

CABINET– 23 FEBRUARY 2016

Proposed Future Arrangements for Children, Education and Family Services

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. Children's Services in Oxfordshire has and continues to be a primary priority for the Council and its partners. In particular, keeping children safe is of critical importance to the Council and as such the Authority has a clear explicit resource commitment to supporting the most vulnerable within the community. There is however significant pressures and challenges facing public sector services that mean the current status quo arrangements are not sustainable. The County Council is facing unprecedented changes that are significantly influenced by a number of factors.
2. Firstly, Children's Services are both locally and nationally facing an agenda of unprecedented change. Much of this is driven by the ambitions of Government to introduce fundamental change to the ways in which children and their families are provided with services such as education, health provision and care. It is an agenda that will over the next 3-4 years fundamentally change the nature and extent of public sector services.
3. Secondly, running alongside these ambitions, funding for public sector services is being radically reduced. In Oxfordshire this has over the last 5 years seen a significant reduction in available finance that has required a reduction in excess of £210million in funding for County Council services. This has had a direct impact on Children, Education and Family services. This is not untypical of what is happening in other Local Authority areas up and down the country. Looking forwards it is known that there are other substantial reductions to come, both in Children's Social Care and in funding for Education Services. The extent of this is still to be ascertained.
4. Thirdly, volume and activity in Oxfordshire and elsewhere has shown since 2011/12 dramatic increases. Between March 2011 and March 2015 the number of children on a child protection plan rose from 332 to 569 - a rise of 71% (compared with a national rise of 16%). Since March the numbers of children on plans have stabilised. This has shown a concomitant increase in the Looked After population from 427 at March 2011 to 514 at March 2015 a rise of 20% compared to a national rise of 4%. Since March the number of looked after children has risen further to 585.
5. It is important to place these pressures and inevitable reduction in service provision in context. Whilst the Council needs to move from universal open access provision for all to a targeted model of intervention it is important to remember that much of existing provision such as those commissioned by public health services will remain in place.

- 6 These changes and pressures, both, volume and spend patterns, against a backcloth of increasing requirements from Government make major organisational change necessary. It is further compounded and complicated by the rising agenda of devolution as laid out in the “Cities and Local Government Devolution Act (CLGDA) 2016 which received assent in January of this year. Whilst much of the immediate changes are likely to affect in the first instance Adult Services it will have a longer term impact on Children’s Services. This is currently being explored by the County Council and the health community and will form the basis of future reports to Cabinet.

Issues

7. As a consequence of the above the Children Education and Families Directorate needs to change. In some respects this builds upon the reorganisation of 2010/11 but fundamentally it is about the Directorate doing less with less resource and inevitably targeting what is done to those who need it most.
8. It inevitably means developing a different relationship with partner organisations such as Schools and Health and will create a different environment of help and support for children and their families.
9. The details of the proposed changes will be developed over the coming months with the intention of having in place a fit for purpose future organisation targeted at the most vulnerable children living in, or visiting Oxfordshire.
- 10 Linked to this report are a series of three reports which cover in some detail:
- The outcome of public consultation regarding proposals for change to early help services, including, children’s centres and early intervention hubs
 - Proposals for the future shape of Education and learning Services
 - Proposals for future safeguarding and Corporate Parenting Services
 - Proposals for future Children’s Social Care services.
11. If the proposals within these reports are accepted by Cabinet then further consultation with staff and partners will be required. This is intended to commence in April/May and will last over the summer period. It will be based upon more detailed work that will be reported to a future meeting of Cabinet.
- 12 An overriding consideration in the preparation of these reports has been affordability. Much of the change is required as a consequence of budget reductions arising from increasing volumes and decreasing resources. So whilst the concept of help and support delivered as part of a universal provision has been recognised as desirable it has been inevitable that

services in some key areas will be reduced. In practical terms the proposals identified throughout the linked reports are made on the basis of protecting the most vulnerable and making the best of what we have.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:

- (a) receive the outcome of the consultation exercise on the future of early help services along with the proposed alternative arrangements for Children's Services as outlined in the Cabinet Advisory Group report of September 2015 along with recommendations from the Director of Children's Services regarding future organisational arrangements for Children's Social Care;
- (b) approve the proposed arrangements for Safeguarding and Corporate parenting services as outlined in the attached report;
- (c) approve the proposed arrangements for Education Services as outlined in the attached report; and
- (d) receives a further detailed report on the implementation of the proposed changes.

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Background papers:

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