
Meeting of Executive Members for Children's Services and Advisory Panel

6 December 2007

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

Review of placement strategy for looked after children

Summary

1. The placement strategy for looked after children is reviewed annually to ensure that there is an opportunity to reflect on progress against the aims and objectives of the strategy.
2. This report will inform that analysis, whilst also providing feedback on OFSTED conducted inspections on the placement services for children and young people provided by the local authority. Traditionally this review also incorporates the annual adoption report to the Executive Member.
3. The report contains specific information about adoption, fostering, children's homes and short break services for disabled children within the city.
4. The recommendations will encompass:
 - acknowledgment of the review of the Statements of Purpose for each service
 - acknowledgement of the annual adoption report
 - acknowledgement of the review of the strategy
 - the endorsement of key actions for the next period of the strategy

Background

5. The original strategy for the placement of looked after children was agreed by the Executive Member in October 2002. It set out the following expected outcomes for an effective placement strategy:

A successful placement strategy would ensure 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, the younger children through adoption and for older children with long term foster carers
- resources for placements of children looked after are efficiently deployed to ensure that placements outside York in foster care of 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

Statements of Purpose

6. Each of the placement services has a published Statement of Purpose required by the statutory regulations. They are for:
 - The adoption service
 - The fostering service including sharing care
 - Wenlock Terrace children's home
 - The Glen Short Breaks home
7. This review offers an opportunity to ensure that each Statement of Purpose is updated by service managers and ratified by the Executive Member.
8. The revised versions of each are available for consideration on the adoption and fostering web pages on the Council website www.york.gov.uk/health/Fostering_adoption/

Inspections

9. All placement services have been subject to inspection in 2007:
 - Fostering - February 2007 by Commission for Social Care Inspection (including the sharing care service)
 - Adoption - February 2007 by Commission for Social Care Inspection
 - Wenlock Terrace - June 2007 by Ofsted
 - The Glen - June 2007 by Ofsted
10. The inspection of Wenlock Terrace and fostering in 2007 concentrated upon the services deployed to provide placements for teenagers in the looked after group. The inspectors were candid in stating that their emphasis was deliberately to evaluate the impact of the closure of Bismarck Street in June 2006 (the former long stay children's home) Across the two inspections, the inspectors concluded that the management of the closure, the integration of the new staff team and the continued success of the specialist fostering scheme for teenagers had all contributed to a smooth transition. It should be noted that in September 2007, 87.6% of looked after young people aged 10-16 were living in a foster family.
11. Fostering and The Glen were described as providing outstanding services. Adoption and Wenlock Terrace were described as providing good services. There was a specific recommendation in both the adoption and fostering inspections (which ran concurrently) that expressed concern whether the staffing establishment in the family placement team was sufficient to maintain the current good and outstanding service provision.
12. These inspection recommendations have been addressed in the short term by the deployment of an extra staff member increasing the establishment from 6.5 to 7.5 family placement workers. This has been achieved by the deployment of grant funding until 31 March 2008.

Options

13. Option A - The recommendations cover both acknowledgement of information and endorsement of the continuation of the growth of local foster carer availability in York. The recommendation to consider further growth of local foster care availability (specifically the specialist scheme) is consistent with the best interests of looked after children and young people, the desired outcomes of the strategy in October 2002 and the pursuit of value for money in budgetary expenditure. It is also consistent with the commitment in the Local Area agreement to increase foster care households to 100 by April 2009.
14. Option B - If the recommendation to continue the growth of local foster care specialist scheme was not agreed, recruitment of foster carers could continue, but the likelihood of success may be significantly diminished. If continued growth in the local fostering pool is not maintained there is a risk

that York will increase its reliance on Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements and consequently the high cost may increase.

Analysis

15. Looked after population and fostering

Table 1 - Extract from Looked after children management information from 2002 to date

Year	No of Looked After Children
2002/03	151
2003/04	159
2004/05	148
2005/06	140
2006/07	157
Q2 2007/08	157

Table 2 - Age and gender distribution of looked after children from 2002-07

	2002/03		2003/04		2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		Q2 2007/08	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Under 1	1	4	16	12	7	2	4	6	3	3	2	2
1 to 4	17	9	35	28	10	9	12	9	14	10	12	7
5 to 9	26	9	13	15	17	13	15	14	17	13	18	18
10 to 15	35	31	24	8	40	29	42	20	48	25	49	29
16 to 17	12	7	4	4	12	9	8	10	15	9	11	9
Total	91	60	92	67	86	62	81	59	97	60	92	65
Grand total	151		159		148		140		157		157	

16. The lowest number of looked after children occurred in April 2006, when there were 140 children and young people. This figure rose steadily in the latter part 2006 to a peak of 165, but it has reduced in 2007 to a steady 157-159.
17. The increase from 140 to the high 150's in 2006-07 has necessitated the placement of several young people with foster carers from independent fostering agencies in Yorkshire and the North East region. The purchase of IFA placements peaked in April 2007 with 13 placements required. The largest cohorts by age were 12 and 13 years of age.

Table 3 – Children who entered care during the year/quarter

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	Q2 2007/08
Under 1	12	13	16	7	4
1 to 4 years	16	13	19	11	12
5 to 9 years	13	15	13	13	6
10 to 15 years	51	46	40	39	13
16 years	1	6	4	4	4
17 years	6	0	0	0	0
Grand Total	99	93	92	74	39

Table 4 – Children who left care during the year/quarter

	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	Q2 2007/08
Under 1	2	7	6	4	4
1 to 4 years	16	22	19	13	15
5 to 9 years	13	13	14	7	1
10 to 15 years	36	34	34	25	6
16 years	9	19	11	7	7
17 years	11	2	3	2	4
18+	5	7	13	2	2
Grand Total	92	104	100	60	39

18. Table 3 shows that in the latter part 2006-07 and so far in 2007-08, the number of entrants to care reduced significantly due to the effects of the reinvestment of staffing resources following the home closure into preventative services for 11-16 services. The increase in the looked after population is a reflection that the rate of leaving care has also reduced (see table 4). The children and young people who become looked after are likely to require longer periods of care, due to family difficulties, which have not been resolved through preventative work.
19. Additionally, there is a commitment for 16 –18 year olds to stay longer in their foster homes, in line with government expectations to make better preparation for young people's move to independence. Planning for the move to independence is managed by the Pathway team in partnership with colleagues in housing and local housing associations. The development and extension of the range of semi independent accommodation, taster and trainer flats has enhanced the experience of young people and they are therefore being better supported into independence. It is recognised in national research that the young people who achieve the greatest stability in employment, housing, relationships and emotional well-being have been able to remain in family settings beyond their 18th birthday.
20. The local availability of York foster carers for teenagers and severely disabled young people (eg with Autism) has increased significantly. The specialist

scheme was launched in October 2002 with capacity for 16 placements. It has grown with increased financial investment to 27 placements in 2007. The Executive Member in the annual placement strategy review has endorsed each tranche of increased recruitment.

21. In December 2007, IFA placements have reduced to 9 with the possibility of 2 more no longer being required by March 2008. Tables below illustrate the comparison of activity in the IFA and specialist scheme from 2004-08

Table 5 - Expenditure per annum

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
£ Thousands				
IFA	536	319	506	583
Specialist scheme placements	330	481	612	785
Total	866	800	1,118	1,368

Table 6 - Numbers of placements averaged over a year

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Independent Foster Agencies	12.9	7.5	10.1	11.8
Specialist scheme placements	12.6	17.2	21.4	26.6
Total	25.5	24.7	31.5	38.4

Table 7 - Corresponding costs of IFA and specialist scheme 11-16 year old

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Weekly £'s				
IFA average	796	818	965	951
Spec scheme 11-16 years old	504	537	550	567
Saving for each	292	281	415	384

22. Table 6 illustrates that there has been a steady growth in the placement of young people with York based foster carers on the specialist scheme from 12.6 on average in 2004-05 to 26.6 in 2007-08.
23. The objective of the placement strategy has been to increase the local availability of foster carers. The most pressing need was for recruitment and retention of foster carers who could provide care for hard to place teenagers. The demand for these placements had been met historically by children's home in York and external residential placements, for which the weekly unit cost would be between £2,000 and £3,000 per week. In recent years, the increase in IFA foster care availability has reduced the need for both internal and external residential placement. It is envisaged that sustained recruitment and retention of further specialist scheme foster carers will reduce further the need for IFA placements.

24. Table 7 shows that each young person placed with a York specialist scheme foster carer would cost £384 per week, or approx £20,000 per annum, less than the average IFA placement.
25. Therefore the further growth of the local capacity of the specialist scheme should continue to be prioritised until the need for an IFA placement becomes an exceptional event.

Local Area Agreement

26. The local area agreement includes a target to increase the number of fostering households in York to 100 by 2009. The recruitment and retention of foster carers has been successful in recent years with a peak of 93 fostering households in April 2007. The deregistration of 7 foster carer households in the period from April 2007 to date has reduced the stock to 86 and this reflected both cessation from fostering due to concerns about standards of care, as well the natural occurrence of experienced foster carers retiring or moving out of the area.
27. The challenge of achieving the net increase of 14 households in the next 16 months may prove exacting for the service, given the setback in mid 2007. However a refreshed media and advertising campaign has been launched with an emphasis upon the need for families for children aged 12 and 13 to avoid out of city (IFA) placements.
28. The target of an increase in the fostering community in York will present a challenge to the resources of the staff in the Family Placement Team. The team consists of a service manager, who manages adoption and fostering services; a senior practitioner (who carries a 0.5 fostering caseload, plus fostering development work); 2 family placement workers who deal exclusively with adoption; and 4.5 workers who recruit, prepare, assess and support foster carers. It is crucial to ensure that the ratio of linked foster families to each family placement worker is maintained to an optimum level to ensure that adequate support levels can be maintained. The optimum ration is approx 15 families per worker. The current ratio is 17.2 per worker. This would require an increase to 6.5 fostering FPW's workers from the current 5 if the LAA target were reached.
29. A further challenge will be the introduction of the Children's Workforce Development Council's (CWDC) 'Training Support and Development Standards for Foster Carers', which come into force from April 2008. It is anticipated that these standards will become a mandatory requirement when the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services (against which fostering services will be inspected by Ofsted) are reviewed. The CWDC standards are extensive in scope and implementation will have resource implications.

30. There may be a subsequent need to consider a growth bid to ensure that the establishment of the Family Placement Team is sufficient to maintain the optimum ratio of linked families to family placement workers.

Care Matters - Time For Change, Children and Young People's Bill

31. The government is committed to further legislative change, which will address the life chances of looked after children. Care Matters - Time For Change was published in June 2007. A draft Children and Young People's Bill has been included in the Queen's Speech in November 2007.
32. The core areas which the legislation will cover relate to provision for looked after children. The principle headings are:
- Corporate Parenting: Getting it Right
 - Family and Parenting Support / Care Placements A Better Experience for Everyone
 - Delivering a First Class Education
 - Promoting Health and well-Being
 - Transition to Adulthood
 - Role of the Practitioner
33. Local authorities were invited to make application for pilot funding for an initiative to establish a headteacher for the virtual school of looked after children. York submitted an application in March 2007, but it was not selected as one of the 11 local authorities for pilot status.
34. It is envisaged that future opportunities will be offered to pilot schemes to inform the learning for the future of Care Matters. The Care Matters Time for Change reference group has been formed from the multi agency professionals in York, who promote the interests of looked after children. The group will prioritise the response both to opportunities for applications for funding for pilots and also the implementation of the new legislative requirements of the Bill when enacted.

Adoption

Background

35. The Council operates as an adoption agency in line with the requirements of The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (ACA 2002), which became fully operational on the 30th December 2005. This Act introduced significant changes to:
- the process for a child being considered for adoption
 - for prospective adopters
 - for birth parents and
 - for adoption agencies

36. The ramifications of the new legislation and guidance are becoming more apparent over time, particularly in relation to the duties in relation to adoption support and support to Special Guardians (a new legal order introduced by ACA 2002).
37. Adoption work within the agency is located within two main areas; in child care teams who complete the necessary internal and legal processes when adoption is identified as a suitable option for a child; and in the family placement team, who identify suitable adoptive families to match with a child and assess individuals' suitability to be approved as adopters.
38. The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) undertook the three yearly adoption inspection of this agency in February 2007. The inspectors judged the service to be good, but directed that there should be a review of staffing levels to ensure that there was an adequate number of staff to meet the needs of an adoption agency.

Adoption activity

39. In the period November 2006 to October 2007, the Adoption Panel recommended:
 - plans for adoption for three children
 - matches with adoptive families for nine children
 - approval for six prospective adoptive families
40. The panel also recommended de-registration of two adoptive families whose circumstances had changed, and received reports on two children whose placements had disrupted prior to adoption. The Agency Decision Maker accepted all of these recommendations.
41. City of York has always been a high performing adoption agency occasionally being ranked in the top five local authorities nationally for the performance against Performance Assessment Framework (PAF) indicator C23 (percentage of children adopted from the looked after children's population). Annex 1 provides data on this. The council's performance has not been maintained at the very high level attained in 2004-05 in relation to percentage of children adopted from the looked after population, though it still remains above the national average. This decrease may partly be explained by the increased use of other legal options, such as Special Guardianship Orders (SGO), to secure the long time placements of young children. Two SGO's were made in year 2006-07.
42. Performance in relation to placing children with an adoptive family within twelve months of the plan for adoption remains at hundred per cent for all children. Unfortunately in 2006-07 the placement for adoption disrupted for two children. Both these children returned to the foster carers who had looked after them prior to being placed for adoption and will remain there -

one on a long term fostering basis, and the foster carers are applying for a SGO in relation to the second child.

43. The co-ordination and provision of a comprehensive approach to adoption support and Special Guardianship support remains a major challenge. The ACA 2002 extended the responsibility of the placing local authorities to provide adoption support services to cover the period from placement up to three years after the granting of an adoption order. It also introduced the duty on the placing local authority to provide Special Guardianship support services from placement and up to three years after the making of an SGO. Detailed support plans are required which must be agreed prior to placing a child, and reviewed annually. The support provided can range from financial eg assistance with nursery fees, on-going regular payments- through to therapeutic support. York is now responsible for the support needs of adoptive families living within York, whose children have been adopted for more than three years. Adoption agencies such as NCH, Catholic Care and Barnardos actively recruit in York for families for 'harder to place' children, so many of these families and children have not been previously known to us.
44. It has to be noted that cumulative demands on the service in relation to adoption support and special guardianship support is causing increasing budgetary and staffing pressures.

Corporate Priorities

45. The placement strategy for looked after children and the recommendations in this report relate to the council's Direction Statement:
 - We want services to be provided by whoever can best meet the needs of our customers
46. It relates specifically to the council's corporate priority to improve the life chances of the most disadvantaged and disaffected children, young people and families in the city.

Implications

Financial

47. This report includes recommendations to reduce the cost of foster care provision by increasing the number of specialist foster carers and moving children from independent fostering agency (IFA) placements, as outlined in tables 5, 6 and 7.
48. The current projected overspend on all fostering costs in 2007/08 is £196,000. For each further successful transfer from an independent fostering placement to a local specialist scheme foster carer, the department will save approx. £20,000 per annum.

Other Implications

49. There are no specific equalities/ legal/IT/ property/HR or crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

50. In compliance with the Councils risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives (Strategic) and to deliver services (Operational), leading to financial loss (Financial).
51. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score all risks has been assessed at less than 16, This means that at this point the risks need only to be monitored as they do not provide a real threat to the achievement of the objectives of this report.

Recommendations

52. Members are asked to consider that the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member to:
 - 1) Acknowledge the information relating to progress in the placement strategy for looked after children relating to adoption, fostering and children's homes

Reason: to comply with requirement to receive an annual report
 - 2) Agree the further development of the specialist fostering scheme in line with the stated principles of the strategy.

Reason: To reduce both independent fostering agency placements and achieve cost savings.
 - 3) Acknowledge the annual adoption report

Reason: to comply with requirement to receive an annual report
 - 4) Note that further reports will be forthcoming in 2008 on short breaks for disabled children, adoption support and Care Matters.

Reason: to ensure knowledge on future information.

Contact Details

Author:

Howard Lovelady
Group Manager
Children and Families
5357

Mary McKelvey
Service Manager
Children and Families
5335

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

Peter Dwyer
Director of Learning, Culture and Children's Services

Report Approved Date 26 November 2007

Report Approved Date

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Katherine Finnie Principal Accountant

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

- Strategy for the placement of looked after children , October 2002 (EMAP)
- Reviews of the Strategy for the placement of looked after children, 2003-2006 (EMAP)
- Care Matters – Time for Change, Government White Paper, HMSO
- Statements of purpose
 - adoption service
 - fostering service (incl. Sharing care)
 - the Glen
 - Wenlock Terrace
- Inspection reports
 - adoption service
 - fostering service (incl. Sharing care)
 - the Glen
 - Wenlock Terrace

CSCI February 2007
CSCI February 2007
Ofsted June 2007
Ofsted June 2007

Annexes

Annex 1: Adoption Statistics