

## Executive Member Decision Session for Children and Young People

11 January 2011

Report of the Director of Adults, Children and Education

### Proposals To Establish An Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service

#### Summary

1. This report outlines proposals to establish new, integrated arrangements for customer access to services across Children's Social Care and the YorOK partnership of providers, including local schools. These proposals are currently out to consultation with staff and key partners and will be finalised by late January 2011. The new service has been provisionally titled the Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention (AA&EI) Service. It is more commonly referred to as the 'new front door'.
2. The AA&EI Service will bring together, under a single line management structure, the current functions of the Children's Trust Unit's Integrated Working Team, including management of the Child Index, the Children's Social Care Referral & Assessment Team, and the Education Welfare Service. The new Service will provide a single point of contact for professionals and members of the public who have a concern about a child or young person, or wish to seek advice and/or information about available services (see **Annex 1** for detailed information and **Annex 2** for the proposed organisational structure of the new Service).
3. The Executive Member is asked to note the progress of work to establish the new AA&EI Service by 1 April 2011.

#### Background

4. Proposals for the new Service have been developed over an extended period in discussion with key agencies across the YorOK Partnership (see *DMT Briefing Note – New Arrangements for Access to Services for Children in York*, dated 2 March 2009). There has been a growing recognition across the Partnership that, whilst there should be 'no wrong door' to services, there are currently too many doors provided for customers – both service users and other professionals. This creates confusion about the most appropriate service to approach and is, in part, reflected by a lack of coordinated service response across all levels of need throughout the city.
5. A large number of professional colleagues, including many Head Teachers, have offered views about the strength of existing contact, referral and

assessment arrangements. They have also highlighted some important gaps and areas for further improvement. Key messages have included:

- some uncertainties about how best to approach some agencies with concerns about children and young people;
- worries about triggering processes that may not be warranted;
- a continuing perception that the collection of agencies who provide support for children and young people are not always as joined up as they themselves would want to be;
- a desire for a more consistent response to apparently similar concerns;
- sometimes inconsistent feedback about actions that have been taken;

but perhaps most overwhelmingly

- the need to be able to talk through, formally or informally, with a sympathetic skilled and knowledgeable professional concerns about individual children and young people.

6. The proposals have also been developed in the context of the current Government's re-iteration of the importance of early intervention. They seek to build further on local progress on multi-agency integrated working arrangements, including a significant increase over the past 18 months in the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) and the Lead Practitioner role. There is a strong fit between these proposals and many of the twenty-five priorities of the Children & Young People's Plan, 2009-12.

## **Consultation**

7. As already noted above, these proposals have been developed over an extended period in discussion with key agencies across the YorOK Partnership, where there is already a good understanding at a senior management level of the potential and the longer-term potency of a more integrated, multi-agency approach to service delivery.
8. The re-modelling of services will see the deletion of a number of existing posts across the three predecessor services and the creation of at least five new posts to better reflect the role and remit of the new AA&EI Service. Accordingly, a formal process of consultation with the twenty-five staff affected by the service restructure has already begun under the Council's HR procedures.
9. Discussions are also taking place, or are planned, in a number of partnership forums, including the Integrated Working Implementation Group, the YorOK Board, the Safeguarding Children Board and the YorSafer Partnership. In addition, there has been recent dialogue with managers in the Youth Offending Team and Young People's Services, with health service colleagues, and the beginnings of a dialogue with Head Teachers, which will be developed further early in the New Year. All of these discussions are likely to continue throughout the period of implementation and beyond.

10. It will be important to ensure that the governance arrangements for the new Service provide for an accountability to key partners through the medium of the YorOK Board, as well as to the City of York Council.

## Options

11. The proposals for the new AA&EI Service have been developed in the context of the loss of grant funding from central Government that has hitherto supported the Child Index and the Integrated Working Team, plus the need to deliver service efficiencies and achieve the most cost-effective arrangements possible in the light of the current financial climate.
12. Three main options were initially considered, ranging from an organisational structure which would have seen the complete loss of any capacity to support and sustain multi-agency integrated working arrangements, through to the retention of all current capacity, but within a new organisational configuration. The three initial options are set out in a paper to the Adults, Children & Education Directorate Management Team on 2 September 2010 (*DMT Briefing Note: Integrated Arrangements for Access to Services for Children*).
13. More recently, a further option has been developed which looks to incorporate the functions of the Education Welfare Service within the new organisational arrangements. This approach is consistent with the longer-term potential of the new AA&EI Service to act as a 'front door' to a much wider range of services to children and young people, including specialist services provided by other key partners. Bringing the three current services together within a single organisational structure also offers the potential for achieving financial efficiencies through economies of scale.

## Analysis

14. Details of this fourth and recommended option are attached at **Annex 1** and **Annex 2**. In arriving at this option, a careful balance has been struck between an approach which would have been unsustainable in the current financial climate, and the inter-related imperatives of addressing significant service pressures within the Children's Social Care Service and of retaining the capacity to support and build further on the strength of local integrated working arrangements.
15. The workload of the Referrals & Assessment Team continues to rise. As recognised by Ofsted Inspectors at the most recent Unannounced Inspection of Contact, Referral and Assessment Services, heavy workloads can diminish the capacity of social workers to maintain high practice standards and to complete high quality assessments in accordance with national performance targets.
16. At the same time, the complete loss of strategic and operational capacity to support, maintain and further develop the effectiveness of local integrated working arrangements would, arguably, lead to even greater pressure on the Referral & Assessment Team, and would heighten the risk of more vulnerable

children and young people "falling through the net", with no offer of support. Accordingly, the option of a minimum necessary level of service cannot be supported.

17. The recommended option retains both a focus and some capacity to undertake the strategic and developmental work currently carried out by the Integrated Working Team. Accordingly, management roles within the new structure will carry a mix of operational and strategic responsibilities. It will be important for the new management team to hold these potentially competing responsibilities in balance, although there will always be a risk that the balance will necessarily be tipped in favour of operational imperatives. However, the retention of dedicated strategic management capacity (as per the current Integrated Working Strategy Manager post) is not a sustainable option in the current financial climate.

### **Corporate Objectives**

18. The development of the new AA&EI Service is part of the second phase of a re-modelling of the Children's Social Care Service through the More for York programme. The new Service will also hold great significance for members of the YorOK Partnership and for the continued strength of inter-agency joint working arrangements.

The new Service will contribute to the achievement of many of the priorities in the Children & Young People's Plan, 2009 – 2012.

The new Service will also contribute to the Council's corporate priorities by helping to reduce the risk of poor outcomes for children & young people in respect of their safety, health and well-being, and to reduce the incidence of criminal and other anti-social behaviours.

### **Implications**

19. Detailed information on the implications of the proposed service restructure will be dependent on the shape of the final proposals. As a guide, the following indicative information is offered.

### **Financial**

20. The new structure has the potential to make an indicative saving of around £170,000 on the current staffing budget, including posts that were established with funding from central government through the ContactPoint grant. This grant has now been withdrawn.

### **Human Resources**

21. There are twenty-five staff whose current substantive posts fall within the scope of this restructure and who are therefore at risk of redundancy. Based on work to date, the new structure is likely to require a staffing establishment of twenty-one full-time equivalent posts. Although there will be opportunities to

assimilate or redeploy many existing staff into new roles, there is obviously the potential for some level of redundancy.

### **Equalities**

22. A key aim of the AA&EI Service is to ensure that there is an increased focus on the early identification of vulnerability and social need and on co-ordinated multi-agency action to address those needs at the earliest opportunity. It is hoped that a continued focus on the value of current integrated working arrangements will ensure that the right help is delivered to the right children and young people at the right time.

### **Legal**

23. There are no specific legal implications arising from these proposals, which are consistent with the existing statutory responsibilities of the Council.

### **Crime and Disorder**

24. Early action to identify and respond more effectively to the needs and circumstances of children and young people who may be vulnerable or at risk is likely to contribute over time to a reduction in the number of children and young people who come to official attention for criminal and other anti-social behaviours. Colleagues in the Police and the Youth Offending Team believe that the new arrangements can also strengthen work to divert young people from the criminal justice system.

### **Information Technology (IT)**

25. The new AA&EI Service will be supported, in the medium term, by current IT systems. However, the provider of the Children's Social Care database (the CareWorks RAISE system) is planning a major upgrade of the system within the next twelve months, after which time the RAISE will no longer be supported. This opens up the possibility of procuring a new system which will provide a higher level of integration than the current separate systems. It should also be noted that the national roll-out has begun of a new electronic system to support the use of the Common Assessment Framework (e-CAF) - the cornerstone of effective integrated working arrangements. In the event of a local decision to adopt the e-CAF, there are likely to be implications for systems development and support activity.

### **Property**

26. Accommodation within 10/12 George Hudson Street has already been secured for the use of the new Service.

### **Other**

27. No other implications have been identified at this time.

## **Risk Management**

28. The recent unannounced inspection by Ofsted of the Council's contact, referral and assessment arrangements reinforced that the remit of the current Referrals & Assessment Team must remain focused on delivering a high quality service to the most vulnerable children and young people. The new 'front door' arrangements should support that objective by strengthening the effectiveness of existing inter-agency arrangements for responding to concerns at an earlier stage. There are obvious risks to achieving improved outcomes for children and young people if the capacity of the new AA&EI Service is insufficient to maintain and further develop integrated working arrangements, and if the workload pressures on the new Assessments Team cannot be controlled.
29. Within the new Service, the role of the Practice Manager, Advice & Early Intervention, will be critical in ensuring that all enquiries to the Service receive a timely, appropriate and proportionate response, and that cases involving risk to children and young people are quickly identified and fast-tracked to the duty social worker. Accordingly, it will be vitally important that the Practice Manager is a suitably qualified practitioner, preferably a registered social worker, with a background in, and significant experience of, delivering a children's social care service.

## **Recommendations**

30. The Executive Member is asked to consider the outline proposals set out in **Annex 1** and **Annex 2** to this report and to endorse them as a basis for moving forward to final proposals by 31 January 2011.

### *Reason*

These plans represent an effective and efficient way to improve the delivery of targeted and integrated services to some of York's most vulnerable children and young people.

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## Background Papers

DMT Briefing Note: New Arrangements for Access to Services for Children in York, dated 2 March 2009

Interim Arrangements for Access to Children's Social Care Referral and Assessment Services, dated 14 September 2009

DMT Briefing Note: Integrated Arrangements for Access to Services for Children, dated 2 September 2010

## Annexes

Annex 1 - Proposals for an Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service

Annex 2 - Advice, Assessment & Early Intervention Service