

Report of the Placements for Looked After Children (LAC) Task Group:

Draft Children in Care Commissioning (CiC) Strategy – consultation response

Purpose

1. To present for Committee endorsement the conclusions and comments of the Placements for LAC Task Group with respect to the Children in Care Commissioning Strategy consultation.
2. To propose that the Committee delegates responsibility for scrutinising the final Children in Care Commissioning Strategy to the Placements for LAC Task Group, which will refer its report directly to Cabinet for consideration on 16th March 2012.

Background

3. The Placements for LAC Task Group was originally established to scrutinise the Placements for Looked After Children (LAC) Commissioning Strategy. In January 2011, the Children in Care Commissioning Group, a sub-group of the Wiltshire's Children's Trust's Commissioning Executive, decided to review and update this strategy, agreeing that the new strategy should have a broader focus and cover all services for children in care instead of focusing only on placements.
4. The draft CiC Commissioning Strategy is out for consultation until 20th January 2012. The purpose of the Strategy is to achieve better outcomes for children and young people by making sure there are sufficient services available locally. This will involve ensuring:
 - There are services available which prevent children and young people from coming into care and assist with a return home if this is appropriate.
 - A good range of high quality services for children in care, including placements (our aim is 'local placements for local children').
 - All services are cost effective.
5. The Placements for LAC Task Group met to consider the draft CiC Strategy on 14th November and agreed the conclusions and comments included in the report below.

Summary of discussions

Comments on the consultation process

6. Members considered a report describing the consultation and engagement on the draft Strategy undertaken with children and young people. This had included focus group work, a paper-based SNAP Survey and an electronic SNAP survey hosted on the Sparksite webpage.
7. It was noted that only 8 young people had taken part in focus groups. Members queried whether this number could be increased to reflect a broader sample of Wiltshire's looked after children. It was noted that the focus group comprised members of Wiltshire's CiC Council who are representatives of the LAC community, and that not all children and young people are able to engage with an event of this nature.
8. Members were pleased that a forum specifically for children and young people with learning difficulties and disabilities (LDD) was now up-and-running and would be used for consultation and engagement on matters such as the new Strategy.
9. Members were concerned that some of the children and young people consulted seemed to doubt the reliability of their social workers. As part of consultations on the new Strategy, young people were asked 'what are the top 5 things that make a good social worker?' The second and third most popular responses were "Turns up to things when they are supposed to and don't cancel" (57.8%) and "They do the jobs and things they say they are going to do" (51.1%). It was reported that the experiences of children and young people in the safeguarding system, e.g. at the court proceeding stage, were likely to have influenced these figures.
10. Members were concerned that Wiltshire's in-house foster carers did not seem to have been consulted and felt it would be essential to gather the views of this group. It was reported that a consultation event had been run for Foster Carers, but only a small number had attended, and members felt that further work to consult this group was required.

Comments on the draft CiC Commissioning Strategy

11. Members noted that the six commissioning priorities proposed in the draft Strategy were considered to be of equal importance.
12. Commissioning Priority 1 in the draft Strategy is "Maximising the involvement of children in care and care leavers in the commissioning process". Members emphasised the need for children to receive the support and guidance required to enable them to properly engage with the consultation process. Some would not have the skills to complete the online consultation independently just as some would not be suited to engaging in a focus group. It would be important to consider how each looked after child could be supported to express their views.

13. Members were surprised that the 11 to 19 Commissioning Strategy was not included in the 'Links with existing strategies' section of the draft Strategy (*Consultation question 2*).
14. Members felt that the word 'everyone' should be clarified in the following statement included under the 'Values' section of the consultation document: "Understanding everyone's needs and taking account of equalities and diversity issues" (*Consultation question 4*).
15. Members asked that 'value for money' be added to the list under the 'Values' section of the consultation document (*Consultation question 4*).

Other discussion points

16. It was reported that significant changes had been made to how placements were used and managed in the county. This had included an overall reduction in the number of young people in residential placements, an increased use of placements with family and friends, an increased use of host families, no young person over the age of 16 being in a residential placement, an overall reduction in the use of external placements and an overall reduction in the average cost of each placement. Members congratulated officers on these significant achievements.
17. Members resolved that at its next meeting the Task Group would receive a report on a proposed new approach to educational support for LAC. This might involve the property in Melksham originally purchased for use as a residential children's home. At the Task Group's previous meeting, it had been reported that, due to the changes to the use of placements referred to in paragraph 16, such a home may no longer be the most effective use of resources.
18. Members noted that approximately half of the £16.9M Children in Care budget was currently being spent on External placements; a significant reduction on historic figures. While acknowledging the difficulty of predicting future demand when meeting the needs of individuals, members would like to receive projections showing where the department aims to be in terms of the spread and cost of placements in the future.

Future scrutiny

19. The Task Group wish to submit the comments in the report above as the Select Committee's response to the Children in Care Commissioning Strategy consultation.
20. The consultation will close on 20th January 2012 and the Strategy will be finalised by the Children in Care Commissioning Group on 17th February. The Task Group will then meet after this date to consider the final Strategy and submit any recommendations to Cabinet who will consider the Strategy on

16th March. The Task Group intends to focus on the Strategy's six key Commissioning Priorities and the actions that sit beneath each one.

21. The Select Committee will receive the Task Group's report to Cabinet for retrospective approval on 29th March, plus an update on Cabinet's decision. (The timetable of meetings does not allow for the Select Committee to endorse the Task Group's report prior to referral to Cabinet.)
22. The Task Group will also meet in January to consider DCE's plans for developing educational provision for LAC and receive a presentation of real life case studies describing young people's journeys through the care system.

Recommendations

That the Select Committee:

1. **Endorses the comments within the report as its response to the Children in Care Commissioning Strategy consultation;**
2. **Delegates responsibility for scrutinising the final Children in Care Commissioning Strategy to the Placements for LAC Task Group, which will refer its report directly to Cabinet for consideration alongside the Strategy on 16th March 2012.**

Cllr Jon Hubbard – Chairman of the Placements for LAC Task Group

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Children in Care Commissioning Strategy 2012 – 2015 – Draft for consultation

Background documents

- A report on the Process of Engaging and Consulting on the Children in Care Commissioning Strategy 2012 to 2015