

CABINET
28 SEPTEMBER 2017**CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE UPDATE**

Relevant Cabinet Member

Mr A Roberts

Relevant Officer

Director of Children, Families and Communities

Recommendation

- 1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families recommends that, in compliance with the Statutory Direction issued by the Secretary of State for Education on the 19 September 2017, the Cabinet:**
 - (a) notes the progress made against the Service Improvement Plan and provide comment for consideration in the continuation of this work;**
 - (b) approves the appraisal of a range of options for the different forms of an alternative delivery models for Children's Social Care Services, against the set of key principles outlined in paragraph 21, with the outcome of this appraisal being reported to Cabinet in December 2017;**
 - (c) approves the proposal to commission external expertise to support the Council in considering the range of alternative delivery models for Children's Social Care Services; and**
 - (d) delegates responsibility to the Director of Children, Families and Communities, in consultation with the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families, to establish a Programme Board to develop the ADM.**

DFE commissioner

- 2. In March 2017, the DfE appointed Trevor Doughty (Director of Children's Services at Cornwall Council) as the Children's Commissioner for Worcestershire. The review took place at the end of March and beginning of April 2017. The Commissioner's report has made a recommendation for the Statutory Direction of Worcestershire Children's Services (Appendix 4).**
- 3. On the 19 September 2017, the Secretary of State for Education issued a revised Statutory Direction to the Council alongside the publication of the Children's Commissioner's report of 9 June 2017. The Direction sets out the requirement for options for an alternative delivery model and full business case to be produced for the DfE.**

4. The DfE have extended the contract of Trevor Doughty as Children's Commissioner for Worcestershire, until 29 September 2018.

Improvement Partner

5. Essex County Council has been formally appointed as Worcestershire's Improvement Partner, and will develop a programme of work to provide support and challenge to the Council's service improvement.

6. Essex County Council are recognised nationally as a 'best in class' improvement partner due to their track record of improving their own services and then working with other Local Authorities to deliver tangible, sustained improvement. Essex County Council is also statistically comparable to Worcestershire County Council and therefore has many similar characteristics. Their similarity to Worcestershire, along with their national reputation, makes them an excellent fit to support the Council's improvement journey.

7. Work began on 25 August with team diagnostic in one of our locality areas, followed by further team diagnostic of Assessment teams at the Family Front Door on 05 and 06 September 2017.

8. In light of the Council's new working relationship with Essex County Council, governance arrangements for the improvement plan are under revision, and the existing Service Improvement Board has been stood down. New arrangements will be scheduled in a way that will best complement the programme of Ofsted monitoring visits and not distract from service delivery and improvement. Arrangements will be made for monitoring and reporting on progress between meetings to ensure visibility of progress to the Commissioner and DfE as well as carefully considering how to continue to engage Members and Partners.

Priority Plan and Progress

9. The first Ofsted monitoring visit took place on 23 and 24 May 2017 and focused on the Family Front Door service (contacts and referrals into social care and targeted early help services). Ofsted deemed that the Local Authority was not making the expected progress to improve services for children and young people. Whilst acknowledging our service improvement plan as a comprehensive plan, Ofsted suggested that an absence of clear priorities was impeding the Council's ability to make tangible and sustained change in any one area. Ofsted also reported that learning from audits was not evidencing an improvement in practice and LSCB thresholds were still not sufficiently understood and/or being applied consistently.

10. As a result of this feedback, as well as initial feedback from our DfE appointed Commissioner, a priority Improvement Plan was established, focusing on four areas:

- **Family Front Door** – Management of Contacts, Referrals and Assessments
- **Early Help** – Remodel the Early Help Offer
- **Culture** – Create a Child-focused and Accountable Culture
- **Quality Assurance** – Understand What 'Good' Looks Like

11. The revised plan has been endorsed by Ofsted and was agreed at the Service Improvement Board on 28 June 2017.

12. See Appendix 1: Priority Plan Progress report (this will be available for distribution to Cabinet with this report by 19 September).

Alternative Delivery Model (ADM)

13. Worcestershire County Council's Children's Social Care Services is working to improve the quality and effectiveness of its services including social work practice. As part of this improvement journey, and in response to both the Ofsted inspection and the Children's Commissioner's report (published 19 September 2017), the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Children and Families recommends that the Council voluntarily considers alternative delivery models (ADM) for Children's Social Care Services in order to both accelerate and sustain improvement.

14. The Ofsted inspection and Children's Commissioner's report will document the case for change in Worcestershire and clarify that there is currently insufficient evidence to demonstrate fully that continuing to provide services in-house will deliver and sustain the necessary improvements. This approach also supports the DfE policy document published in July 2016 'Putting Children First' which makes clear that due to greater regional collaboration, local strategic decisions and swifter intervention from central government, there will be a growth in such alternative delivery models. The DfE are encouraging ADM arrangements for Authorities to consider. Cornwall Council, who are rated good by Ofsted, were successful in receiving an DfE innovation grant to develop ADM arrangements for their services.

15. However, it is important to note that an alternative delivery model does not automatically lead to improvement. As such, the key factors for making a success of an alternative delivery model are the same as those for making a success of any long-term improvement. The LGA/ISOS March 2017, research into the role and models of external improvement support for local children's services 'Enabling Improvement' summarised two key factors in the successful establishment of an alternative delivery model.

16. Firstly, it is vital that staff, partners, service users and other stakeholders are engaged meaningfully in shaping the overall vision for improvement and determining how the creation of an ADM will help achieve the vision. Secondly, the research highlighted that it is crucial that there is absolute clarity about the way in which the relationship between the body delivering children's services – whether this is a newly created, independent organisation or a partnership with another local authority – and the Council functions. Specifically, this includes matters such as governance and accountability, the interface and transition between services (e.g. children's services and education, children and adult services) and the interface with back-office and support functions.

17. There is also learning to be taken from other Local Authorities that have already moved to or are in the process of moving to an ADM for Children's Services. Many describe the biggest benefit being the ability to create a 'big bang' or 'clean break' effect that provides a clear signal for change. There are also benefits around having a single entity that's sole focus is on improving outcomes for children and young people as well many operational benefits such as recruiting and retaining quality staff.

18. However, there are also risks, issues and challenges to pursuing this approach that will need to be properly understood and addressed. Firstly, it is crucial that the

development of an ADM needs to add value to, and not distract, the improvement work taking place across children's social care. There are also technical and operational implications that will need to be addressed including those relating to finances (e.g. VAT), Information Governance, impact on existing contractual arrangements, IT systems and the ongoing relationship with Worcestershire County Council. The development of the ADM also needs to form part of the broader implementation of Worcestershire's Children and Young People Plan (children and young people at the heart of everything we do) and play its full part in the broader system of services focused on children and young people.

19. It is therefore imperative, that in order to do the right thing for Worcestershire's children and young people, careful consideration is given to the range of potential alternative delivery models and the scope of services included within it. Whilst it is important to take learning from those other areas that are also pursuing or have ADMs, Worcestershire will have its own unique set of circumstances and the preferred model needs to be the right fit for Worcestershire. There will need to be careful consideration of the benefits and risks of the case for change with full member, partner and staff involvement and it is recommended that external expertise and additional capacity is procured to support the completion of this work.

20. In developing these proposals the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families recommends to Cabinet that the options appraisal of a full range of models (see Appendix 2) and clarification of services including scope should be guided by a set of key principles which are outlined in paragraph 25. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children and Families also recommends to Cabinet that, at this early stage of developments, any consideration that is given to scope of the ADM should be refined and clarified as part of the development of the full business case.

21. The model and scope for an ADM needs to:

- Provide a single and unwavering focus on providing the best services to children, young people and families;
- Complement, not distract, the existing improvement work within children's services
- Be able to support and develop the best social work support to children and families;
- Be able to accommodate a range of children's services in addition to those under statutory direction if so desired;
- Provide the conditions for operational independence;
- Consider the delivery of children's services as part of wider system and not unnecessarily add additional complexity into the system or place un-due pressure on relationships with partners;
- Consider market maturity and risks associated with this;
- Consider the significant and avoidable financial implications for the Council including the impact of current service contractual arrangements; and
- Play a full part in the implementation of Worcestershire's Children and Young People's Plan and demonstrate impact that Worcestershire's children and young people:
 - Are safe from harm
 - Reach their full potential
 - Make a positive contribution in their communities
 - Live healthy, happy and fun filled lives

22. The programme for developing and ADM will be broken down into a number of phases. These are broadly outlined below and will be refined throughout the development of the programme.

- Phase 1: September – November 2017: Consideration of options with preferred recommendation
 - 14 December 2017 Cabinet
- Phase 2: November 2017 – March 2018: Detailed Business Case
- Phase 3: April 2018 to March 2019: Design
- Phase 4: April 2019: Shadow implementation
- Phase 5: April 2020: Full implementation and benefits realisation.

Scrutiny by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Panel will also be built into the timescales

23. One of the critical success factors to developing ADMs in Children's Services that was raised in the LGA/ISOS research (see paragraph 19) was the engagement of staff, partners, service users and Members. A comprehensive communication and engagement plan will be developed and implemented as part of the programme plan which will include regular face-to-face briefings for key groups.

Children's Social Care Investment

24. A mix of permanent and temporary transformation funding has been allocated to support the Service Improvement Plan giving a total in year revenue increase of £4 million, alongside £1 million for capital investment into systems and technological improvements. £3 million of the revenue funding has been allocated to social care and £1m for corporate support.

25. The revenue investment has been allocated to support increased capacity for
- Family Front Door – to increase the number of teams and management capacity to support the increased demands upon community teams, contact and referral and assessment
 - Appointment of practice leads in safeguarding and permanency teams to improve social work quality of practice and support team managers with case load management requirements
 - Independent Review Officers and Child Protection Chairs to ensure a focus on timeliness of reviews and statutory case conferences
 - Case progression officers to bring pace to cases which are required to be presented to court
 - Administrative support in each of the 12 locality teams to ensure information is recorded on case management files in a timely and efficient manner and provide performance monitoring reports
 - Personal Advisers, accommodation and additional financial contributions for care leavers
 - Training and development for all staff including the development of the signs of safety model
 - Legal, programme management and commercial support

Financial Pressures / Placements for Looked After Children

26. The most significant area of financial pressure is within the Looked after Children's placement budget. As part of developing the medium term plan, investment is required to put the service in the best position to achieve the best outcomes for Worcestershire's most vulnerable children and young people.

27. Detailed monitoring is taking place of our Looked After Children, those entering and those leaving our care, and their associated placements/costs. As a result the service is forecasting a financial pressure of £6 million in 2017/18. This outturn assumes the successful delivery of £1 million from an action plan for the remainder of the financial year, including activity described below to:

- Reduce the number of new entrants where it is safe to do so "Edge of Care"
- Increase in house foster care provision to create a resilient resource to meet need and demand.
- Challenging the rise in placement breakdowns and residential demand
- Increase internal residential provision to meet need and demand.

28. The local forecast demand pressure within services for Looked after Children is consistent with that facing a number of other local authorities nationally especially those who are on a similar improvement journey following an Inadequate Ofsted judgement.

29. During the 6 months post-Ofsted there was a significant increase in children starting care, compared with last year. This is reflective of what has happened in other councils post an inadequate judgement and is reflective of the protective safeguarding work being undertaken in the service with children subject to child protection and pre-proceedings work. In comparison the numbers leaving care have decreased and it is essential to secure clear, safe permanency arrangements before they can leave care, which can take longer to achieve.

30. The result has therefore been an overall rise in the number of children in our care rising to 67 per 10,000 which is above the national average of 60 per 10,000.

31. Following this initial increase at the end of 2016/17 in the first four months of 2017/18 the number of new entrants into care has stabilised and is now similar to the number of children starting care in the same period last year.

32. Safeguarding services and Fostering services are working together to ensure, where it is appropriate, we identify a "Friend, Family and Connected person (FFC)" to care for a children where they cannot remain with birth parents. There has been a 42% increase in the number of children cared for in FFC placements compared to this period last year.

33. In financial terms the Council is continuing to achieve best value reflected by the unit cost per placement being lower than at the same point last year.

34. However we are also seeing an increase in the number of placement breakdowns with children in internal foster care placements, and some in internal residential placements, breaking down and needing external foster care or residential care.

35. In response to this the service has developed a number of strands of key activity.

36. Reduce the number of new entrants where it is safe to do so "Edge of Care". In May 2017 the service re developed its Edge of Care service which focuses on preventing children coming into the care system where it is safe to do so. Since its implementation the service has been successful in engaging young people (56%) and their parents (84%) in "Edge of Care" panel meetings where a range of crisis support services are offered including, short breaks, family group conferences and Specialist Family Support provision.

37. A sustainability review of the Edge of Care service was carried out three months after its commencement which confirms that the service has been able to prevent 23 out of 26 children coming into care during the first three months of its implementation. In financial terms the cost avoidance of a single child coming into an internal foster care placement for 12 weeks is £5,724. For 23 children this is cost avoidance of £131,652. Further information on the Edge of Care service offer can be found in our Edge of Care leaflet – Appendix 3

38. Increase in house foster care provision to create a resilient resource to meet need and demand. A business plan in Fostering Services has been developed for 2017/18 which focuses on recruitment, retention and support of internal foster care placements.

39. Challenging the rise in placement breakdowns and residential demand. A cross service action plan has been developed to review the process and standards for managing placement breakdown.

40. Increase the residential internal provision to meet need and demand. A business case for the development of the in-house residential provision has been completed, the detail of which is included within the Resources Report elsewhere on this Cabinet agenda.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 – Priority Plan Progress report.
- Appendix 2 – Options to be considered in appraisal of Alternative Delivery Models
- Appendix 3 – Edge of Care leaflet
- Appendix 4 – Statutory Direction
- Appendix 5 – Commissioner's Report
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/worcestershire-childrens-services-non-executive-commissioners-report>

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Children, Families and Communities) the following background papers relate to the subject matter of this report:

- Agenda and background papers for the meeting of the Cabinet held on 02 February 2017
- Agenda and background papers for the meeting of the Cabinet held on 06 April 2017
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/revised-direction-issued-to-worcestershire-county-council>