

## **CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES – 20 APRIL 2015**

### **Provision of Advocacy Services to Private Residential Homes**

#### **Report by Director for Children's Services**

#### **Introduction**

1. Volunteer Independent Visiting and Advocacy (VIVA) is an independent service, run by Oxfordshire County Council, providing children and young people with an independent visitor or advocate. VIVA is part of the Complaints and Information Team within Joint Commissioning, in the Social and Community Services Directorate.
2. Independent visiting and advocacy is provided by volunteers or paid sessional workers who are not part of social care services. An independent advocate acts as a representative or assists the young person or vulnerable young adult with getting their voice heard. An independent visitor helps young people who are mainly Looked After by Oxfordshire County Council who have little or no family contact by befriending and providing opportunities to talk.

#### **Background**

3. A new statutory duty from the Care Act 2014 supports the principle of enabling everyone to be involved in key decisions that affect their lives and part of this is ensuring that independent advocacy is available to those who need it.
4. VIVA has been approached by a Private Residential Home that supports young people who are privately placed and may benefit from independent advocacy. VIVA has been asked to provide up to four generic independent advocacy sessions per year. In this setting, the role of the Independent Advocate is to act as an impartial person within the residential home to listen and represent the voices of the children and young people placed within the home. This can either be on a group basis or one to one support, depending on the needs of the children and young people placed at any particular time. Visits will last for approximately 45 minutes to one hour and this excludes additional specialist advocacy work which will be agreed as and when required.
5. As a result of the new duties in the Care Act, VIVA anticipates that it will be approached by other Private Residential Homes to provide a similar service. VIVA is keen to be able to support this in order to raise the profile of the service and to reach out to more young people, who may not have had an opportunity to be heard previously.

## **Corporate Plan/Priorities**

6. The proposals within this report support the vision and objectives of the Corporate Plan by working in partnership to achieve a Thriving Oxfordshire by helping young people to help themselves, by ensuring that their voice is central to all aspects of their care and support. Independent Advocacy also provides a vital safety net for the most vulnerable young people within the County who may not feel able to talk to professionals or family members.

## **Legal Implications**

7. For VIVA to provide this service a spot contract is required which has been drawn up by Oxfordshire County Council's legal team. The spot contract is designed to be a generic contract which can be used again if VIVA is approached by additional private residential homes.

The Council's Legal and Insurance teams have recommended a low cap on liability as this is a non-profit making activity for the Council and, as such, it is reasonable that we do not take on any additional financial risk above the contract price. This is because the Council is providing a service rather than receiving one and the Council is covered to do this in terms of professional indemnity/negligence insurance.

## **Financial and Staff Implications**

8. To provide this service to Private Residential Homes VIVA will charge a fee to cover costs and overheads of providing generic advocacy sessions. This is because Private Residential Homes are profit making organisations and charge a fee for supporting the young people placed in their care. However, if any young person placed within any Private Residential Home is Looked After and funded by Oxfordshire County Council, VIVA would not charge to provide specialist individual advocacy support. A charge of £50.00 per hour plus travel expenses is proposed to cover staffing costs, travel expenses and administration charges.
9. A small number of the volunteers managed by VIVA have become trained sessional workers recruited to Oxfordshire County Council's casual bank and provide specialist services for VIVA. These paid sessional workers will be used to provide this service. There are no significant staffing implications for VIVA other than the administration of the service. The role of the Independent Advocate will be managed and supported by the Council but it will be the responsibility of the Private Residential Home to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the Independent Advocate whilst on their site.
10. The Private Residential Home that has approached VIVA for this service is requesting up to four independent advocacy sessions per year. Sessions will last for up to an hour and therefore the charges are small, in this case approximately £200.00 per year.

## **Equalities Implications**

11. By providing this service, VIVA is helping to ensure equality of access to the service for children in Private Residential Homes who may otherwise not have opportunities to have their voice heard in important matters relating to their care and support.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

12. **The Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families is RECOMMENDED to agree that VIVA can charge costs including overheads of providing independent advocacy services to Private Residential Homes. The Cabinet Member is also asked to agree in principle to the provision of the service as outlined in this paper.**

### **JIM LEIVERS**

Director for Children, Education and Families

Background papers: Nil.

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March 2015