

Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA)

Front Sheet: Corporate Parenting & Placements for Looked After Children and Young People

Directorate and Service Area:

Children Education and Families – Children’s Corporate Parenting

What is being assessed (e.g. name of policy, procedure, project, service or proposed service change):

The assessment has been prepared to consider the proposed changes to a range of services provided to Looked After Children (LAC). A set of changed policy and practice is being implemented across the LAC service which includes;

- Improved decision making to become LAC
- Reconnecting LAC with their birth families
- Improvements in the Fostering Service
- Expanding Supported Lodgings Provision for post year 11 LAC
- Prevention of unregulated placements
- Review of all Third-Party Service Spend

These proposals are made up of a range of changes within the Corporate Parenting Service for CEF. The changes are being implemented to deliver improved services to LAC which can also deliver financial efficiencies as set out within the MTFP.

Responsible owner / senior officer:

Lara Patel – Deputy Director Corporate Parenting

Date of assessment:

05 December 2018

Summary of judgement:

The impact of these changes will be upon all Looked After Children (LAC) and young people. The changes have all been driven primarily with the intention of reducing unnecessary delay in the LAC process, providing the most appropriate placement provision for LAC, reducing change and disruption of placements and enhancing the ability of the Council to place children as near to their families and communities and possible.

The proposed changes to practice and service provision will all be conducted to meet the Council’s requirements as set out within the Children Act 1989 and all related statutory guidance for LAC and care leavers.

It is not intended that the changes will result in any detrimental impact upon looked after children and young people. On the contrary the changes and improvements are intended to provide a better service for this service user group.

Detail of Assessment:

Purpose of assessment:

The purpose of the assessment is to ensure that the proposed review and changes to LAC services do not adversely affect this group of children and young people and that the Council continues to provide good services to them. Services will continue to meet the statutory requirements of the Council as set out within the Children Act 1989 and associated statutory guidance and regulations.

In undertaking this assessment, the Council has given due regard to Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 in exercising its functions.

Social Value

Under the Public Services (Social Value Act) 2012 the Council also has an obligation to consider how the procurement of services contracts with a life value of more than £173,934¹ might improve the economic, social, and environmental well-being of the area affected by the proposed contract, and how it might act to secure this improvement. However, it is best practice to consider social value for all types of contracts, service delivery decisions and new/updated policies. In this context, 'policy' is a general term that could include a strategy, project or contract. In this case the proposals will enhance the social value by improving the choice and quality of services provided to LAC.

Context / Background:

A demographic pressure exists within the number of Looked After Children (LAC) within Oxfordshire. This budget includes the mainstream LAC, which excludes children with disabilities and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children which currently total 99.

The overall LAC population has increased from 460 in 2013/14 to 755 at the end of September 2018, an increase of 64%, and since the end of 2017/18 numbers have increased from 684, an increase of 10%, which could lead to a 20% increase in 2018/19 if extrapolated. Most of this increase has been within mainstream placement provision (foster placements).

As a result, there is a forecast overspend due to demography which means that the Council need to review and change the way that services are provided. The service is also required to make efficiencies in line with the Council's MTFP. The Council must also consider how to plan and fund a range of possible growth scenarios.

In order to meet these demands, the service has been reviewed and a series of improvements and changes have been proposed. The service is regulated by Ofsted so all changes will be implemented in line with statutory requirements and to meet the criteria for a good service as set out in the statutory guidance.

Proposals:

The Council has developed a range of service changes and improvements related to LAC provision that will reduce the need for expensive out of authority placements; will reduce unnecessary delay in care planning; will expand service provision; and offer more placements that are local and meet individual children's needs. By reducing delay and providing more in-house placement provision the Council make significant financial savings as set out within the Cabinet report. Over the period 2019/20 to 2020/23 savings proposed total £7.085m as follows;

- Improved decision making to become LAC – facilitating savings across the service
- Reconnecting LAC with their birth families - £2.491
- Improvements in the Fostering Service - £1.104
- Expanding Supported Lodgings Provision for post year 11 LAC - £0.240
- Prevention of unregulated placements - £0.100m
- Review of Third Party Service Spend - £3.150

It is proposed that the following changes to the service will be implemented;

Improved decision making to become LAC – The implementation of an Entry to Care Panel that is chaired by the Deputy Director - Corporate Parenting, to ensure consistent and timely decision making for all new LAC. This Panel maintain's close oversight of all decisions to bring a child into care to consider diversionary activity to prevent the child becoming LAC; ensure that the most appropriate service provision is made available to that child with the intention of progressing their care plan without delay; and to ensure they achieve the best possible outcomes.

Reconnecting LAC with their birth families - Due to demand on local authority looked after children services there is a need to improve the effectiveness of the Reconnecting Meetings to increase the number of children leaving care. The main practice model to implement this work will be via the NSPCC Reunification Model, which will be rolled out across all LAC teams. As part of this initiative the service is also undertaking focused work to step-down children from high cost residential provision into bespoke foster placement provision. This will only take place where the change in accommodation clearly meets the needs of the child and is part of their agreed care plan.

Improvements in the Fostering Service - Oxfordshire County Council are the Corporate Parents for 755 Looked after Children (September 2018). These children and young people are placed across a wide range of carers, ranging from Kinship carers, Special Guardians, mainstream Foster Carers and Residential homes. Of this cohort, 363 (September 2018) children and young people are placed in 'mainstream' foster carers, either within the county of Oxfordshire or in neighbouring counties or further afield. This project has been scoped to focus on these 'mainstream' foster carers, of which 178 are classed as 'in-house' foster carers and 185 are foster carers provided by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). To achieve this increase in

carers and compete in this challenging market once again, OCC would need to review and enhance their full 'offer' to in-house carers. This may not necessarily be a financial offer but one of enhanced support to foster carers, leaner processes, more efficient systems and a stronger approach to marketing/advertising, leading to a stronger presence in the market.

Expanding Supported Lodgings Provision for post year 11 LAC - Supported Lodgings enable single children aged sixteen and above to be offered accommodation in a home environment when leaving foster care or residential care. The placements are provided by registered carers who can offer a bedroom in their homes, along with 10 hours of support to care leavers. Oxfordshire is currently extending its supported lodgings policy and procedure to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of providers available to meet the needs of those young people who would benefit from this support and ensure that valuable fostering and residential resources are made available for other children whom require them. This will reduce the need for higher cost external independently provided foster placements.

Prevention of unregulated placements - The Council has a challenge to identify children's placements for our most vulnerable and complex children and particularly for those children in care for whom a specialist crisis provision is required following a placement breakdown. The service will therefore invest to provide a specific resource that is suitable of providing a crisis bed to meet the needs of our complex and high risk looked after children. This provision will be used to reduce the use of making unregulated placements which, are both high cost and present a high level of risk to the child and staff involved.

Review of Third Party Spend – Some placements and services are provided under contract with third party providers. The Council is undertaking a review of all such contracts to ensure that they offer best value for money and that all possible discounts and financial savings are being delivered within the contracts. The financial efficiencies made through this activity will not affect the quality or capacity of the services being offered to LAC but will be driven through tighter contract management.

Evidence / Intelligence:

The proposals and service developments have been considered as part of a wide range of evidence gathering, consultation and advice from across the service, service users and service providers.

The proposals are all informed by the Council's CEF Sufficiency Strategy (2018) which outlines the key requirements for LAC services based on demographic information, service analysis and the statutory regulatory framework.

The proposals are also the subject to close monitoring and scrutiny as part of the Children's Transformation Programme governance structure. This ensures that appropriate risk management and regulatory guidance is considered in relation to the different proposals.

Alternatives considered / rejected:

A range of service options have been considered for each of the service proposals in line with the statutory requirements as set out within the Children Act 1989. The options have been considered alongside the current service provision which will be

maintained as the new service are developed and implemented. Where appropriate the service proposals have outlined option appraisals as part of the Transformation Programme documentation which detail benefits and risk associated with them.

Impact on Individuals and Communities:

Community / Group being assessed (as per list above – e.g. age, rural communities – do an assessment for each one on the list)

Risks	Mitigations
Service to LAC children deteriorate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LAC placement options will be enhanced and improved. • Local Fostering provision will be expanded to offer better quality placements • Expanded Fostering service will be able to provide greater likelihood that LAC will be placed nearer to their home community.
There will not be enough LAC placements to meet the Council's statutory responsibility.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposals will increase the number of placements available to meet the increased number of LAC. • The quality of provision will remain high because all of the proposals will meet the requirements of the statutory regulator, Ofsted.

Impact on Staff:

Risks	Mitigations
Increased workload within the Fostering Assessment Teams.	Additional staffing is planned for those services that increase in size (Fostering)

Impact on other Council services:

Risks	Mitigations
Increase cost to other Council services	Without savings in CEF other services would need to take a greater share of financial pressure to balance the budget.

	Better placement outcomes in childhood will help to reduce demand/need in adult services

Impact on providers:

Risks	Mitigations
Service providers will be affected by the management and possible reduction in the use of their services.	Ongoing plans are in place to consult with providers of specialist placement services to LAC in Oxfordshire.

Action plan:

Action	By When	Person responsible
All of the proposals form part of the Children's Transformation Programme which includes detailed action plans and monitoring arrangements to progress them	Monthly through the Children's Transformation Board.	Lara Patel

Monitoring and review:

Person responsible for assessment:

Version	Date	Notes (e.g. Initial draft, amended following consultation)
1	30 November 2018	Initial Draft
2	05 December 2018	Amended following consultation with service