

Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
Thursday 8 March 2006

**IMPLEMENTING RECOMMENDATIONS 2.2a AND 3.1 OF THE
CONTRACTED OUT PLACEMENT FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE
SCRUTINY TASK GROUP**

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of the position with regard to in implementing the Scrutiny Task Group recommendations (2.2a & 3.1) June 2006 arising from the Contracted Out Placements for Children & Young People report.
2. The specific recommendations were **(2.2a)** "the Department is recommended to review its staffing structure in the Family Placements Service to ensure that there are sufficient staff : (i) to provide support services to foster carers, including leisure and respite services and (ii) to ensure that there are recruitment and training officers to meet demand".
3. **(3.1)** "the Department is recommended to take forward the actions arising from the "Raising the Game" initiative and....consider creating a Commissioning Manager post to be responsible for managing a centralised children's placement team for foster care, children's residential care and special school placements....."

Action Required of the Scrutiny Committee

4. That the committee notes the position to date.

Background

5. 2003/04 benchmarking data showed that social care expenditure in Wiltshire equated to £743 per week of placing a child in residential or foster care – as opposed to £628 average in England. This weekly cost rose again in 2004/05 to £859 in Wiltshire.
6. Details of the actions to reduce costs and demand were considered by the Cabinet and the Children, Education & Libraries Advisory Panel during 2003/04 and 2004/05, these included:
 - a review of all mainstream placements to identify those children that could be brought back into in-house services or returned home with support
 - the development of the Crisis Intervention Service, as an Invest to Save scheme, which aimed to work with young people and their families to prevent the need for placements

- the appointment of an additional Contracts Officer to review contracts and ensure more effective procurement of placements
 - the procurement of a 1:1 Solo Foster Care service for children with complex care needs
7. Based on forecast proposals, the Council approved an increased budget for mainstream and disability placements in 2005/06 by £2.5m, and the Schools Forum agreed an additional contribution of £0.850m for independent special school placements.
 8. However, early on in 2005/06 the Department was projecting even higher demand than had been anticipated for foster care and children's home placements, a higher number of external placements, and the escalation of unit costs.
 9. Consequently, in June 2005, the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee commissioned a review of the cost and demand of contracted out placements to be carried out by a Scrutiny Task Group of five members. The Task Group reported in June 2006 and made certain recommendations to the department. This report is concerned with two of the recommendations.

Current Position

10. With regard to both recommendations, work has been undertaken at a number of levels. However, this activity has to be seen in the context of wider developments within the Department for Children & Education and the Local Authority.
11. **Recommendation (2.2a)** is concerned with the Family Placement Service structure, the provision of support to carers and capacity to recruit and train sufficient foster carers.
12. An initial consideration of the service structure has been undertaken in the context of the Task Group report. The service has been protected from the financial constraints on staffing and recruitment imposed in response to the Council's financial position. It became apparent in the Autumn of 2006 that the service was to be the subject of a full service inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in February 2007. It was judged appropriate to direct energies into the preparation for the inspection. A report on the findings, together with any requirements or recommendations from inspectors will be made available to the Local Authority in March. However, inspectors have indicated that they received positive feedback from carers regarding the support and training which they receive from the Family Placement Service and from the Area Social Work teams.
13. Specific work has been undertaken in considering the future shape of the Adoption Service. This was based on the Task Group report but also comments from inspectors during the Annual Performance Assessment and Priorities meeting with Government Office for the South West in the Autumn of last year. Proposals regarding the future arrangements for the service are being worked upon. However, the Adoption Service has also been subject to

a full service inspection in January 2007. The draft report indicates that the service has improved considerably since the previous full inspection in 2004.

14. A review of the Disability Service has been ongoing during the Autumn of 2006 and it is proposed to transfer the Short Breaks Service into the Family Placement Service in due course. This move has been supported by inspectors and will have the effect of strengthening both services and ensure a consistency in approach to recruitment and support of carers under one service lead.
15. In summary, whilst a range of activity relating to the Family Placement Service is in train, final decisions regarding further developments within the service will be best informed by the final inspection reports.
16. **Recommendation (3.1)** is concerned with the commissioning of placements. At a department level work is continuing with regard to the 'Raising the Game' commissioning proposals. Additionally, the Local Authority is also developing proposals relating to the future arrangements for procurement within the authority. These proposals will have an impact on existing arrangements within the Children & Families Service.
17. A good deal of positive activity relating to the commissioning of placements since the Task Group report was published in June 2006 can be reported. Key points to note are:
 - The Head of Services for Looked After Children has a lead responsibility for commissioning placements
 - In-house Foster care recruitment has been maintained
 - The externalisation of the in-house residential service is almost completed.
 - Placement procurement is monitored and controlled by three senior managers on a weekly basis.
 - A projected under spend on placement costs is predicted for the year end.
 - The department is represented on the Regional Commissioning Forum and will benefit from initiatives concerned with sub-regional activity and a regional data base.
18. It will be possible to further review commissioning management arrangements once the externalisation project is concluded. A new national contract for the placement of children in independent and voluntary sector residential care will also need to be considered in managing placement arrangements and vetting in the future.
19. Finally, the development of the After Care Service and the scope to recruit, train and support good quality supportive lodgings providers remains a key issue for the department over the next year. Work is currently underway to identify the extent of the need and the level of resourcing which may be necessary to achieve effective commissioning of such provision.

Service Implications

20. As yet, there is no basis to be complacent regarding the overall situation. Nevertheless, if current progress can be maintained it is reasonable to move forward with the existing strategy with some measure of optimism.

Financial Implications

21. The existing approach to placement commissioning indicates that current year costs will be within budget. Such an out turn would allow us to further refine the existing strategy with a view to improving unit costs.

Risk Assessment

22. The main risks centre on:
- Our continuing ability to recruit and retain in-house carers
 - The success of the externalisation project
 - Maintaining tight control over independent sector provision
 - Reducing our reliance on spot-purchasing with non-preferred providers
 - The need for high cost secure placements.

Conclusion

23. The Scrutiny Committee are requested to note the progress to date, d to comment on the report and seek any clarification or actions they consider appropriate.

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