

CABINET – 19 OCTOBER 2010

PROGRESS REPORT ON CHILDREN IN AND LEAVING CARE: TO NOTE PROGRESS AND ISSUES IN RELATION TO THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN COUNCIL'S CARE.

Report by Director for Children, Young People & Families

Introduction

1. This report updates Cabinet on performance and outcomes for Children Looked After and Care Leavers (CLA), and on the continued implementation of the Corporate Parenting Strategy adopted by cabinet in May 08.

The Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy

2. Our Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the key priority actions required to tackle the critical issues that impact on children in care. These include: the need for stable and consistent care; the support necessary to minimise the time spent in care; access to the best possible appropriate education and healthcare, and for the services to be developed in partnership with them.
3. Our Corporate Parenting role currently extends to 754 children and young people, 460 in care, and 294 care leavers. 182 of the total are Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Children (UASC).
4. Our Children in Care Council (CIC), a representative group of children in care, has grown in confidence, knowledge and gravitas, remaining determined to ensure care leavers and looked after children's voices are heard and help shape policy and services. They have represented the County Council nationally and regionally at a variety of forums, such as the National Young People's Benchmarking Group and the Associated Parliamentary Group, and have continued to work closely with members, officers, carers and other agencies.
5. Highlights over the last six months include:
 - setting up and running their own conference for CLA over the summer attended by 120 people.
 - the creation of a young inspectors team to monitor the recently commissioned supported housing.
 - continued involvement in the design of the new Thornbury.
6. We say goodbye to our exiting joint chairs, Alidja Templer and Sarah Lawrence who depart to university to read social work, leaving a significant legacy, and welcome Alice Roe and Victoria Bowden as their successors.

7. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel visit the children's homes regularly to satisfy themselves that the care provided is "good enough for my child". In addition, they are overseeing the rebuild of Thornbury House.

Progress in Corporate Parenting Programme

8. Projects which have arisen from various initiatives to raise awareness of corporate parenting continue to make progress, for example:
- Information on Corporate Parenting for all those joining the Council.
 - 100 reconditioned computers for CLA from the Better Offices Programme (plus 70 through the Virtual School)
 - The Virtual School itself, has improved outcomes at KS4 of CLA (many of whom have substantial learning difficulties) and maintained educational provision in challenging circumstances. Our priorities in 2010/11 include:
 - 100% timeliness in PEP (personal education plan) scheduling.
 - Embedding improvements in attendance through CLA champions.
 - Strengthening engagement with education in children's homes.
 - Improving the % CLA gaining 5+ A*-C including English and Maths.
 - Strengthening partnership with education providers in other LAs.
 - Securing innovative and inspiring approaches to extended learning through the Vulnerable Intervention Partnership co-ordinator.
 - The Council's Employability programme for Care Leavers has made significant progress with 5 placements offered in the last two months and another four planned imminently. Particularly welcoming has been the recognition of the Chief Executive as the "Head Corporate Parent" to staff offering this service
 - The joint commissioning of supported housing for vulnerable CYP including care leavers, with Districts and Supporting People, has been successfully completed; 15% savings have been made, a 20% reduction from Supporting People has been absorbed, quality has improved while placement numbers have been maintained. Work in this area continues to be commended by CLG

Performance and Outcomes for CLA

9. Good performance has been maintained across the range of indicators with notable improved performance being achieved around long term stability, the numbers in education, employment and training (the best in our SN group) and consistently high numbers of adoptions. On the education front, key stage 4 results have improved and numbers going to university have risen to 15% (plus 7 graduations this year).
10. Numbers of foster carers recruited have increased, alongside numbers remaining in foster care post statutory school leaving age) and foster care programmes are delivering positive outcomes.
11. OFSTED inspections of children's homes were good (Maltfield) and satisfactory (Thornbury) although safeguarding, education and health at

Thornbury were all “good”. Our long term placement stability for CLA has continued to be a strength. The Ofsted inspection reports are available in the Members’ room or electronically available to members on request.

Forming developments and challenges

12. These include:

- To reduce the number of young people who have to be placed more than once.
- OFSTED inspection of Children’s Services delivered by OCC and partners as a whole is imminent.
- Maintaining prevention/early intervention services as far as possible in the face of significant savings.
- Providing the right levels and quality of provision for a care population which is more troubled than our statistical neighbours, as measured by SDQ (strengths and difficulty questionnaires), and has growing numbers of older CYP with very complex needs.
- Court judgements continue to place pressures on budgets. We await the outcome of the last two sets of Children’s Act guidance on Kinship Care and Care Leavers, both delayed because of case law.
- We await judgement as to what will happen to UASCs designated as “legacy cases” in the new categorisation. It might well be that they become the sole responsibility of Local Authorities .
- Improved levels of young people in employment, education and training means young people are pushing to stay in care until 18 and post 18 and this has had a significant impact on budgets particularly given the cost of residential care. It has however been mitigated this year by our enhanced foster care and Supported Housing programmes.
- The findings from Rt 2 be Cared 4 highlighted a positive correlation between staying in care until 18 and EET. Some then require support through university, with accompanying financial pressures, along with a rise in those staying on at college post 19/20 who become reliant on the Council since they are not eligible to claim benefits.
- Care proceedings/entries to care continue to rise, which alongside increasing court ordered supervised contact, places significant pressure on placements and staffing. Outsourcing contact is being explored.
- A substantial need for welfare secure for self harming adolescent girls. Securing enough local places for CLA by 2011 is a statutory requirement under the new Children Act.

Service Developments

13. A range of service improvements have been or are being developed to support better outcomes and provide cost savings:

- The Oxfordshire-led joint commissioning of agency placements for children with complex needs with six other LAs has successfully completed and will deliver up to nine residential beds for Oxfordshire at a saving of between £500 and £1300/ bed /week over the next five years.

The model will be used to commission Independent Fostering Agency placements and will be extended to all residential provision.

- Rebuild of Thornbury by April 2011 will provide an additional bed at no additional cost and will release the land it currently occupies for sale.
- Implementation of a community based assessment and intervention programme for parents and babies in conjunction with the Elmore team is designed to decrease the need for expensive residential assessments.
- Re modelling the delivery of health services to CLA to ensure assessments are integrated and holistic (through co location) and resources are targeted on those with complex needs.
- Extending and finalising the procurement of housing to take account of needs arising from the Southwark judgement.
- Explore Boarding School project, building on successful pilot.
- Decommissioning UASC services as the New Asylum Model develops.
- Charging policy for all families accessing children's placements.
- Further Improving recruitment and retention of foster carers by developing payment for skills remuneration and out of hours support (learning from Multi Dimensional Treatment Foster Care project).

14. Other possible developments include:

- Providing immediate cost benefits by refocusing intensive fostering programmes towards adolescents and young children for whom expensive agency placements are the only alternative.
 - Building on the achievements of the Family and Placement Support Services (lower numbers in care than SNs) to reduce the need for adolescent placements and to provide vital services necessary for placement stability, where breakdown leads to rapidly escalating costs.
15. Whilst still below statistical neighbours (SNs), the numbers of CLA/10,000 continue to rise. Recently published information from CIPFA on the financial returns on planned expenditure put OCC beneath our SNs average. (In year readjustments will reduce this further). The average unit cost for looked after children in Oxfordshire in 2009/10 was £891/week; our SNs average was £940/week. These figures should also be viewed in the context of a lower number of CLA and a lower per capita expenditure than both our SNs and nationally. This is more significant when taking into consideration our very low use of residential agency special schools.
16. Numbers subject to Special Guardianship Orders continue to rise and these are now entitled to the same allowances as foster carers.

Financial and Staff Implications

17. There are no financial implications arising from this report.
18. The withdrawal of service to UASCs whose rights have become exhausted will result in changes to staffing in line with the reduction in grant funding. Appropriate consultation has taken place with all staff affected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

19. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) continue to support the Corporate Parenting Strategy;**
 - (b) note the information on outcomes for Looked After Children and the associated service performance measures.**

MEERA SPILLETT
Director Children, Young People & Families

Background Papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Jim Leivers, Head of Children's Services,
Tel: (01865)818271
Fran Fonseca, Strategic Lead CLA, Children, Young
People & Families Tel: (01865) 323098

30 September 2010