

Children & Young People Select Committee

A meeting of Children & Young People Select Committee was held on Wednesday, 30th September, 2009.

Present: Cllr David Harrington (Chairman), Cllr Jim Beall, Cllr Mick Eddy, Cllr Maurice Frankland, Cllr Miss Barbara Inman, Cllr Alan Lewis

Officers: Jane Humphreys, Jayne Palmer (CESC); Graham Birtle, Nigel Hart (LD); Jim Bell (R).

Also in attendance: Mr G.Davies, Mr R.G.Lupton.

Apologies: Cllr Ann Cains, Cllr Phillip Broughton, Cllr Andrew Sherris.

1 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Harrington declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in respect of the items entitled Efficiency Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Child Placements and Residential Care and Work Programme; as a result of his employment with Middlesbrough Borough Council.

2 **Minutes of the Meeting held on 16th September 2009**

CONCLUDED that the draft minutes of the meetings held on 9th and 15th September 2009 be agreed as a correct record and be forwarded on to Council for consideration subject to the following additional words being added to the third paragraph of item 3-16th September 2009:-

'as part of an overall package of kinship care'.

3 **Efficiency Improvement and Transformation (EIT) Review of Child Placements and Residential Care**

The Corporate Director of Children & Young People advised members of the results of the feasibility study undertaken by Outcome UK on behalf of the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership entitled Collaborative Foster Care Services Project.

The project had the involvement of regional partners and considered baseline information for 2008/2009. This evidence showed that 75% of external placements were with IFA's and the cost of the Fostering service budget regionally was £37M. Details were also provided of the average time from enquiry to approval from prospective carers, the average recruitment cost for foster carers, and the average caseload for authorities within the region which ranged from 6 to 22.

Members were advised that the study had identified the following six main options; the merits of each of which was addressed:-

1. Limited action.
2. Collaborate to provide specialist fostering service.
3. Collaborative marketing with single point of entry.
4. Collaborative training provision.
5. Collaborative recruitment and assessment.
6. Full service collaborative outsourcing.

Reference was made to the opportunities identified by the study and each Corporate Director of Children Services within the region had until the end of October to submit further suggestions for improvement. This Council's Corporate Director of Children & Young People sought approval of this Committee to enter into further discussions to explore, at no cost to the authority, some of the 'shallow' and 'mid pool' options identified by the study. It was also suggested that representatives of Outcome UK be invited to a future meeting of this Committee so that members can seek clarification as to how this authority fared in comparison with others in the region so that the context of our own performance could be assessed.

Reference was made to the marketing opportunities and recruitment needs for foster carers in this area and the potential to attract RIEF money to assist in meeting costs in this regard.

CONCLUDED that:-

1. The information be noted.
2. The Corporate Director of Children & Young People be authorised to enter into further discussions regionally regarding potential opportunities presented by the study.
3. Representatives of Outcome UK be invited to attend a future meeting of this Committee to set out the Stockton context of the data uncovered by the study.

4 Work Programme

Consideration was given to a compilation of the key service challenges and developments identified in each of the five workstream baseline reports presented to the Committee to date.

With regard to Fostering, it was noted that recruitment and retention/replacement of carers was a key challenge for this service area given the fact that many of the existing carers were advanced in years. The need for extensive marketing of the service and training for carers was also identified.

In respect of Residential and Short Break provision, members were advised that the excessive costs of such placements was a Tees Valley wide concern, and therefore work was being undertaken to carry out a regional annual audit of the cost of this service.

The Corporate Director of Children & Young People referred to the need for a clear policy in regard to Placements with Family and Friends and reference was made to recent research carried out by the Family Rights Group and to the need to establish what was happening regionally and nationally.

CONCLUDED that the information be noted.

5 Chairman's Update

The Chair thanked those members that had been able to attend and had contributed to the recent Youth Service Review meeting. The review report would not now be going to the November meeting of Cabinet, as originally scheduled, and members would be advised in due course of the revised timescale.

The next meeting of this Committee would be on the 28th October 2009 and would contain an overview given by the Corporate Director of Children & Young People and Heads of Service of all ongoing work within the department. Members with any interest in specific topics that they would like to be discussed at that meeting, should advise the Scrutiny Officer prior to the meeting.

It was noted that a research briefing paper on Adoption Agency Fees had been received by the Chair, and he would arrange to circulate a copy to all members of the Committee.

The next meeting as part of this Committee's review of Child Placements and Residential Care would be held on the 11th November 2009 and the Chair referred to a draft flow chart that had been prepared to provide a summary of evidence/stages of the review undertaken to date, which was likely to be a useful tool for members. It was agreed that an up to date copy be circulated by the Scrutiny Officer to all members of the Committee.

CONCLUDED that the information referred be circulated to all members of the Committee.