

Learning & Culture Overview & Scrutiny 18 September 2013 **Committee**

Report of the Director of Children's Services, Education and Skills

Keeping Families Together – Safely Reducing York's Looked After Children Population

Summary

1. This report describes the trends in the number of children and young people looked after by the City of York. It examines the reasons for a significant and sustained growth in this population over a number of years and describes the progress of a programme of work launched in 2012 to safely reduce these numbers. The paper concludes with some specific proposals for further work to ensure that all children and young people's services are focussed on those children who are most likely to enter public care if alternative help and support is not provided.

Background

2. In 2011 York's looked after population reached 256, making it the fourth highest number of children looked after per 10,000 pop in the Yorkshire and Humber region. Although an analysis of the activity at the time, both internally and subsequently by the external regulator (Ofsted), demonstrated that only those children who needed to be looked after had been taken into public care members and officers were concerned to try and find alternative outcomes for these often very vulnerable children and young people.
3. In partnership with children service providers across the city a whole system transformation programme branded Keeping Families Together – Safely Reducing our Looked After Population was launched. This programme described a whole system approach to:

- strengthen early intervention arrangements to identify and support at an early stage those children, who may be otherwise at risk of coming into public care,
 - improve the experience of those moving through care and speed up their journey to a secure permanent alternative care arrangement
 - support better those older young people as they leave care to enter adulthood
4. With much of the transformation work now complete this paper examines the impact and progress of this work.

Consultation

5. There has been extensive consultation on the Keeping Families Together programme both within the council and external partners.

Options

6. This paper is provided to report progress on the impact of the arrangements to safely reduce the number of children and young people looked after by the city.

Analysis

7. There is clear evidence to demonstrate that the current arrangements developed to safely reduce the city's looked after population are effective. Significant budget reductions are predicated on this trend being sustained over the next two years. At the heart of this strategy is an increase in the number of children and young people who are diverted from becoming looked after through a sharp focus on prevention and early intervention. To this end the paper describes further work over the coming months to ensure that all services are focused on those children deemed to be on the 'edge of care'.

Council Plan

8. This work aligns with and fully supports the council's priority to support vulnerable people.

Implications

Financial

9. Failure to achieve the planned reduction in the number of children who are, or who become, looked after will have a significant impact on the budget predictions for 2013/14 and beyond.

Other

10. There are no significant HR, Equalities, Legal, Crime & Disorder, Information Technology (IT) or Property implications.

Risk Management

11. The practice and service changes described in the Keeping Families Together programme have been presented to and agreed by the City of York Safeguarding Children Board. Regular reports on the progress of this work are also presented to this Board.

Recommendations

12. Members are asked to note the content of this report and the further work described at Annex 1, paragraph 12.

Reason: The proposed work will ensure that there are robust early support arrangements for those children and young people who are most at risk of becoming looked after.

Contact Details

Author:

Eoin Rush
Assistant Director
(Children's Specialist
Services)
01904 554212

**Chief Officer Responsible for the
report:**

Kevin Hall
Interim Director of Children's Services,
Education and Skills

**Report
Approved**

Date 09/09/13

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

Wards Affected:

AI
I

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers

None

Annexes

Annex 1: Keeping Families Together – Safely Reducing our Looked After Population in York