

CABINET - 16 JULY 2013

PLACEMENT STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN IN

AND ON THE EDGE OF CARE 2013-16

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet approval for the Placement Strategy for children in and on the edge of care 2013-2016.
2. The Placement Strategy sets out how Oxfordshire will strengthen edge of care interventions to keep children with their families wherever possible, support friends and family care arrangements, increase in-house fostering for harder to place children and build on the work that has been so successful in achieving permanency for many of our looked after children. It also sets out how we will fulfill our corporate parenting responsibilities to care leavers to ensure they are given the best possible start to their adult lives.
3. There are recommendations within the strategy to increase residential provision in-county which will require capital investment. Cabinet are being asked to endorse the initial approach of a detailed survey of potential sites followed by a more detailed costings returning to Cabinet for consideration.

Placement Strategy for children in and on the edge of care 2013-16

4. This document amends the 2011 Placement Strategy in order to respond to priorities and pressures emanating from the Corporate Parenting Review. This review has focused on the need to develop in county capacity in terms of short and long term foster care, potential adopters and residential provision so that we are better able to keep our "riskiest and most vulnerable closest". Some children will require very specialist placements out of county but for the large majority we need to be able to place, educate, and provide therapeutic support within Oxfordshire creating flagships of excellence that deliver good outcomes for our own children and young people. Whilst outcomes are our primary concern an important driver is also recognizing that high quality saves and poor quality costs in terms of expenditure on our looked after children (LAC).
5. Children need to be placed in a variety of settings when they can no longer remain in their family home: with friends or family carers, with foster carers or in residential provision. When this move needs to become permanent the main options are residence orders, special guardianship orders and adoption. Oxfordshire already delivers "good" or "outstanding" provision in all the above areas and has excellent

"edge of care" support services keeping children with their families wherever possible. However, we urgently need to increase our capacity to look after our most challenging and hard to place children and young people within county.

6. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Children Missing from Care published in June 2012 recommended urgent action on "out of area placements" to reduce the number of children living outside their own local authority citing this as a major factor in causing them to run away and putting them at additional risk. The report highlighted it was difficult to ensure that children placed out of county receive the additional specialist support which they may need; that availability and quality of therapeutic and educational provision was highly variable and the placing authority often had very little control.
7. The *G v Southwark* judgement in the House of Lords in 2009 has also contributed to additional pressures on Children's services to accommodate 16 and 17 year olds either as children in need under section 17 or as looked after children under section 20 of the 1989 Children Act. Our existing Supported Housing provision has been stretched to capacity by this particular group leading to a small group of young people being temporarily placed in bed and breakfast accommodation. We also have a pressure finding suitable accommodation for care leavers aged over 18 years as 16 and 17 year olds have priority in the supported housing pathway.
8. Older children are staying longer in foster care now and this is only likely to increase with the raising of the participation age in terms of schooling to end of year 12 in 2013-14 and end of year 13 in 2014-15. This will further reduce current foster carer availability. While Oxfordshire has done well in recruiting new foster carers, there are still not many who are willing or able to take older children with highly complex needs.
9. An important emerging issue both nationally and locally is Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). There is increasing pressure locally due to Operation Bullfinch, which is a joint police and Council investigation into CSE in Oxfordshire. The Kingfisher Team has been set up to support children and young people who are at risk or subject to sexual exploitation. The Kingfisher team is now identifying the need for foster care or residential placements for children at risk of sexual exploitation. As professional awareness of the incidence and impact of CSE grows it is likely that an increase in demands on specialist placement provision will continue.
10. We are also seeing an escalation in young men presenting with risky behaviour where we need to assess the risks and protect the public but often are having to place out of county at considerable expense as there is no local provision. Under the 2012 Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders (LASPO) Act Local Authorities are now responsible for the costs of young people remanded by the courts and they receive looked after or leaving care status. The Local Authority needs to develop the resources in both foster care and residential provision to provide emergency placements at bail,

placements at the point of sentence and resettle offenders post sentence. It is estimated that as a result of these changes 18 more young people will become looked after each year.

11. The above pressures all sharpen the focus on the need to increase in-county capacity. Rising demands on the placement budget also intensify the need for effectively targeted interventions for children and young people on the edge of care, to divert them from becoming looked after.

Placement Costs

12. Oxfordshire County council's costs for placing children rose in the year 2012-13. This was due to the increased use of both Independent Fostering Associations (IFA's) and external residential provision.
13. In house foster care costs on average £520 per week (including the more expensive Foster Plus and Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) placements) whereas IFA provision costs on average £915 per week. Disabled children's IFA placements can cost £1300 per week. Placements days for IFAs have increased from 19,513 in 2010-11, to 20,540 in 2011-12, and 23,269 in 2012-13.
14. Annex 1 sets out the difference between Oxfordshire County Council's in-house residential provision, costing £2,800 per child per week and externally managed provision costing £3,465 per week. At the heart of this placement strategy is therefore increasing in-county capacity in terms of both foster carers and residential provision to drive down the spend on IFA placements and external residential provision.

Consultation

15. Oxfordshire is committed to consulting looked after children and their parents and carers, concerning the design and monitoring of services we provide for them. A Children in Care Council was established in November 2007 and has worked extensively with members, officers, carers and other agencies locally and nationally to ensure that appropriate services and support are provided to looked after children.
16. This placement strategy has directly developed from the findings of a Children in Care Council workshop held on 4 April 2013. All the young people present felt that being placed out of county would make them feel more "unsafe", could lead to them mixing with the wrong crowd, and would make them much more likely to run away. Many of them spoke from personal experience about their lives already being chaotic, the trauma of coming into care, and the need for some sort of consistency in terms of schooling or friendship groups when they came into care. All felt that Oxfordshire was a big enough county to allow them to be placed a suitable distance from unsafe situations if that was required.

Interventions for children on the edge of care

Challenges

17. Oxfordshire County Council has a smaller proportion of children in care than other local authorities but our looked after children have more complex needs and are therefore harder to place. The strategy remains to keep children at home wherever possible and to exhaust all other family and friends options before considering bringing a child into care. There needs to be early identification of those whose outcomes are not improving at home leading to appropriate intervention. There is also a critical time factor for returning a child home. The successful rehabilitation benchmark for all looked after children is within 6 weeks and residential benchmark when young people come into care in an unplanned way is 10 days.

Response

18. Oxfordshire County Council will evaluate placements made since April 2013 to establish whether there has been either any drift in decision making or evidence of "placing in haste" where the young person was not previously known. The authority will tighten expectations around the use of Family Group Conferences and involvement of the Family and Placement Support Team before bringing a child into care is considered.
19. All edge of care teams will have a "rapid response" capacity and greater flexibility to deal with spikes in demand including weekend, evening and holiday working. All edge of care interventions will have clear and measurable outcomes for the child and family and the "Family Star" will be used to measure the impact.

Foster Care

In-house foster care: challenges

20. Oxfordshire like all local authorities faces a number of critical challenges in meeting the demand for in-house foster care provision. Although Oxfordshire has good numbers of foster carers, the profile of these carers does not match the needs of all children requiring placements in Oxfordshire. There is a shortage of foster carers for disabled children, children over 10 years old, children requiring long term placements and children remanded to local authority care.
21. Young people are being encouraged to remain in care beyond 18 in line with government legislation. Oxfordshire County Council has adopted a "Staying Put" policy which gives young people who are in education and vulnerable young adults who do not meet adult services' thresholds the right to continue in care. This demand is likely to increase with the raising of the participation age.

In-house foster care: response

22. The strategy is to both increase and "professionalise" our in-house fostering provision and recruit the next generation of Oxfordshire foster carers whose profile better matches the needs. Each area Foster Team now has a specialist recruitment worker. Approvals have increased by over 20% over the last three years and a target has been set to recruit 135 new unrelated carers over the next 3 years. Targeted campaigns will be launched to find carers for disabled children, children over 10 years old, children requiring long term placements and children remanded to local authority care.
23. The authority is improving tracking of foster carers through the assessment process. A career development pathway is being developed that supports in house carers taking on progressively more challenging placements as their confidence grows. The Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care programme is targeting those children who would otherwise need expensive out of county residential placements, bringing back those whose outcomes have not improved, and fostering young people being remanded into local authority care.

Independent Provision - Fostering Agencies (IFAs) challenge and response

24. The number of young people placed with IFA's has increased slightly this year especially for placements for children who are aged 13 years and over. The council's strategy is to work with other authorities to establish frameworks, develop a local market of outstanding and good providers with a track record in providing good outcomes, and drive down the costs. The Joint Commissioning Programme, a collaborative project with eleven other local authorities to set up a framework with IFA's went live in April 2012 and this has already achieved cost savings and allowed monitoring responsibilities to be shared.
25. If the rise in accommodating teenagers continues without increasing in-county fostering capacity our unit costs will rise due to the higher age related fees. Placements made for young people with fostering agency carers on a short term basis often become long term and we are then committed to these higher fees over a longer period when we do not wish to disrupt the placement.

Residential care: In-house provision: challenge and response

26. Oxfordshire has two children's homes, one offering 6 beds for girls and the other 6 to boys. Maltfield has an OFSTED rating of outstanding and the Moors is rated as good with outstanding features. At the heart of this placement strategy is the proposal to build on the success of Maltfield and the Moors and increase OCC's residential

capacity to 32 beds with the construction of four new homes, 2 assessment units each with 6 units and 2 move on homes each with 4 units. Expert guidance has stressed the importance of having sufficient residential provision to create a care pathway from assessment through to mainstream provision and then post 16 provision which is a bridge between residential and supported housing.

27. It is proposed that surveys will be conducted on already identified sites within the County's existing property estate. Estimates suggest that this initial survey work will cost £150,000. The estimated overall spend to build the 4 homes is £7 million but this will be exactly quantified post survey results. Appendix A sets out how the annual savings on placement costs would allow the capital investment to be paid off within a ten year period.
28. Two assessment homes would increase capacity to provide a multi-agency rapid response when children come into care so that those that can be returned home within a short period are prevented from drifting into long term care arrangements. This frequently happens when young people are placed out of county. The assessment homes would also offer outreach services to those on the edge of care and sharpen practice around assessing risk and vulnerability. The Youth Offending Service will co-work where adolescents are presenting with risky behavior that needs a robust management plan. Health partners are currently working with us to develop appropriate therapeutic models and agree how they will support this new initiative. We are also engaging schools in developing in-county models where risky and disruptive behavior is never dealt with by any form of exclusion but is managed internally so that the young person has to learn to self-regulate their behavior. Oxfordshire County Council will also need to work closely with Thames Valley Police to jointly assess and manage risk.
29. Within or alongside this pathway Oxfordshire County Council and partners will need to develop CSE (child sexual exploitation) specific provision. A scoping exercise involving the Kingfisher team is currently underway to establish the levels and types of provision required although initial indications are that separate residential provision for 11-16 and 16-18 year old girls will be required.
30. An options appraisal on whether to have in-house service delivery or commission this out to an external provider has been completed. The appraisal demonstrated that in terms of quality, outcomes, availability, added value and costing there is currently a very strong case for managing this provision internally. This would not rule out commissioning an external provider at a later stage.

Externally provided Residential Provision: challenges and response

31. The strategy is to have a mixed market in terms of residential provision, to encourage external providers to invest locally, but to avoid becoming wholly dependent. The number of young people placed in residential provision managed by an external provider increased in 2012-13. On 31 March 2013 there were 11 children placed in the two local authority homes, 13 children in agency homes within Oxfordshire and 23 children in agency homes outside of Oxfordshire. There is a shortage of foster placements to care for the 13 years + age group and this trend is common to other local authorities and there is competing demand for placements. There are a number of young people with high emotional needs and challenging behaviour where it has been difficult to identify local placements, education and therapeutic provision. This has been more challenging by the additional responsibilities for LA's under the LASPO Act 2012 and the identification of young people who have been sexually exploited coming into care.
32. The Cross Regional Project with five other local authorities and the Keys group has been operational for two years and provides residential care and education for young people with complex emotional and behavioural needs. Oxfordshire can use up to 6 of the 20 bed spaces but this commissioned out model has not provided the quality of therapeutic provision the council were hoping for despite intensive engagement by the commissioners.
33. The quality of care from external providers can be variable and the further Oxfordshire County Council places out of county the more difficult it is to monitor these standards. The Corporate Parenting Review is strengthening the monitoring, review and quality assurance for all independent provision. This includes working alongside the Joint Commissioning Team to strengthen contracts and skill up those conducting monitoring visits to better quality assure all placements. Independent Reviewing Officers are now conducting mini inspections of the overall placement when they undertake looked after reviews for Oxfordshire young people placed in independent provision. There is also closer work with Health and Education partners in reviewing providers pre-placement and joint monitoring.

Permanency recruitment and assessment: challenges

34. The number of care proceedings being issued over the past 12 months has remained high and led to a sustained demand for permanent placements. There are new requirements for Care Proceedings to be completed in 26 weeks following the recent Family Justice Review. Adoption scorecards will be introduced to measure the timeliness of placements with penalties for poorly performing authorities.

35. The timescales for approving adopters have been reduced from 8 to 6 months. From 2012/13 approved adopters will be able to go on to the Adoption register within three months of approval which will increase the likelihood of them being matched with children from other local authorities. There are significant challenges in identifying permanent placements for older children, sibling groups, children with complex needs and disabled children.

Permanency recruitment and assessment: response

36. Oxfordshire County Council is committed to providing children with permanency and the percentage of looked after children with special guardianship orders or adopted rose from 14.8% in 2011-12 to 20.9% in 2012/13 (63 out of 302 children) which will rate Oxfordshire as one of the highest performers nationally. This strategy recognises that the type of permanency arrangement e.g. adoption, special guardianship, residence order, long-term fostering or residential provision should be determined by the child's individual circumstances and engaging and assessing family and friends remains critical.
37. The adoption system has to be redesigned to meet the new changes in regulations and the authority have introduced Permanency Planning meetings in each area every month to track permanency plans for children and assist with family finding for hard to place children. The service is using foster carers who have significant experience of disabled children to give potential new long-term foster carers insight into how rewarding the experience can be.
38. Oxfordshire County Council are exploring "Fostering to adopt" and concurrent placement schemes to the minimize delay in placing children for adoption. The adoption reform grant is helping the service to implement these changes and respond to the increase in workload by recruiting additional staff for one year and then developing a financial model to provide sustainability.

Permanency support: challenges

39. Adoption placements offer the best chance of stability for children but without appropriate support, their breakdown often leads rapidly to the most drastic and expensive consequences. The increase in numbers of children achieving permanency is positive but is likely to lead to an increase in demand and take up of post adoption support services. Adopters will have more say in the services they require through the introduction of adoption passports and personalized budgets.
40. There has been a significant growth of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) from 14 in 2008-9, 52 in 9/10 64 in 10/11, to 101 in 2012/2013. SGOs are a growing

area of financial responsibility because of a court ruling linking rates of remuneration to foster allowances with all special guardians qualifying for some allowance if they are taking responsibility for a child who has been in care.

Permanency support: response

41. The strategy is to commission a range of specialist services to permanent carers and their children to give the best support possible to adopters and children by using the Adoption Reform Grant. The authority are appointing a specialist social worker to work with families taking out Special Guardianship Orders to track and monitor that sufficient support is going in and to respond rapidly if there are concerns regarding breakdown.

Care Leavers: challenges

42. Oxfordshire County Council is committed to ensuring care leavers are supported to have the best possible start to their adults lives and that they receive all the entitlements laid out in the Care Leavers Charter. This involves clear pathway planning, on-going support in terms of education, training and employment, suitable accommodation and developing independent living skills.
43. In September 2012, Oxfordshire was responsible for 414 young people Looked After and Leaving Care aged over 16 years of which just less than three quarters were indigenous young people and just over one quarter were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASCs). Recent amendments to Children's legislation and DfE monitoring requirements have further increased local authority responsibilities for young people aged over 16: the raising of the Participation Age, a move towards personal budget/self-directed support for young people, the right to a Personal Advisor to 25 if the young person is re-engaging in education or training, and expanding those 'qualifying' for advice and assistance under section 24 of the 1989 Children Act. Those who are remanded into local authority care now having "looked after" status increasing the local authority's tracking and reporting requirements to include all young people eligible for leaving care services at age 19, 20 and 21 years.

Care Leavers: response

44. Oxfordshire County Council is re-commissioning the young people's housing pathway. A review of the pathway will begin in September 2013 with the pathway being re-commissioned by April 2015. This re-commissioning will aim to prevent even very limited use of B&B for 16 and 17 year presenting as homeless by increasing emergency/short-notice beds in supported units. It will address the changing nature of the cohort living in supported housing projects following the Southwark ruling and address the increased pressure on projects and District Councils for accommodation for young people aged 18 plus. It will ensure positive, planned progression through the

pathway for each individual resulting in a move to stable, independent, unsupported accommodation as a final outcome.

45. The authority is also developing a Homelessness prevention strategy. Data analysis identifying the triggers leading to youth homelessness is taking place. This will allow for more effective targeting and earlier interventions to reduce 16 and 17 year old homeless presentations.
46. The authority is developing a 0-25 years education, employment and training strategy. Research demonstrates that engagement in Employment Education and Training (EET) and securing and retaining stable accommodation are mutually protective factors. A key area for focus and development within the placement strategy is therefore continuing to improve EET outcomes for young people. From September 2013 the Virtual School and Raise services are planned to integrate to create a single 0-25 years service focusing on attendance, attainment and employability to maximize both levels of qualification and levels of work readiness.

Conclusion

47. This placement strategy builds on the wider themes contained within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Children and Young People Plan and Joint Commissioning Strategy for Children and Young People. Increasing in-county capacity will both "narrow the gap for our most disadvantaged and vulnerable groups" (Priority 2) and "keep children and young people safer" (Priority 3). In terms of delivery models it favours building on in-house experience where the council already have good/outstanding practice and this represents better value for money. There will be areas where Oxfordshire County Council does not have the required expertise or is performing less well which will benefit from developing the market and commissioning out. These will be reported to Cabinet as part of the overall Corporate Parenting Review in October 2013. It is critical that key partners in health, schools and the police are fully engaged and commit their own resources to keeping more of Oxfordshire's most risky and vulnerable children in county and work alongside the local authority to build flagships of excellent multi-agency practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

48. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- (a) Approve the placement strategy; and
- (b) Endorse the initial approach to increase in-county residential capacity and give approval for a detailed survey of potential sites to be undertaken followed by more detailed costings and return to cabinet for consideration.

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Background papers: none

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Annex 1

Comparison of costs for internally managed and externally managed residential care provision for children

		Externally managed Children's Homes - average costs both in and out of county	OCC children's homes	Potential savings if the new provision (20 beds) is provided by OCC
A.	Current unit cost per week	£3,465 *	£2,800 **	£665 per week
B.	Annual cost per placement (A x 52 weeks)	£180,180	£145,600	£34,580 per year
C.	Staff time and travel when going to visit LAC out of county	£25,000	Not applicable	£25,000 per year
D.	Placement cost for 20 children for one year	£3,603,600	£2,912,000	£691,600
E.	Total potential savings (C + D)			£716, 600
F.	Duration required to achieve savings in years based on £7m capital spend for four new homes			9.77 years

*This figure is reported in the CLA summary spread sheet, which collects information about the number of days that OCC purchases and the cost. It is a financial management tool used by Placement Duty and by Finance and includes overheads

**This figure includes an element of overheads. The figure without overheads is £2,413.