

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

8 MARCH 2012

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Mrs McCoy

EIT REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

1. Summary

The efficiency, improvement and transformation (EIT) review of children's social care was a year 3 gateway review undertaken under the auspices of the arts, leisure and culture (ALC) select committee. The review forms part of Stockton-on-Tees borough council's three year EIT programme of reviews of all council services.

The project scope for the review was agreed by ALC select committee on 26 October 2011, the base line information was reviewed on 1 December 2011 and the final report approved on 23 February 2012.

The review considered the full range of children's social care services provided by Stockton-on-Tees borough council and was undertaken against the backdrop of well documented workload pressures. Like the majority of local authorities nationally and regionally, Stockton-on-Tees borough council has experienced an upsurge in the numbers of referrals following the death of Peter Connelly in Haringey. It is also considered likely that the current economic climate is at least partially responsible for this rise, as financial hardship puts families under increased pressure and stress. The increase in the numbers of referrals has translated into unprecedented workload pressures throughout the children's social care system. As a result of these pressures, it was accepted at the outset of this review that cashable savings were unlikely due to the statutory duty to provide children's social care services.

Although the review concluded that fundamental transformational change is not required, a number of areas were identified where service improvements were considered crucial in order to ensure the service is able to cope with increasing workload pressures, is provided in the most cost effective manner and achieves the best possible outcomes for children.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Formally approve the recommendations in the attached EIT review of children's social care report.
2. Authorise the commencement of a 30 day formal consultation period with staff included in the review.

3. Delegate authority to the corporate director for children, education and social care in conjunction with lead cabinet member to implement the new staffing structures on completion of the consultation.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To produce efficiencies and improvements in the delivery of children's social care services as part of Stockton-on-Tees borough council's EIT programme in order to improve outcomes for children and families in receipt of children's social care services.

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 (**paragraphs 10 and 11 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.

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

8 MARCH 2012

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

EIT REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

SUMMARY

The efficiency, improvement and transformation (EIT) review of children's social care was a year 3 gateway review undertaken under the auspices of the arts, leisure and culture (ALC) select committee. The review forms part of Stockton-on-Tees borough council's three year EIT programme of reviews of all council services.

The project scope for the review was agreed by ALC select committee on 26 October 2011, the base line information was reviewed on 1 December 2011 and the final report approved on 23 February 2012.

The review considered the full range of children's social care services provided by Stockton-on-Tees borough council and was undertaken against the backdrop of well documented workload pressures. Like the majority of local authorities nationally and regionally, Stockton-on-Tees borough council has experienced an upsurge in the numbers of referrals following the death of Peter Connelly in Haringey. It is also considered likely that the current economic climate is at least partially responsible for this rise, as financial hardship puts families under increased pressure and stress. The increase in the numbers of referrals has translated into unprecedented workload pressures throughout the children's social care system. As a result of these pressures, it was accepted at the outset of this review that cashable savings were unlikely due to the statutory duty to provide children's social care services.

Although the review concluded that fundamental transformational change is not required, a number of areas were identified where service improvements were considered crucial in order to ensure the service is able to cope with increasing workload pressures, is provided in the most cost effective manner and achieves the best possible outcomes for children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Formally approve the recommendations in the attached EIT review of children's social care report.
2. Authorise the commencement of a 30 day formal consultation period with staff included in the review.
3. Delegate authority to the corporate director for children, education and social care in conjunction with lead cabinet member to implement the new staffing structures on completion of the consultation.

BACKGROUND

- 1 The provision of children's social care services is a statutory duty placed upon local authorities, primarily by the children act 1989, children act 2004 and children (leaving care) act 2000.
2. The strict legislative and policy framework within which these services are provided means that there is relatively little scope for genuine transformation or radically different models of service delivery.
3. There are well documented workload pressures in children's social care nationally, with the majority of local authorities reporting a significant upsurge in referrals following the tragic death of Peter Connelly in Haringey. It is also considered likely that the economic climate is at least partially responsible for this rise, as financial hardship puts families under increased pressure and stress.
4. This trend has been mirrored locally with a marked rise in numbers of referrals which has translated into significant workload pressures throughout the social care system. These issues have been the subject of regular reports to Cabinet on a quarterly basis since July 2009. To illustrate this trend, in March 2009 there were 212 children subject to a child protection plan and 239 looked after children. By December 2011, this had risen to 301 and 336 respectively.
5. This has resulted in significant budget pressures, notably the independent fostering agency budget which is set at £3.265m for 2011/12 and projected to overspend by £86k, the children's homes agency placements budget which is set at £2.536m for 2011-12 and projected to overspend by £982k and finally the social work staffing budget which is set at £3.107m for 2011/12 and projected to overspend by £265k (all projections based on the position at 31 December 2011).
6. The key recommendations arising from the EIT review of child placements included the creation of a marketing officer post, development of a kinship (family and friends) care policy and exploration of the viability of developing additional local authority residential provision for looked after children. All of these recommendations have been fully implemented.
7. The recommendations to create a marketing officer post and explore the viability of developing additional residential provision were both made on an 'invest to save' principle and are likely to have a significant positive impact on the independent fostering agency and children's homes agency placements budgets in 2012/13 and beyond.
8. It was accepted at the outset of this review that cashable savings were unlikely due to the statutory duty to provide children's social care services and the ongoing workload pressures outlined above. Notwithstanding this, greater efficiencies in service provision could potentially result in both improved outcomes for children and non cashable efficiencies in service delivery.

DETAIL

9. This EIT review has been a timely opportunity to review the existing children's social care service and ensure that this provides the best possible outcomes for children and families in Stockton-on-Tees within the available resources.
10. There has been a high level of interest and engagement from staff in the review and the proposed recommendations are heavily influenced by staff and indeed service user feedback.
11. In general terms, the children's social care service provides positive outcomes for children in Stockton-on-Tees, as evidenced by a range of external inspections and internal quality assurance mechanisms.
12. Although a range of alternative models of service delivery were considered as part of the review, based on practice in other local authorities nationally, the project team did not consider a fundamental review of structures or processes to be necessary, or indeed desirable. In addition, some areas of the service had recently been subject to individual service reviews. In the interests of continuous improvement a number of areas were identified where further evolutionary change, as opposed to transformation, was deemed to be required.
13. The proposed recommendations are designed to achieve three key aims:
 - To make the service more responsive and flexible to the needs of service users, by aiming to reduce the number of unnecessary changes of social worker and team required for any children and families in receipt of social care services.
 - To ensure the service is better able to cope with increasing workload pressures, by sharing the workload more evenly across social work teams and enhancing the professional development of staff.
 - To enable the service to be provided in the most efficient and cost effective manner by reducing the current reliance on temporary arrangements and costly agency staff.
14. It is important to stress that should the current workload pressures begin to reduce over time the proposed structure will enable the level of service provision to be scaled back according to need.
15. Taken together, these recommendations are considered crucial in order to ensure the service continues to move forward in a positive direction and is able to achieve the best possible outcomes for children in Stockton-on-Tees within the available resources.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

16. The current costs of providing the service exceeds the budget by £330k and this is being funded through service managed surplus in this year. Although the intention is to ensure that the service operates within budget in the medium term, given the current level of looked after children, this will require a structure which exceeds the current budget by £80k. Funding for transitional pressures is identified in the medium term financial plan report and this additional cost, which is anticipated to be for 2 years will be funded from this area. The long term position will also be influenced by any potential changes through the numbers of looked after children and the care arrangements in place.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

17. As outlined above, the provision of children's social care services is a statutory duty placed upon local authorities, primarily by the children act 1989, children act 2004 and children (leaving care) act 2000.
18. The strict legislative and policy framework within which these services are provided means that there is relatively little scope for genuine transformation or radically different models of service delivery.

RISK ASSESSMENT

19. There are three risks relating to this area of activity which have been already been identified and included in the service group risk register. These are listed below with their current risk score.
 - Demographic changes and demand for services (CESC02)
Current score: 16
 - Finance & resource availability in all CESC Services (CESC07)
Current score: 12
 - Serious injury or death leading to a Serious Case Review (CESC14)
Current score: 20
20. These risks will continue to be monitored at Children's Trust Management Team (CTMT) and the risk scores amended as appropriate. Any resulting changes will be fed into the corporate risk register and highlighted in future workload pressures reports to Cabinet.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

21. The safeguarding of children is a key component of the children and young people theme in the Sustainable Community Strategy. Improving outcomes for children by effective service delivery will also impact on their potential quality of life in adulthood.
22. The effective safeguarding of children and young people will also have a significant impact on the community safety agenda.

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

23. An equalities impact assessment has been undertaken and there are no identified negative impacts arising from this EIT review. It is envisaged that the proposed recommendations will enable the service to respond to the diverse needs of service users in a more flexible and timely manner.

CORPORATE PARENTING

24. For those children who are looked after, the council has a responsibility as corporate parent to ensure that their needs are appropriately met.
25. It is envisaged that the proposed recommendations will enhance the council's ability to effectively fulfil its responsibilities as Corporate Parent.

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

26. The Arts, Leisure & Culture (ALC) Select Committee received updates at key stages for independent challenge and were presented with the final report for comment at their meeting on 23 February 2012 prior to consideration by Cabinet.
27. Members acknowledged the difficulties in making savings in this area but recognised the need to continually improve and transform the service while also ensuring that it is being provided in the most efficient way. The Committee discussed the importance of staff retention and the introduction of professional career grading. Reporting systems were also raised by the Committee and noted that these needed to be clear and concise.
29. The Select Committee supported the recommendations which would allow the service be more responsive and flexible to the needs of service users, ensure the service is better able to cope with increasing work pressures, and enable the service to be provided in the most efficient and cost effective manner.
30. Although there has been extensive staff involvement in this review, there has been no formal consultation with staff at this stage. Subject to the approval of this report, a 30 day consultation period will be launched on 12 March 2012.

Name of Contact Officer: Shaun McLurg
Post Title: Head of Children and Young People's Operational Services
Telephone No. 01642 527049
Email Address: shaun.mclurg@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers

The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report HMSO 2009.
The Protection of Children in England: Action Plan HMSO 2009.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors

Not applicable.

Property

There are no implications for Council property.