
Meeting of Executive Members and Children's Services Advisory Panel

7th December 2006

Report of the Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

Review of the Placement Strategy for Looked After Children in York

Summary

1. This report incorporates
 - Annual feedback upon the progress of the placement strategy for looked after children in York, which was originally agreed by elected members in October 2003.
 - Information about the key issues relating to the adoption, fostering and residential care elements of provision for looked after children
 - Statistical information about the adoption activity for City of York in the past year and provides an update on changes in the membership of the adoption panel.
 - A specific recommendation regarding the ongoing development of the local specialist fostering scheme

Background

2. In October 2006 the government published a green paper "Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in care " The key issues identified in the Green Paper relate to improving practice around
 - Children on the edge of care
 - The role of the corporate parent
 - Ensuring children are in the right placements
 - A first class education
 - Life outside school
 - The transition to adult life
 - Making the system work
3. The green paper provides a consultation opportunity to all partners involved in the care of looked after children with contributions required by the 15th January 2007. Final decisions about proposals with cost implications for 2008-09 will be taken in the context of the Government's comprehensive spending review in 2007. Children & Families Service section of the

directorates will be leading a local consultation and submitting a formal contribution by the January deadline.

4. This review of the strategy for placements of looked after children relates specifically to the matters raised in the green paper under "Ensuring children are in the right placements."
5. Elected members have been directly involved in the establishment of the strategy for placement services with annual reviews having been conducted and reported to Executive Member Advisory Panel. This is a clear example of members fulfilling their corporate parenting responsibilities. In addition there are several key positions for elected members in monitoring the work with looked after children of Children and Families Services. There is a councillor on each of the Adoption Panel and the Fostering and Sharing Care Panel. There are also four councillors who undertake rota visits on a quarterly basis to the children's homes. Additionally there are two nominated councillors, who undertake a corporate parenting role in listening to voice of looked after children. This is being boosted in December 2006 with the formation of the "Show Me How I Matter" forum, where councillors and young people will join together to ask for feedback about past and future progress in developing better services for children and young people.
6. As with any strategy it is important to be explicit about the expected outcomes of our locally agreed strategy. The following is an extract from the EMAP report in October 2003:

Expected outcomes

A successful placement strategy would ensure that there is an adequate supply of placements for children and young people across the range of resources. This would include

- Children and young people are placed with foster carers in or around York, when first looked after
- Young people for whom foster care is not appropriate or who are unable to be placed in foster care are looked after in good quality children's homes
- Children and young people who are not able to return to their families (rehabilitation) are able to live in permanent substitute families, for younger children through adoption and for older children with permanent foster carers
- Resources for placements of children looked after are efficiently deployed to ensure that placements outside York in foster care or residential care are only made when every stage of local provision and placement has been explored and exhausted
- Placements in the York children's homes are released for the placement of young people with the most pressing need for a residential placement

The strategy will endeavour to ensure that children and young people who are currently placed outside York are enabled to return to a York based placement (where appropriate) and that the need to place children and young people outside York in the future is minimised. Locality of service and the availability of foster carers for teenagers with difficult behaviour and severely disabled children will enhance the capacity of other local partners (schools, Educational Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and the Health sector) to support the plan in a corporate parenting model.

Consultation

7. Feedback from young people to the Children's Rights Officer in 2004 indicated that among the key issues for social workers to address were a choice of placements, privacy in foster homes and children's homes and maintaining good links with their home community through contact with their family and continuity of school placements.
8. Family placement workers liaise closely with social work colleagues in finding suitable families for children who are looked after and particularly those whose plan is adoption. The feedback from the workers and managers is positive. The chair and professional adviser to the adoption panel meet with child care teams on an annual basis to receive feedback on the panel process and discuss the work of the adoption agency. The Assistant Director meets twice yearly with the Independent Chair of the Adoption Panel where practice feedback is provided.

Options

9. The success of the specialist fostering scheme with a full complement of 20 fostering households should be noted. It is recommended that the capacity of the specialist fostering scheme is increased from 20 to 28 households. The increase of 8 households over the next two years will reduce the need to place young people in higher cost out of city placements.

Analysis

Looked After Children

10. The following two tables illustrate the recent effects of the changes in the looked after population and the type of placements utilised.

Table 1 - Age Composition of Looked After Children

	At 31 March 2005	At 31 March 2006	At 30 Sept 2006
Under 1	9	10	9
1 to 4 years	19	21	23

5 to 9 years	30	29	31
10 to 15 years	69	62	86
16 to 17 years	21	18	3
Total	148	140	152

Table 2 - Placements

		At 31 March 2005	At 31 March 2006	At 30 Sept 2006
Foster placement	York foster carers	85	89	98
	IFA (Independent Fostering Agencies)	10	8	10
Children's Home	York homes	8	5	4
	Non York homes	5	2	2
Placed for adoption		5	11	7
Placed with parents		25	19	19
Other		10	6	12
Total		148	140	152

11. We have experienced two distinct phases with regard to the total looked after population in this recent period. There was a reduction from 148 down to 140 but 2006-07 has seen a significant increase up to 152 again. These trends are subject to continued analysis and review.
12. There has been a shift in the types of placement so that significantly more children are now fostered than on 31 March 2005 (64% up to 71%).

Adoption

13. The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (ACA 2002) became fully operational on the 30th December 2005. The Act introduced significant changes to the process for a child being considered for adoption, for prospective adopters and for birth parents. Membership of the adoption panel was changed in line with the requirements of the new legislation.

14. Adoption work within the agency is located within two main areas; within child care teams who complete the necessary internal and legal processes when adoption is identified as a suitable option for a child; and within the family placement team, who identify suitable adoptive families to match with a child and assess individuals' suitability to be approved as adopters.
15. The Commission for Social Care inspection is responsible for the inspection of local authority adoption agencies. This requires a detailed inspection on a three yearly cycle. The last inspection was undertaken in July 2003, with a brief interim inspection in November 2005. The authority received positive reports at both with all national minimum standards being met. A full inspection is scheduled for February 2007.
16. City of York has always been a high performing adoption agency occasionally being ranked in the top 5 local authorities nationally for the performance against PAF indicator C23 (% of children adopted from the looked after children's population). In the latter two years of the three year period of the LPSA, City of York has been ranked 2nd (2003-04) and 1st (2004-05, published in early December 2005).
17. These advances in the achievement of adoptions have been further improved by a significant increase in the timeliness of placing children for adoption within 12 months of the plan and a significant reduction in the rate of pre adoptive disruption of placements. These three indicators taken together are indicative of a concerted approach to the active planning for adoption, consistent support to prospective adopters and prompt completion of the process. A chart showing current performance with national comparative data is appended at annex 1 of this report
18. Extensive work has been undertaken to ensure that new requirements under the ACA 2002 are met. This included training for social work teams and panel members, delivered by the panel chair, Jenny Gwilt, who had worked on the Act whilst at the DfES.
19. The five key changes from ACA 2002 were:
 - An extension of the local authority's role in providing adoption support to all parties in adoption (the adopted child, the adopters, the birth parent and birth relatives, throughout the child's life);
 - The standardisation of the process of placing children for adoption with the introduction of placement orders replacing freeing orders;
 - The introduction of special guardianship orders;
 - New regulations for adoption panel representation and business;
20. New regulations to standardise the adoption process including greater clarity over the transfer of parental responsibility from birth parents, via the local authority to adoptive parents.

21. These changes have now all being incorporated into practice in the agencies. Policies and procedures are being updated and developed in line with these changes.
22. A major challenge remains the co-ordination and provision of a comprehensive approach to post adoption support. The Act extended the responsibility of the placing local authorities to provide adoption support services to cover the period up to 3 years after the granting of an adoption order.
23. As described above the Adoption Panel for City of York now has a new chair, Jenny Gwilt, previously employed by the DfES in the capacity as the national lead person on adoption, and 2 new members: a nurse consultant from Limetrees and a senior manager in substance misuse services.
24. In the period this report covers the panel recommended plans for adoption for 11 children; matches with adoptive families for 5 children and approval for 4 prospective adoptive families. The Agency Decision Maker has accepted all of these recommendations.

Fostering

25. In 2006-07, the fostering service has the largest number of registered foster carers since 1996, when it was established. In the local government reorganisation, City of York was established with 65 fostering households, who elected to continue with the city instead of remaining with the North Yorkshire service. In November 2006, there are 89 fostering households for the city.

Table 3 - Composition of fostering households

Type	Description	Numbers	Target by 2009
Kinship	who are relatives or friends of the child	16	16
Respite	who provide weekend and holiday breaks for children	5	6
On hold	who are taking a break due to family reasons or illness	6	6
Foster Carers	Who are available for all looked after children and young people	62 (including 20 specialist scheme foster placements)	72 (including 28 specialist foster placements)
Total		89	100

26. The fostering service is committed as part of the Children and Young Peoples block of the Local Area Agreement to a target of 100 foster carer households by 2009. Achieving this target does not reflect planned growth in the looked after population but is aimed at increasing placement choice and as a result enhancing placement stability for looked after children.
27. During the period from 2003-06 there has been a significant and successful recruitment strategy undertaken to boost all levels of foster carers available in the York area. More specifically we recruited up to 20 foster care households, who provide specialist foster placements for severely disabled young people and teenagers with the most challenging behavioural or placement difficulties.
28. Recruitment to the specialist scheme has been successful and there are now 20 established specialist scheme foster carers. Specialist scheme carers receive additional payments to the weekly allowance for the child. For a young person aged 11-15 the total weekly payment is £ 549.77, for a young person aged 16-17 the total weekly payment is £ 579.34. It is important to highlight that there are no current vacancies to recruit any new specialist scheme foster carers and all of the placements provided by the scheme foster carers are currently utilised.
29. If a young person can not be placed with a York approved foster carer, consideration is given to a placement with an independent fostering agency. The costs of the placements with IFA's range from £760 to £1400 per week, with the average cost being £980 per week. Currently it presents a false economy to restrict the numbers of specialist scheme foster carers recruited, if available. For each additional young person aged 11-15, who could be placed in York with a specialist foster carer the minimum saving from purchasing an IFA placement is £210 per week (£10,920 per annum) increasing to £921 per week (£47892 per annum), with average saving of £ 430 per week per placement (£22,360 per annum)
30. From April 2005 the looked after population has fluctuated, with a significant reduction from April 2005 to April 2006 (154 down to 140) unfortunately this has been followed by a net increase of looked after children from April to November 2006 of 18. There has been a significant increase in the numbers of looked after children who are placed with York approved foster carers from 84 in 2004-05 to 101 in November 2006.

Table 4 - Comparison of York fostering with IFA placements

	All looked after children	Foster care with City of York	Foster care with IFA's
1 July 2004	154	86	11
1 April 2005	140	94	7
1 November 2006	158	101	10

31. Alongside the commitment to increase the proportion of children and young people placed in the York area has been significant joint work with partners in
- the CAMHS service (a designated looked after children's team)
 - Education (designated Educational Psychologist, a specialist teacher, a teacher in every school, personal education plans etc)
 - the voluntary sector (Looked after children's School Home Support Project)
 - the youth service,
 - Leisure service
32. The Commission for Social Care inspection is responsible for the inspection of local authority fostering agencies. This requires a detailed inspection on an annual cycle. The last inspection of fostering services including sharing care was undertaken in January 2006. A positive report was received with all national minimum standards being met. The next annual inspection is scheduled for February 2007.
33. The placement strategy related specifically to looked after children living away from home for significant periods or permanently. It is important to note that there is a parallel fostering service providing family based short breaks for severely disabled children. The Sharing Care team and sharing carers work cooperatively with the Family Placement team to ensure that the needs of severely disabled children, who need to be looked after for significant periods, are prioritised.

Residential

34. During 2005-06, a review was undertaken of York's placement strategy for the next 5 years. This took account of the falling trend in the need for residential beds in the city. It was anticipated that by July 2006, there would be less than 6 young people requiring a residential bed and that the great majority of looked after teenagers would have the scope to be placed with foster carers. Following extensive consultation with the staff and young people, who would be affected by the closure, the council took the decision to close the long stay children's home (51 Bismarck Street) in March 2006.
35. On 4 June 2006, the home was closed and there were only two young people remaining resident on the day of closure who both moved to the children's home at 19 Wenlock Terrace. One young person aged 16 ½ has negotiated a very successful semi-independence placement with a friend of her family and was discharged from care in September 2006. The other young man approaching his 16th birthday in November indicated that he didn't wish to consider fostering and has been looked after in the remaining children's home. He has recently indicated his wish to be considered for a foster placement to bridge him into independence and this is currently being sought.

36. The residential staff group affected by the closure of the children's home were positively redeployed into other council posts. One staff member elected to apply for voluntary redundancy and has subsequently found employment in residential care in North Yorkshire.
37. Occupancy in the single children's home (Wenlock Terrace) from June until November 2006, a four month period has been at 90%. The young people accommodated have predominantly been aged 15 and 16 years of age. The statement of purpose for the home in providing short to medium term care has proved appropriate.
38. The Glen Family Resource Centre is York's second children's home, which provides a parallel service to the Sharing Care team with residential based short term breaks for severely disabled children.
39. The Commission for Social Care inspection is responsible for the inspection of local authority children's homes. This requires an inspection on a twice per year basis. The last inspection for Wenlock Terrace was undertaken in July 2006 and for the Glen in October 2006. A positive report was received for both homes with all national minimum requirements being met, indeed the Glen scored the highest level 4 for an inspection outcome for a children's home. The next annual inspection for Wenlock Terrace is scheduled before January 2007.

Corporate Priorities

40. The strategy for the placement of looked after children in York makes a significant contribution to the corporate priority of improving the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children.

Implications

Financial

41. The current increased demand for looked after children's placements has resulted in pressure to purchase independent fostering agency placements. The cost of each IFA placement is between £200 and £850 per week greater than the cost of an additional specialist scheme placement. There are adverse financial implications of continuing to seek IFA placements instead of increasing still further the capacity of the specialist fostering scheme for the city.
42. Average savings for each new specialist scheme households replacing an IFA placement will be £22,360 per annum. If 8 new placements could be achieved replacing 8 IFA placements the cost would reduce from £408,000 to £228,000 a saving of £180,000. There will be careful monitoring over the next two years to ensure that the growth of the specialist scheme remains an accurate reflection of the needs of the looked after population. If there is a reduction in the population and underlying need, then the specialist

scheme will be reduced/maintained to the adequate level to avoid out of city high cost placements.

43. In July 2006, the DfES issued Good Practice Guidance on the issue of fostering allowances and foster payment systems. The implications of this practice guidance are being considered and will be addressed in the council's annual budget review.

Legal

44. The new legislation and regulations placed significant changes and some new responsibilities upon the council as an adoption agency, as outlined above.

Other

45. There are no direct human resources, equalities, crime and disorder, information technology, property or other implications for this report.

Risk Management

46. There is a risk that the fostering service will continue to purchase more external independent fostering agency placements due to the lack of new home grown specialist scheme fostering households. If that risk is not managed by encouraging the growth of the York specialist scheme from 20 to 28, there will be inefficient utilisation of the budget for fostering.

Recommendations

The Executive Member is recommended to:

- i. Note the updated information in relation to the placement strategy for looked after children in York.
- ii. Agree the extension of the specialist fostering scheme to afford the scope for recruitment of up to 8 new households in the next two years to ensure the capacity to place young people locally and avoid the additional cost of placing young people with higher cost independent fostering agencies.
- iii. Note the information about the adoption activity in the past year.
- iv. Note the changes following from the implementation of the ACA 2002 and specifically the wider responsibilities to provide adoption support to families.

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Report Approved *tick* Date *Insert Date*

Specialist Implications Officer(s) *List information for all*

Implication ie Financial

Name

Title

Tel No.

Implication ie Legal

Name

Title

Tel No.

Wards Affected:

All Yes

For further information please contact the author of the report

Annex 1: City of York's performance in the past four years compared to national performance

Background Papers:

A placement strategy for looked after children in City of York (Report to Community Services EMAP on 21 October 2003)

Annual report of the Children's Rights Officer, City of York/PACT Children Society 2004

The National Minimum Fostering Allowance and Fostering Payment Systems: Good Practice Guide, DfES July 2006

Care Matters: Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People In Care, DfES October 2006