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| 3 July 2014 | | ITEM: 8 |
| Corporate Parenting Committee | | |
| Children's Placement review report | | |
| Wards and communities affected: All | Key Decision: Not Applicable | |
| Report of: Barbara Foster, Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes | | |
| Accountable Head of Service: Nicky Pace, interim Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes | | |
| Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Service's | | |
| This report is Confidential | | |
| <i>If the report, or a part of this, has been classified as being either confidential or exempt by reference to the descriptions in Schedule 12A, Paragraph 3, of the Local Government Act 1972, it is hereby marked as being not for publication. The press and public are likely to be excluded from the meeting during consideration of any confidential or exempt items of business to which the report relates.</i> | | |
| Date of notice given of exempt or confidential report: N/A | | |

Executive Summary

1. To examine all budget and payment arrangements in order to ensure that maximum efficiency and future planning is being brought to bear on this volatile and high cost area of service provision.
2. To examine all commissioning and procurement arrangements in order to ensure that best value is being achieved through effective use of resources and management of the market.
3. To establish that there are effective exit strategies which are age appropriate for those children who may be able to return home, be adopted or move into independence.
4. To examine that appropriate joint commissioning is undertaken for those children and young people who require placements to meet their specialist health and special education.
5. To appraise the development of the council's own fostering service and how it can contribute to future planning.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 To note review and actions taken

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 On March 7th 2013, the Corporate Parenting Committee minuted under Miscellaneous Items that “The Chair also raised that Councillor Halden had represented an additional report on placements and this would be received at a reconvened meeting in the near future”.

On 15th April 2013, a further meeting dealt with placement expenditure as a single item. The minutes are attached as Appendix 1 and the report as Appendix 2. The main change introduced by this meeting was for each subsequent meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee to include a standing agenda item on exempt business as to care placements made since the previous meeting.

The minutes decisions were recorded as in being the proposal set out in paragraphs 3.1 to 3.7. (In fact, these paragraph numbers and the minutes do not cover these actual paragraphs which were the relevant paragraph numbers for the previous draft of the report. There is no Paragraph 3.7 and paragraphs 4.1 to 4.7 cover the main discussion item). The report being considered by the committee had been written by the Shadow Lead Member for Children and included a reference to Full Council having agreed “a sum of £5000 for an independent audit of our care placements. At the start of the new municipal year (2013/2014) officers will bring a paper forward with a suggested audit for members to consider. In addition, the committee will take a report in the new municipal year where we will compare our profile and spend with other authorities”.

Therefore after this meeting there were decisions to:

- a) Update each Corporate Parenting Committee meeting with anonymised information on all new placement purchases.
- b) Act on the Full Council decisions for an external audit.
- c) From the minutes but use the agreed actions, to use CIPFA data.

At this point, we went into the new municipal year with changes or membership or the Corporate Parenting Panel. The June meeting minuted under the heading of New Placement Review that “The Director of Commissioning at Peterborough Council has agreed to review this issue in Thurrock. It was planned that they would meet with Members of the Committee to understand their viewpoints.

The September meeting of the Committee did not minute any discussion of the matter and the December meeting minutes state that:

A Member requested an update on the audit of care packages and the peer view which was discussed at the meeting on 5 September 2013. Officers responded that both pieces of work were ongoing; the audit of care packages had required the

examination of the packages of older young people in children's homes and the more expensive placements, once further progress had been made an update report would be provided to the Committee.

Draft minutes of the March 2014 meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee are as follows:

“Officers reported that Peer advice had been sought in relation to an audit of the cost of Looked After Placements, and that regular updates on the cost of placements had been provided to the Committee. Members were informed that the Peer Reviewer had made several suggestions which the team had put into operation, which included:

- Revised administrative arrangements for payments being made;
- Reviewed the older cohort of children;
- Established a Joint Funding Panel with Health, Education and Social Care working together in order to fund placements. Officers explained that they had unfortunately not had the capacity to draw together a report on this work and the Chair proposed that this should be re-visited in the work plan.”

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 In August 2013, Terms of Reference for the Placement Review were agreed with Wendi Ogle-Welbourn, the Peterborough colleague who had agreed to undertake the work with us. Her post title is actually Assistant Director for Strategy, Commissioning and Prevention. The Terms of Reference are attached as Appendix 3 and are described individually below. We also provided the breakdown of our placement expenditure and she advised that we should consider the reallocation of the DSG in order to increase the proportion used for placement purchasing and reviewing all the residential placements, with particular emphasis on the older young people.

The work undertaken so far is described under each element of the Terms of Reference as follows.

2.1 Examine all the budget and payout arrangements in order to ensure that maximum efficiency and future planning in being brought to bear.

a) The impetus of rising needs and costs has strengthened the resolve to undertake this review and colleagues in the Finance Team have completely reviewed their recording and spreadsheets in order to increase clarity and efficiency. (Attached as Appendix 4).

Colleagues in SERCO have worked with us to implement some improvements which were suggested by the SW Adviser on the Use of Resources which have simplified the payment arrangement so that only one post holder records and arranges all payments and all suggested changes to payments. This has increased confidence in the accuracy of payments, which now widely regarded as being efficient and high quality but no immediate savings can be identified from this.

b) We have continued to subscribe to CIPFA so as to be as well informed as possible on comparison with other councils. We are aware that we have some high residential cost which we attribute to the high proportion of children which we maintain in foster care, especially in house.

2.2. Examine all commissioning and procurement arrangements in order to ensure that best value is achieved through effective use of resources and management of the market.

a) Since the budget planning for the year beginning April 2012, the service has been challenged by Members to reduce the expenditure on placements by inviting in an "Invest to Save" post. This post was created as the Social Work Adviser on Resources (referred to above) and the post holder started work in August of that year. Unfortunately, the Team Manager for Fostering Support was taken ill shortly after her arrival so the Social Work Adviser covered those duties in what sadly became an unexpected long period of serious illness. This has impacted on the time available to concentrate on purchasing but the post holder has established herself as a source of specialist advice to social workers, thus avoiding any uninformed placement searches, and has also been directly involved in as much purchasing as possible. Examples include that she begins price negotiation in comparison with London Care Placements (formerly Pan London) costs. This is despite our not being a formal member of this commissioning network. Examples of cost reductions she has achieved are attached as Appendix 5.

b) These successes demonstrate the value of specialist staffing resource to work on this budget. At present, the daily duty system for placement searches is staffed by the duty Social Workers in the Fostering Service and, when possible, by the provider Partnership Officer from Commissioning Team, plus the Social Worker Adviser herself. All of these staff are required to leave the office in order to fulfil their duties and the Fostering Social Workers do not have any specialist knowledge of residential care, which is the most expensive of the service provisions. The whole of the CATD service has worked together to create a new additional post from within existing resources in order to have a specialist duty worker reporting to the Social Worker Adviser. The team for Disabled Children has transferred their shared care Foster Carers to the Foster Service, who have become their supervising Social Workers, thus freeing up sufficient funds for the new post which will, of course reduce the duty responsibilities of the Fostering Team. This is ready to go to Matching Panel

c) Thurrock is already a Council which attracts the London Fostering Market from both Councils and the independent sector. There are more Looked After Children from other Councils in Thurrock schools than there are Thurrock's own Looked After Children- this being 93 children from other Councils at the time of writing. There is only one independent children's home in the Borough. Newly opened and offering placements for disabled children. 3 placements have been purchased, thus enabling these 3 young people to continue attending the Councils own special schools. There is no agreed strategy to encourage other residential care provider into the borough as our small size informs staff to reflect on the difficulties previously experienced in matching Thurrock children into the Councils children's home in previous years when the resource was under-used and eventually closed. Obviously, there is no desire to purposely encourage other Councils Looked After Children into the Borough,

especially as we already have the experience of there being a remand fostering provision from an outside provider which is creating an increased work for Youth Offending Service. However, we do believe that there is scope for further Commissioning and Procurement work which could assist. As of today, the only existing group contracts is the ER4 Fostering Provision which reduces the costs of existing long term placements.

3. Establish that there are effective exit strategies which are age appropriate for those children who may be able to return home, be adopted or more into independence.

In addition to the work of the Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer teams, we hold a weekly Placement Panel which is chaired by either the Service Manager for Placements or the Service Manager for Through Care (Case holding) Teams. In order to give increase prominence and emphasis to the Panels, the Head of Service has chaired them personally and has also called additional panels to scrutinise the Residential Care Placements. This exercise has already been undertaken previously and has not resulted in any dramatic cost reduction although it has given increased profile to a small number of cases where young people were already in the process of returning home. In our normal practice, special Panel meetings are held for Care leavers so as to Plan their transition.

Adoption work is now scrutinised closely through the governments Adoption Scorecard which latterly shows some increased average time scale for Thurrock due to adoption being achieved for 4 children who had been hard to place and had been in care for some time. This resulted in a visit from the Civil Service who were satisfied by our explanation. Although small, numbers of children being adopted have increased.

We have also used our Troubled Families team in order to assist, where possible, in restoring children to their own families. This remains a small element of the total care population but they have assisted 4 children to return home.

Another source of savings is being presented currently with a new project to organise local assessments (Community Based Assessments) instead of residential mother and baby placements.

4. Examine appropriate joint commissioning for those children or young people who require placements to meet their specialist health or specialist education needs.

We have established a new Joint Funding Panel, which has now met twice, chaired by the Head of Service. In 2 cases, additional funding was supplied from Education but unfortunately health representatives withdrew funding from 2 cases where placements was no longer meeting specific health needs.

5. Appraise the development of the councils own Fostering Service and how it can contribute to further planning.

The development of the Fostering Service has been assisted by increase financial support for Thurrock Foster Carers which was very much needed as payments had

begun to compare unfavourably with other Councils. This is particularly important as the Borough is attracting so much recruitment activity from competitors. The Fostering Service is very well developed with a therapeutic Fostering Team offering multi-disciplinary support to very hard to place children and a "One Team" Foster Carers' association which includes membership across the Service. The allocation of the increased financial support was planned with the full involvement of existing Foster Carers and the highest paid very generously advocated that new funds should be concentrated on encouraging entrants to the Service.

This is beginning to show some encouraging signs of an improved response to the recruitment activities after a very disappointing period when we received feedback that enquires were withdrawing after comparing our Thurrock financial support with that of competitors.

The Lead Member requested a paper to the Corporate Parenting Panel in September 2013 which fully described the service activity, including refreshed recruitment images from the Communication Team.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel are requested to note the contents and actions above

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Not applicable

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 Reducing cost through better commissioning, placement mix and tighter gatekeeping will impact positively on the services available to children and families in Thurrock

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

- 7.2 The Cost of Children's placements continue to be the most significant pressure on the council's budget and managing demand and use of resource will remain a priority.

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
01375 652466
kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk

7.3 Legal

Ensuring that children come into care through the most appropriate legal route, are supported to remain at home is a legal requirement of the authority through the Children Act and other legislation.

Implications verified by: **Christine Ifediora**
Solicitor
Christine.Ifediora@BDTLegal.org.uk

7.4 Diversity and Equality

7.5 Ensuring that children with diverse needs have their needs met in the most appropriate way and have a choice of placement if required. Monitoring of outcomes/ success of placements for different equalities groups(Equality Act 2010) will take place.

Implications verified by: **Teresa Evans**
Equalities and Cohesion Officer
TEvans@thurrock.gov.uk

7.4 **Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

7.5 The impact of the changes to legislation making authorities responsible for the costs of Remand placements and also increasing the responsibility for young people from 17 who have been remanded to have Looked after children's status has impact on the placement costs.

8. **Background papers used in preparing the report** (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

9. **Appendices to the report**

Report Author:

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