

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting14th June 2012

1. Title of Item/Report

Children's Social Care Workload Pressures

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report relating to the continued workload pressures within the social care system. The report was based on information until the end of March 2012.

Members were also provided with details of associated pressures on the Children, Education and Social Care budget in a number of key areas.

It was explained that following the publication of the adoption scorecard on 11 May 2012, the Department for Education (DfE) requested to meet with representatives from Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council to explore the reasons behind the performance against the three new performance indicators.

The meeting subsequently took place on 23 May 2012, attended by Cabinet Member, Children and Young People, Chief Executive, Corporate Director, Children Education and Social Care (CESC) and a number of senior officers. The consensus was that this was a productive meeting, with opportunity being provided to share some of our concerns about the scorecard.

The key points we made to the DfE were as follows:

„X The focus on adoption to the exclusion of other forms of permanence failed to take account of the significance and prevalence of special guardianship orders, residence orders and family and friend placements.

The emphasis on timeliness at the expense of other factors, most notably placement stability, was unhelpful because it put process before outcome. This was particularly pertinent in Stockton-on-Tees as it was believed that the Council had a very strong track record of making successful and lasting adoption placements, which was highlighted by

Ofsted in June 2011 to support the 'outstanding' judgement received.

„X The reductionist nature of the scorecard did not take account of a variety of factors which made it more difficult to place children, such as sibling groups, age profile (15/40 of our children were over 5), ethnicity, disability etc.

„X The scorecard appeared to suggest that the process was completely under the control of the local authority when it was known, from experience, that this was not the case. Even the performance indicator which measured time from placement order to the match with prospective adopters (A2) could still be at the mercy of the court process.

Cabinet noted the small size of the cohort in Stockton-on-Tees - there were 18 children (12 cases) outside the threshold in relation to the A2 indicator. A summary of the reasons for the delay in each case was provided to DfE, with detailed discussions taking place in relation to some cases in order to ensure that DfE had a full understanding of the complexities of this area of social work practice. Crucially, it was shared that all 18 children had been successfully matched with adopters, where they remained to date.

The Children's Improvement Board (CIB) was also present at the meeting and shared details of a diagnostic assessment which was available to local authorities at no cost. This would be considered alongside the possibility of a 'peer challenge' which the Council was already exploring prior to the publication of the scorecard. The crucial factor in determining which model to proceed with, would be that it was able to focus on the wider issue of permanence, rather than exclusively on adoption.

The DfE had since made contact to confirm that on the basis of this meeting they have no cause for concern as far as Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council was concerned and that they were 'entirely happy' with the progress the Council was making. There would be no further follow up by DfE in respect of this issue and it was solely the Council's decision whether to proceed with the diagnostic assessment or continue with a 'peer challenge' as originally planned.

Members agreed that the Department for Education's adoption scorecard process had been seriously flawed and had potentially undermined the efforts and morale of staff in this area. It was noted that a letter would be sent to the DfE, highlighting the Council's concerns.

RESOLVED that

1. the continued workload pressures within the social care system and the associated impact this was having on caseloads, performance and budget.

2. further update reports be received, on a quarterly basis, in order to continue to monitor the impact of these workload pressures.

3. Reasons for the Decision

There was a significant and continuing rise in social care workload which could potentially impact on the Council's ability to effectively safeguard children, fulfil statutory duties and remain within allocated budget.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not applicable

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

Not later than midnight on Monday 25 June 2012

Proper Officer
04 May 2012