

## **Children, Education and Communities Policy 27 September 2021 and Scrutiny Committee**

Report of the Assistant Director, Education and Skills and the Assistant Director, Children's Social Care

### **Reducing Service Cost Boards**

#### **Summary**

1. This paper provides a summary of Reducing Services Cost Boards across Education and Skills and Children's Social Care. In particular to set out what the Reducing Cost Service Boards are, how they work, key financial pressures and what is being done to tackle these issues.

#### **Recommendations**

2. This report is for discussion and comment, there are no options put forward for consideration. However, support from the Scrutiny committee is sought in the ongoing efforts to reduce service costs whilst meeting the needs of children, young people and families.

Reason: To ensure the Committee are kept up to date with progress in reducing service costs.

#### **Education and Skills Reducing Costs Board**

3. The Education and Skills Reducing costs board meets fortnightly and membership consists of the heads of service plus a principal account from the CYC finance team, it is chaired by the Assistant Director, Education and Skills. In February 2021, Budget Council approved £564K of general fund savings to be realised from the Education and Skills teams budgets and these savings have been delivered through the restructure of the Education and Skills teams. This restructure has reduced the number of posts across Education and Skills by 14.3 full time equivalent posts (including two grade 12 posts). The remaining teams have been re-organised to deliver a 0-25 Education service.

4. The DSG is also under considerable pressure with a £5m in year deficit and a cumulative deficit of £10m to address through the development and implementation of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) recovery plan. The plan will need to be shared with and approved by the Department for Education and progress on delivery of the plan reported to Schools Forum. The current overspends have been created by accelerating care costs, increases in the number and costs of managing education, health and care plans (EHCPs) and increasing costs of SEND transport. The majority of the spend on SEND is from the High Needs block of the DSG, this includes the funding of posts in the Council's SEND Services teams.
5. In 2020/21, the LA received just over £19m in the High Needs Block of the DSG and total expenditure was just over £24m. Of this £19,937,650 was spent on place and top up funding in schools, AP, ERPs and post 16 colleges and in funding out of area placements. A reduction in commissioned places at Hob Moor Oaks has been agreed in 2021-22 and also at the Danesgate Community.
6. The current place funding and top up via bandings will be reviewed as part of the DSG recovery plan and will be benchmarked against regional and stat neighbours.
7. SEN services continue to experience pressures related to requests for statutory assessment. The percentage identified as SEN support (9.6%) saw no change between 2019 - 2020 however, the percentage with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) increased by 0.20% and is on a rising trend - this mirrored the national rate of increase. This is in part due to the number of plans being maintained beyond the age of 19, but also by an increase in the number of requests for statutory assessment in the primary phase (0.30% increase in 2020). In order to monitor and reduce costs a weekly financial tracker has been put in place for the EHCP panel and for home tuition. This is being used to monitor in year variation. Work has been done to refresh the terms of reference for the EHCP panel with the request to assess being separated from the decisions about resourcing a plan.
8. Combined Panel receives requests for out of area provision both pre and post 16. During 2020-21 panel has been reviewing requests and identifying opportunities to end current out of area placements and to refuse requests for new out of area placements. This is bringing additional legal challenge and there has been an increase in requests for mediation and tribunal (though tribunals still remain below national, regional and stat neighbour averages). In order to ensure that the local

offer can meet need we have identified key areas where in city provision needs to be further developed:

- a. Provision for those children and young people with complex autism with SEMH as the presenting need
- b. Provision to develop independent living skills for those with SLD/PMLD post 19 – this is currently being looked at as part of the PfA work taking place. Many requests for Henshaws are linked to independent living skills.
- c. More opportunities to develop routes to employment through a wider variety of traineeships and supported internships

### **Children’s Social Care Reducing Service Costs Board**

9. The Children’s Social Care Reducing Service Costs Board meets on a monthly basis and membership consists of heads of service, service managers plus a principal account from the CYC finance team, it is chaired by the Assistant Director for Children’s Social Care.
10. The budget for Children’s Social Care remains under significant pressure with the 2021/22 quarter one financial monitor projecting a year end overspend of £5,952k. This is clearly significant and as a result of multiple factors. These include the impact of COVID-19 on families, the increased population of children and young people in care, placement sufficiency, continued used of agency staffing and costs associated with our ongoing work to improve services in order to keep children and young people safe.
11. York is not alone in facing these challenges. The national independent reviews of children’s social care, published in June 2021<sup>1</sup>, showed a 32% increase in child protection plans and a 24% increase in the population of children in care (national data from 2009/10 to 2019/20). The report highlights the challenge nationally - ‘The cost of children’s social care is escalating and funding is increasingly skewed towards acute services and away from effective help. It is getting harder to meet children’s needs within the current system and if we don’t take urgent action to prevent this, costs will continue to rise and the situation of children will deteriorate.’
12. Whilst the independent review of children’s social care identifies national and systemic challenges we can see elements of these

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<sup>1</sup> <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/case-for-change.pdf>

reflected in the pressures being faced locally. The Children's Social Care Reducing Service Costs Board focuses on safely reducing costs by overseeing service activity in a number of key areas. Monthly reports are produced by service managers in order to set targets and review spending. Key areas include:

- d. Placement finding, commissioning and support including foster carer recruitment, enquiries, assessment and foster carer vacancies. We can see progress being made in this area:
  - i. The most recent digital recruitment campaign ended in February 2021 and we have continued to receive a steady stream of enquiries totalling 19 enquiries in a 3 month period (April to June).
  - ii. The quality of the applicants has improved. We have recently received applications from people who have experience of working with teenagers and also carers wishing to transfer from an IFA, reflecting the positive impact of our digital recruitment campaign.
  - iii. We are part of the White Rose Group fostering recruitment partnership and any applicants interested in becoming a foster carer for York, are passed directly to us.
  - iv. Our Skills to Foster preparation training course has been re-written and is more flexible to meet the needs of applicants and also in ensuring applicants understand what the fostering role entails.
  - v. The 2 year recruitment target beginning April 2020 was 12 carer approvals. Through the digital media campaign, we are on track to exceed this target.
- e. Children in Permanent Placements including reducing care episodes and placement costs. Monthly reports have shown that progress in this area has been made. When the number of looked after young people began to increase there was an increased use of costly residential provision. Where possible young people have been moved into more appropriate foster placements. This has reduced costs of placements and York's costs are now more in line with what would be expected for the current population of children in care.

- f. Exit planning for Children and Young People in Care. There have been 9 children adopted from April to August. This is up 3 compared to the same period in 2020 and already level with 2018/19 & 2019/20 year end performance.
  - g. Agency costs and recruitment of permanent social workers. A specific workforce group is focused on developing a stable and experienced workforce and reduce spending on agency social workers. We are taking a dual approach of 'grow our own' with two Frontline pods having now trained up 10 Newly Qualified Social Workers who have moved into the service. Alongside this we are currently introducing a social worker 'career grade' in order to recruit and retain more experienced social workers.
13. We continue to face significant budgetary pressure, as is the case in many local authorities. The Reducing Service Cost Board is an important component in our wider improvement activity to reduce costs and ensure that children are safe. We have identified a number of continued focus in the next 12 months.
- h. There is a strong need to strengthen the earliest preventative support across our partnership to manage demand in targeted and statutory services.
  - i. Fully delivering our workforce and recruitment strategy to develop new social workers alongside ensuring sufficient experienced social workers. This will be supported by the completion of our current restructure and the introduction of a new 'career grade' to recruit and retain experienced social workers.
  - j. Securing local foster carers and placements to allow children to return to York and step down from residential care.
  - k. Securing appropriate placements for teenagers with complex needs.

## **Implications**

### **Financial**

14. The financial implications set out in the paper are correct.

## **Human Resources (HR)**

15. This paper makes reference to staff changes in Education and Skills and Early Help. Consultation with staff in scope of those reviews are managed and supported in line with the Councils relevant Policies and Procedures. Staff in scope have been consulted on the proposals as have trade union colleagues.

## **Legal**

16. There are no implications.

## **Crime and Disorder**

17. There are no implications.

## **Information Technology (IT)**

18. There are no implications.

## **Property**

19. There are no implications.

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## **Abbreviations used in this report**

AP – Alternative Provision

CYC – City of York Council  
DSG - Dedicated Schools Grant  
EHCP - Education, Health and Care Plan  
ERP – Enhanced Resource Provision  
IFA – Independent Fostering Agency  
LA – Local Authority  
PfA – Preparing for Adult Hood  
PMLD- Profound Multiple Learning Disabilities  
SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities  
SEN – Special Educational Needs  
SEMH – Social, Emotional and Mental Health  
SLD – Specific Learning Disability