

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

12 NOVEMBER 2012

SUBJECT:	LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN REVIEW PROJECT – UPDATE
WARD/S AFFECTED:	ALL
REPORT OF:	ACTING DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES
KEY DECISION?	NO

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress of the Looked After Children Review Project. The objective of the project, which was created as a part of the Strategic Change Programme, is to:-
- Review the provision of care to looked after children in order to ensure that the cost of care and other associated costs are reduced.
 - That the numbers of children in care are safely reduced.
 - Raise the standard of care that children and young people receive.
- 1.2 The report also seeks to outline to members the future activities of the project. The intention moving forward with the second phase of the project is to identify further interventions, clearly targeted and based upon a cost / benefit analysis, which will move the objectives of the project forward.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 2.1 The Children and Young Peoples Department submitted a Project Initiation Document (PID) to the Council's Strategic Change Programme (SCP) on the 15th October 2010. This sought to initiate a project as a part of the SCP that would review Looked after Children's provision. The objective of the Looked After Children's Project, at that time, was to reduce expenditure in this area and stabilise the departments budget.
- 2.2 The context at that time for the project was that Wirral had a higher rate of Looked after Children than many authorities regionally and nationally at 93 children per 10,000 compared with a national figure of 58 per 10,000 (SSD903 2009/10).
- 2.3 This project was set against a substantial increase in referrals coming into Children's Social Care in 2009/10 compared to the previous year following the Baby Peter case. Data indicated that:
- There was an increase in the number of Initial Assessments undertaken (2031 in 2008/09 to 2600 in 2009/10).
 - There was an increase in the number of Core Assessment undertaken (698 in 2008/09 to 979 in 2009/10).
 - Children subject to a Child Protection Plan have almost doubled since March 2008 to March 2010, from 166 to 321.

In addition 1,853 initial contacts per 10,000 population (0-17) were received by Children's Social Care nationally in 2010/11, compared to 1,577 in 2009/10. The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) in their position statement 'What is Care For' (23rd October 2012) states that national statistics show that referrals to social care, numbers of care proceedings and numbers of those proceedings resulting in children coming in to care all continue to rise, yet in a small number of local authorities these numbers appear to be stable, or are falling.

- 2.4 National impact of Baby Peter at that time was that 8% more children became looked after in the year ending 31st March 2010 compared to the previous year. Nationally there were 4.5% more children becoming looked after in 2011/12 compared to the previous year. In Wirral safely reducing the number of children in care is a priority for the Council and against this national increase in Wirral the population remained static, as may be seen in Table 1. However, an increase in the number of children in care did occur in 2010/11 and numbers of children in care have remained high.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Number of Children in Care as at 31 st March	683	671	607	626	629	683	673

Table 1: Number of Children in Care as at 31st March.

- 2.5 The Looked After Children Review has five objectives which are:
1. To reduction expenditure on Looked after Children by £4.8m over the next three years.
 2. To safely reduce the numbers of Looked After Children from the current level to circa 500.
 3. To reduce the higher cost independent sector residential placements from 48 to 39.
 4. To review in-house placements in Brookfield, Willowtree and Rosclare and their related costs in order to improve services and bring about economies.
 5. Review and streamline practice and processes related to the management of Looked After Children within Children's Social Care to maximise efficiency.
- 2.6 In order to meet these objectives five 'work streams' were developed in order to address specific aspects of the project these included:-

Work Stream 1 – Willowtree and Rosclare (£620,000 reduction in expenditure)

Review of in-house residential provision at Willowtree and Rosclare. This review will seek to improve services and produce economies. The cost and quality of provision will be reviewed and benchmarked. The review will explore the potential to combine locations, service delivery and alternative ways of working and provision. (Completed).

Work Stream 2 – Brookfield (£680,000 reduction in expenditure)

Review of in-house residential provision at Bookfield. Value for money and appropriateness of the provision be reviewed and modelled. A range of options be produced for appraisal and the decision implemented. (Completed, as the home has now closed).

Work Stream 3 - Reduction in Fostering Numbers and Agency Foster Care (£1.15m reduction in expenditure)

This work stream has a number of inter-related strands. It will focus on reviewing current placements in agency foster care and reducing them where safe to do so. In order to reduce future requirements for such care the work stream will review the cohort of children needing foster care and the types of foster carers required to meet the needs of vulnerable children particularly those that are currently hard to place. It will focus on foster carer recruitment and retention, including mainstream foster care and Fostering Futures (intensive support fostering) and adoption. Approval will also be sought for a new special guardianship policy.

Work Stream 4 - Reduction in Independent Residential Care (£1.18m reduction in expenditure)

This work stream will focus on both reviewing current placements in independent residential care and reducing them where it is safe to do so and scrutinising new placement proposals. Contract re-negotiation will be reviewed and implemented where appropriate.

Work Stream 5 - Reduction in other Social Care costs resulting from reduced Looked After Children (£1.17m reduction in expenditure)

This work stream will monitor the reduction in looked after children, leading to an appropriate reduction in the complement of staff.

- 2.7 Each work stream has specific objectives and targets for its work and is led by a Strategic Service Manager from Children's Social Care. Actions for each work stream are developed and regularly monitored and reviewed against the project plan at monthly project meetings. The financial benefits over the course of the project reflect the following savings targets for each year:-

2011/12 - £1m
2012/13 - £0.74m
2013/14 - £1.77m
2014/15 - £1.29m

- 2.8 The looked after children population is a complex and volatile cohort. For children and young people in care there are a range of legal options such as adoption, special guardianship, residence orders or supervision orders for children who can safely leave care. Added to this there exist a range of different ways of providing care for children who require looking after by the local authority, such as, fostering, treatment fostering, local authority residential provision, independent sector residential provision or fostering, or secure residential placements. Not all children in care incur the same costs and each case requires individual consideration and careful monitoring of care plans. Some children in care require specialist provision that may be high cost. The safety and welfare of these children and young people is of paramount concern to the Council. It must also be recognised that a range of partners also have a role to play, with health and education professionals being a part of the support provided to children in care. Similarly the courts have an important part to play in ensuring that applications to court are dealt with in a timely way. Recently, for instance, a new Merseyside Court Proceedings Protocol has been agreed in order to reduce delay in proceeding and make better use of available court time.

- 2.9 The ADCS in their position statement 'What is care for' believes that aspects of the current system of care are outmoded. Care should be built around the individual needs of each child and young person. There is a need for a new construct of 'care' that is guided by evidence and designed, commissioned and delivered to realise, right placement, at the right time, for every child. The ADCS have identified 3 areas of for further investigation these are:-
- Adolescents, entering the care system
 - The stability of placements, in order to improve life chances
 - Permanence, in all its forms

This project will be monitoring the progress of the ADCS in these areas in order to inform the local design and delivery of services within the overall system.

PROGRESS TO DATE (2011/12 & 2012/13)

- 2.10 The Looked After Children Review has made some progress to date against the objectives laid out in 2.5 (above). In 2011/12 Work Stream 2, the review of Brookfield, was completed. A review of the Brookfield Residential Children's Home found that while the quality of provision was good, as judged by Ofsted, the 'value for money' rating for this provision was higher than similar Independent Residential Children's Homes in the Borough. The decision, endorsed by members, was made to close this provision. This realised a reduction in expenditure of £680,000 in 2011/12. The young people who were placed in this provision were transferred to other placements. This is of particular note in considering the first statistical release of national data for looked after children for the year 2011/12. This indicates that nationally the use of residential accommodation is 9% of all looked after children, down from 10% in 2007/08. In Wirral the use of residential accommodation is lower with 8.1% of children looked after in this way, down from 10.5% in 2007/08.
- 2.11 Progress has also been made in Work Stream 1, the review of Willowtree and Rosclare. The review of this provision concluded that the expanded and improved provision based on the site of the Rosclare Children with Disabilities Residential Home would in future provide all 'in-house' Short Break services for Children with a disability. This led to the closure of the Willowtree Children with Disabilities Residential Home. As a result the number of staff required in order safely run these provisions was reduced. This realised a reduction in expenditure of £320,000 in 2011/12.
- 2.12 The Looked After Children Review introduced a number of schemes designed to divert children and young people away from care proceedings or assist in them obtaining permanence such as Family Group Meetings (FGM), the Adolescent Crisis Team (ACT) and the revised Special Guardianship Order (SGO) policy and implementation.
- 2.13 Further activities are already in progress and will include a cost / benefit analysis in order to identify clearly the results expected from each initiative. These are summarized as:
- The review of the departments use of preventative services in supporting children and families and providing the 'early help offer'.
 - Edge of Care Meetings – providing an opportunity to target resources in order to divert children who are on the edge of care away from the care system.
 - Legal Advice and Action Meetings (LAAM) – supporting the new court protocol in seeking to ensure that all applications to court have been

thoroughly considered and necessary steps taken to ensure that care proceedings are concluded in a timely manner.

- Enhanced monitoring and tracking system provided to the Looked after Children's Performance Board – in order to track cases through to permanence for children and young people in care to ensure that there is the minimum of delay.
- Review the use of Family Support Services in the Children with Disabilities Service.
- Develop a Foster Carer wrap around service to support Foster Carers and raise the quality of care and support.

- 2.14 As members will be aware there is continued high demand for Care. As a result the financial projections for the project indicate that it will not meet the £740,000 reduction in expenditure for 2012/13. Currently budgets for fostering, independent residential care, adoption, court and other associate areas are predicted to overspend by £4,500,000. This has been reported to members in the quarterly Performance and Financial Review.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

- 2.15 As may be seen from this report progress has been made in developing the 'building blocks' for future progress. The overall numbers of looked after children in Wirral remain high placing pressure on staff time and in house foster care provision. Although the percentage use of expensive independent residential and independent fostering is low in comparison to other authorities this remains an area for pressure within the budget. In order to progress the project needs to concentrate on diverting new entrants away from the care system while ensuring that permanence is reached for those already within the system. While this may be simple to say, the challenges that this presents cannot be overstated.

- 2.16 In order to reduce the overall numbers of children in care the project needs to further develop its understanding of the current care population and future demands. Ongoing work involves collecting information on comparator authorities in order to plan effectively for the future. Key elements of this focus of work are:-

- Update and develop the Wirral Sufficiency Strategy in order to identify likely future demand for services.
- Develop a better understanding of the way in which the Southwark Judgment and changes to Remand and Custody will affect entrants to the care system.
- Further develop intelligence from the information available on the reasons for children and young people entering care.

In updating this information Wirral will be better placed in order to target the resources it has on those children and young people who will benefit from intervention. It is also acknowledged that the ADCS will be undertaking work on specific areas of the care system, the outcomes of which will inform the future progress and direction of the project.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 3.1 The risks associate with the Looked After Children review are reported in the Risk Log for the project in the Councils Concerto Project Management System. They form part of the Departmental Risk Register.

3.2 In summary the open risks to the project are as follows:-

- Potential increased risk of harm
- An increase in placement instability of looked after children (NI62)
- Reduced intervention activity leading to higher future costs
- A lack of political, corporate, management and staff engagement
- A lack of dedicated capacity to deliver the project
- Capacity in the Fostering Service
- Unsuitable placement activity leading to higher future costs.

3.3 One risk has also been opened as a project issue; this is an increase in demand for children's social care services. This would appear to be the case from the increased number of looked after children receiving services.

4.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 There are no proposals for consideration in this report; therefore there are no other options to consider.

5.0 CONSULTATION

5.1 None required for the purposes of this report.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS

6.1 None arising from this report.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS

7.1 The project is a key part of the departments' plans to reduce the number and costs of looked after children. The current looked after population exceeds resources by £4,500,000.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None arising from this report.

9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review is attached.

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/children-young-people>

10.0 CARBON REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no carbon reduction implications.

11.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

11.1 There are no planning implications.

11.2 The community expects that the authority provides appropriate and timely services to safeguard children and care for children in the councils care.

12.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

12.1 Members are asked to note the report.

13.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

13.1 Members requested a report on the progress to date of the Looked After Children Review Project.

13.2 Members are asked to note the planned future activity of the project.

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APPENDICES

REFERENCE MATERIAL

- Information contained in this report is derived from Wirral Councils Concerto Project Management System (Project 16).
- The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS): Position Statement 'What is Care For' (23rd October 2012)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date

Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit (from May 2012)

Section 1: Your details

EIA lead Officer: Matthew Humble, Business & Performance Manager

Email address: matthewhumble@wirral.gov.uk

Head of Section: Simon Garner, Acting Head of Branch Children's Social Care

Chief Officer: Julia Hassall, Acting Director of Children's Services

Department: Children and Young People's Department

Date: 15/10/2012

Section 2: What Council proposal is being assessed?

Looked After Children Review Project

Section 2b: Will this EIA be submitted to a Cabinet or Overview & Scrutiny Committee?

Yes

If 'yes' please state which meeting and what date

_____ 12th November 2012 _____

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-2010/children-young-people>

Section 3: Does the proposal have the potential to affect..... (please tick relevant boxes)

- Services**
- The workforce**
- Communities**
- Other** (please state eg: Partners, Private Sector, Voluntary & Community Sector)

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 4.

- None** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 4: Does the proposal have the potential to maintain or enhance the way the Council (please tick relevant boxes)

- Eliminates unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- Advances equality of opportunity
- Fosters good relations between groups of people

If you have ticked one or more of above, please go to section 5.

- No** (please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 5:

Could the proposal have a positive or negative impact on any of the protected groups (race, gender, disability, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership)?

You may also want to consider socio-economic status of individuals.

Please list in the table below and include actions required to mitigate any potential negative impact.

Which group(s) of people could be affected	Potential positive or negative impact	Action required to mitigate any potential negative impact	Lead person	Timescale	Resource implications
Disabled People	<p>Positive impact Current policies ensure that disabled people can apply to become foster carers, kinship carers, special guardians and adopters, and appropriate support would be assessed through the supervising social work service and care is taken to match child's needs with carers strengths.</p> <p>Positive impact Financial support for adopters, special guardians etc takes into account the additional costs of disability.</p>				
Lesbian, Gay & Bisexual People	<p>Positive impact Current policies ensure that gay, lesbian, bisexual people can apply to become foster carers, kinship carers, special guardians and adopters, and appropriate support would be assessed through the supervising social work service and care is taken to match child's needs with carers strengths.</p>				

Women	<p>Positive Impact Ensure that women and men are equally encouraged to become foster carers, adopters and take on the responsibility within the family.</p>				
Men	<p>Positive Impact Ensure that women and men are equally encouraged to become foster carers, adopters and take on the responsibility within the family.</p>				
Black & Racial Minority People	<p>Positive Impact Current policies ensure that black and racial minority people are encouraged to apply to become foster carers, kinship carers, special guardians and adopters, and appropriate support would be assessed through the supervising social work service and care is taken to match child's needs with carers strengths.</p> <p>Positive Impact Carers are given advice and information about support groups, and meeting the cultural needs of the children in their care.</p>				
Older People	<p>Positive Impact Grandparent groups run through the children's centres.</p> <p>Positive Impact Current policies allow people of all ages to apply and would match carers abilities to the needs of children</p>				
Younger People and Children	<p>Positive Impact Service ensures that young people and children are provided with the best care and support.</p> <p>Positive Impact Modern apprenticeship scheme operated by the</p>				

	<p>council for young people in care/leaving care.</p> <p>Positive Impact Pathway plan covers education, employment and training for children in care.</p> <p>Positive Impact Virtual school and designated teachers for all CIC.</p> <p>Positive Impact Health needs being met through specialist nurses and screening tools.</p> <p>Positive Impact Teenage pregnancy strategy to target and reduce numbers.</p> <p>Positive Impact Young mothers in care are assessed and where appropriate provided with support to look after their own child.</p> <p>Positive Impact CWDC standards implemented for foster carers to ensure best practice for care of children and young people.</p> <p>Positive Impact Specialist service for children's involvement and inclusion. Children's Champions, Children's Council.</p>				
Religious / Faith Groups	<p>Positive Impact Current policies ensure that people from different religious and faith groups are encouraged to apply to become foster carers, kinship carers, special</p>				

	<p>guardians and adopters, and appropriate support would be assessed through the supervising social work service. Care is taken to match request from parents or the child themselves regarding their religion/faith with an appropriate placement. Or if no appropriate placement available would ensure that carers are given advice and information to meet the religious needs of the children in their care.</p>				
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Section 5a: Where and how will the above actions be monitored?

Actions will be monitored via the Looked After Children’s Project Board and the Departments Management Team (DMT) meeting.

Section 5b: If you think there is no negative impact, what is your reasoning behind this?

There are no negative impacts identified as the purpose of the project is to review service areas in order to improve both the cost of care and provision to all groups.

Section 6: What research / data / information have you used in support of this process?

The project has been informed by National and Regional Data on Looked After Children provided by central government, Placements North West, the ‘Regional 22’ and the North West Regional Improvement Group (RIG).

Section 7: Are you intending to carry out any consultation with regard to this Council proposal?

No – (please delete as appropriate)

If ‘yes’ please continue to section 8.

If ‘no’ please state your reason(s) why:

Consultations are to be undertaken during reviews of specific areas as a part of the project in order to engage more effectively with the users of the service rather than a general consultation on looked after children.

(please stop here and email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for publishing)

Section 8: How will consultation take place and by when?

Before you complete your consultation, please email your preliminary EIA to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk via your Chief Officer in order for the Council to ensure it is meeting its legal requirements. The EIA will be published with a note saying we are awaiting outcomes from a consultation exercise.

Once you have completed your consultation, please review your actions in section 5. Then email this form to your Chief Officer who needs to email it to equalitywatch@wirral.gov.uk for re-publishing.