals directly with the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities and aims to improve services and opportunities for children and young people looked after by the Council and who are either accommodated, in care or remanded/detained.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

16. No specific consultation exercise was undertaken

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Background Papers

Baseline reports for each of the services under review were provided to the Committee at the following meetings:

15 July 2009 – Fostering and Adoption Services
19 August 2009 – Residential Placements
9 September 2009 – Complex and Additional Needs
16 September 2009 – Placements with Family and Friends

Options reports were presented to the Committee at the following meetings:

18 November 2009 - Residential Placements; Placements with Family and Friends
2 December 2009 – Fostering Services (Marketing)
9 December 2009 - Complex and Additional Needs

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Not ward specific.

Property

No implications at this stage.