

REVIEW OF WORK MAY 2007 – MAY 2011

Summary

This report presents to Members a summary of the reviews that have been carried out in the Municipal Years 2007/8 – 2010/11 and highlights the key outcomes and impact of these reviews.

Scrutiny Review of Corporate Parenting

Scope

To assist the development and adoption of a corporate parenting strategy, it was decided to carry out a review of corporate parenting in two stages, the first dealt with issues about the strategy whilst the second reported on the effectiveness of the partnership working.

Findings

This was an important review because Looked After Children have historically been significantly disadvantaged by their experiences within the care system and are the most vulnerable group within the Borough. Statistics showed that Stockton's Looked After Children were more likely to come into care at a younger age, the main reason for that being neglect. In addition, there were particularly high incidences of domestic violence and drug related issues that contribute to children being brought into care.

The Committee report highlighted to all levels of the Council and Primary Care Trust that as Corporate Parents everyone in the organisations when planning their actions and decisions should consider "If this were my child I would ...".

Key Outcomes/Impact

The Review recommendations sought to strengthen the support given by the Council's elected members and employees. In addition, the borough's schools were also encouraged to make public their duty of care to looked after children.

- Raised awareness of corporate parenting including a requirement for Councillors to sign a commitment to their corporate parenting role
- The appointment of a Corporate Parenting Champion
- Corporate parenting implications included on Cabinet and Council reports
- Data on Looked After Children is collected as part of broader performance management purposes

School Organisation Plan

Scope

To help with the determination of school need and location based on the changing demographic nature of Stockton Borough as well as testing the accuracy of information used for formulating consultation for the BSF programme.

Findings

The Committee found that there should be better sharing of information between Council departments to ensure increasingly accurate data is used when planning for future school places.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- Improved communication between CESC and DNS to improve awareness of planning proposals and the impact on school place
- Improved communications to Members on BSF proposals

Obesity

Scope

In the Stockton PCT area the estimated annual costs to the NHS of diseases related to overweight and obesity for all ages was calculated to be £51.9m in 2007, £53.9m in 2010, and £57.6m in 2015. With such concerning figures the Children and Young People Select Committee examined the obesity issue as it affected Stockton Borough residents. Whilst normally focusing on topics that impact on those aged under-19 it was decided to widen its focus to include adults.

Findings

The Committee's resulting 40 recommendations covered all stages of a person's life, even before they were born, and wanted to ensure that individuals always maintained a healthy lifestyle whether in what they eat or in pastimes or activities in order that their weight was maintained within healthy recommended boundaries.

Recommendations included the commissioning of the midwifery service to introduce progressive nutrition and cooking skills programmes during antenatal visits which should include benefits of breast feeding, introducing cooking skills development within Children's Centres, and increasing opportunities for active play in parent/carer and toddler groups in order to give babies and children the best possible start to a healthy life.

The review highlighted that schools and colleges had a responsibility to provide a healthy environment in which children and young people can learn and develop, and to maximise the opportunity for them to live healthy lives. This is now underpinned by a duty on schools to promote the well-being of pupils. Of particular interest to the Committee was the numbers of fast food outlets in close proximity to schools and the ease by which young people can access foods that might be high in fats, sugar and salt, all contributors to an unhealthy diet if eaten regularly.

The increasing sedentary lifestyles chosen by adults and children coupled with an increase in fatty calorific foods raises the likelihood of obesity and accounts for the increased levels of

obesity that are occurring. The Committee was therefore keen to explore what is being done and what could be done by the Council Sports Development team and Tees Active Limited (TAL) to help stem the rise of obesity and increase the numbers of people involved in some form of physical activity.

The Committee was also keen to encourage the development of more family programmes in sports facilities so parents/carers and children could access these together. Committee members joined in by being supplied with pedometers to promote the benefit of walking at least 10,000 steps every day.

Key Outcomes/Impact

The review recommendations sought to address the obesity issue by addressing the wider health determinants. 28 of the Committee's 40 recommendations have been fully achieved and a wide range of initiatives are in place, these include:

- Implementation of an Obesity Strategy
- Midwifery services to include nutrition and cooking skills programmes, including the benefits of breast feeding
- The "Lets Get Cooking" programme established in 19 schools across Stockton
- SBC have commissioned the Health Visiting Team to deliver an Early Years Obesity Service in partnership with Dietetics and SBC Sports Development
- Tees Active have increased services for 3 – 5 year olds
- Leisure and Sports Development Grants were awarded to 57 schools worth £98,561 who could demonstrate sustainable plans to develop physical activities during lunchtimes
- Marketing and promotion of healthy eating in all schools with SBC catering contracts
- Support for workplaces to adopt healthy catering
- Publication of measured walks to help people to achieve their 10,000 steps a day
- PCT have commissioned a child weight management service. Referrals above 98.6 percentile are seen by the paediatric dietician
- A policy has been incorporated into the retail suite of policies of the draft Regeneration DPD. This policy restricts hot food takeaways from being located within 400 metres of any schools, parks and playgrounds in the Borough. However, this does not restrict them from designated town, district, local and neighbourhood centres. (This policy is subject to public consultation).

EIT Scrutiny Review of Child Placements

Scope

The review explored whether the Borough was 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.

In order to provide some structure the review was divided into separate, but linked, workstreams:

- fostering and adoption services
- residential placements
- complex needs
- placements with family and friends

Findings

Providing residential, fostering and adoptive placements for children is a low-volume, high cost and high reputational activity.

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.

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.

Stockton Council places some young people out of borough in variety of settings and for a number of reasons. 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. 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.

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. 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

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.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- Appointment of specific full time officer post to deliver the marketing of the fostering service
- Kinship Care Policy drafted
- Working towards greater provision of sub-regional provision for 'hard to place' children/ young people with complex needs

- Business case developed for additional local authority residential provision for looked after children
- The review identified potential savings of between £259,000 and £691,000

EIT Scrutiny Review of Youth Services (Universal)

Scope

The review focused specifically on universal youth services provided through core funding from the Council, delivered primarily through the Council's 24 youth clubs. However, the Committee has also received evidence about targeted activities (provided under time limited funding programmes) in order to understand the full picture of youth provision in the Borough.

Findings

The Committee concluded that there was wide variation in the quality of youth club facilities and attendances. The Committee also acknowledged that some clubs represented better value for money than others. There were also gaps in provision with uneven spread of provision across the week and a lack of provision at weekends. The Committee concluded that there was a compelling argument to reconfigure the service around a smaller number of quality centres. To assist in the reconfiguration, the Committee have developed a matrix which takes account of attendance, footfall, footfall costs, potential reach and deprivation giving clubs a ranking according in individual factors and an overall ranking. The Committee recommended that Cabinet take the matrix into account in making decisions about service reconfiguration in addition to any other relevant factors including available finance, geographical spread and wider youth provision.

The Committee also supported a "mixed economy" approach involving the statutory and third sector as they believed that this had demonstrated an effective model in a range of settings. The Committee concluded that officers pursue opportunities for increased collaboration with the third sector of private sector in providing universal services.

The Committee also noted that targeted activities were demonstrating better value for money in terms of footfall and outcomes and concluded that it was important to protect delivery of targeted youth services taking into account the impact of these services.

Key Outcomes/ Impact

- Priority for targeted activities
- Reconfiguration of the universal youth service around a smaller number of high quality settings (savings to be determined)
- Recommendation for review of premises/ lettings arrangements by Asset EIT review
- Review of contractual arrangements for youth services staff to ensure consistency
- Authority to pursue options for increased collaboration with the third sector and private sector

EIT Officer Task and Finish Review of Integrated Youth Support Service (Connexions, Targeted Youth Support and Preventions)

Scope

The review included Information, Advice and Guidance and related support services funded through the Connexions budget. The review also included targeted services core funded through the Youth Service and not included in the CYP Youth Review of Universal Services, and Preventions activity funded through a combination of Youth Justice Board (YJB) and Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) grants.

Findings

Given the need to review services in line with budgetary requirements and national policy direction, it is apparent that structural change within the services is necessary. Such a review will look to future proof the Local Authority responsibilities whilst delivering an agreed level of savings.

Key Outcomes/Impact

- The review is recommending to Cabinet that the services are restructured to meet an agreed savings target

The revised structure will fulfil a number of key priorities around services for young people:

- Delivery of Universal Youth Service (via recommendations of the Youth Review).
- Delivery of Targeted Youth Support to reduce risk taking behaviour preventing Anti Social Behaviour, Offending, Substance Misuse and Teenage Pregnancy and contributing to reducing NEETs (Not in Education, Employment and Training). This will include engaging vulnerable young people in Positive Activities.
- Tracking and monitoring of young people from leaving school to age 18 (19 for vulnerable groups).
- A targeted support service to enable all young people including those in vulnerable groups (up to age 25 for those with LDD) to engage and participate in Education, Employment and Training, and support the achievement of Raising the Participation Age (to include Information, Advice and Guidance approaches for Tier 1 and Tier 2 clients).
- To encourage more young people to be involved in volunteering, citizenship and participation activities.

Lead Officer Comments (Optional)

The services within this review are key front line services for young people enabling and supporting them to make the most of their potential and raising aspirations. The services are preventative in nature benefiting both local communities and the local economy. Significant changes have already been made in order to align services into a coherent and co-ordinated youth support service including universal youth service and Youth Offending Service. However, given emerging Government policy and the financial limitations arising from the CSR and Early Intervention Grant announcements further development is needed for services to young people in terms of delivering on outcomes and cost –effectiveness based upon the priorities noted above.