

Wolverhampton City Council

**OPEN EXECUTIVE
INFORMATION ITEM (AMBER)**

Cabinet / Cabinet Panel	CABINET (RESOURCES) PANEL		
Portfolio(s)	COUNCILLOR V GIBSON / CHILDREN & FAMILIES		
Originating Service Group(s)	COMMUNITY		
Contact Officer(s)	JOHN WELSBY		
Telephone Number(s)	01902 551449	KEY DECISION IN FORWARD PLAN	YES NO
Title	<u>INVESTING TO SAVE: IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF EARLY INTERVENTION BY SOCIAL WORKERS BY THE REDUCTION OF CASELOADS</u>		

1.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 1.1 Approve the establishment of two additional social work units to undertake intervention activities with a view to reducing expenditure on Looked After Children.
- 1.2 Approve the use of £384,000 from the Efficiency reserve to fund this.
- 1.3 Approve the proposals for monitoring effectiveness as in section 5.

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Cabinet (Resources) Panel received a paper on 23 July 2013 outlining the factors behind a £5 million overspend in 2012/13 in the services concerned with Children in Need (CiN), Child Protection (CP) and Looked After Children (LAC).

2.2 That paper noted the fundamental reason behind the overspend as being the rise in children and young people needing services, and in particular the rise in number of LAC with the average placement cost per child being £40,000 per annum.

	June 2012	June 2013	Change
LAC Population	601	700	+16.4%
CiN	683	893	+30.7%
CP	198	225	+13.6%

2.3 The paper noted how, as well as placement costs, that rising numbers of LAC result in other increased costs e.g. supervised contact between children and parents, legal costs and transport costs.

2.4 The paper noted how varying numbers of LAC over this year and next year would be likely to affect the key placement budget:

- If the numbers remain at the end of June 2013 level
- If LAC numbers are reduced to 650 by mid-2014, and
- If LAC numbers are reduced to 520 by mid-2014 in line with budget assumptions.

Year	2013/14 £000	2014/15 £000
Budget	26,700	25,500
Forecast Outturn (no reduction by July 14)	30,600	30,800
Variance	3,900	5,300
Budget	26,700	25,500
Forecast Outturn (based on 650 at July 14)	30,000	28,700
Variance	3,300	3,200
Budget	26,700	25,500
Forecast Outturn (based on 520 at July 14)	28,100	23,100
Variance	1,400	(2,400)

2.5 The paper noted that a LAC Transformation Plan is in place and is already working on two fronts.

2.5.1 To ensure that only those children and young people who need to be looked after are part of the looked after children system:

- Reconfigure Children & Families Service to improve early intervention (implementation of the New Operating Model);
- Review gateway into Looked After Children system;
- Increase in activity and improvement in outcomes of early intervention services (e.g. Family Group Conferencing, Intensive Early Support, Parenting Programmes);
- Improve targeting of Children's Centres to families with most need;
- Awareness raising/advice for parents of LAC to prevent further LAC;
- Implement recommended actions following Dartington Social Research Unit study, included within the LAC Transformation Plan;
- Establish an Intensive Family Support Team;
- Implement a whole family approach to substance misuse services;
- Establish a care plan tracking panel;
- Undertake an audit of LAC placed with parents;
- Increase the number of adopters;
- Increase the number of adoptins, and
- Improve the timeliness of adoptions.

2.5.2 Improving the range and cost effectiveness of Placement Options:

- Set up Placements Team;
- Undertake strategic review of residential sufficiency;
- Increase use of Boarding Schools as an alternative to care;
- Increase use of Special Guardianship and Residence Orders;
- KEEP Foster Carers programme to improve stability of placements;
- Increase the number of internal foster carers available;
- Ensure internal foster carers are appropriately supported, and
- Improve the range and quality of alternatives to care.

2.6 The paper noted that further work is being done to profile our LAC population to enable more accurate predictions about future numbers and to benchmark our in-house fostering costs against other Local Authorities.

2.7 The paper also noted future anticipated pressures on LAC numbers for example arising from increased stress in families as a result of welfare reform or from legislative change, such as the introduction of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act (2012) under which all young people remanded to the secure estate gain Looked After status.

3.0 FURTHER ACTIONS AIMED AT REDUCING THE NEED FOR CHILDREN TO BECOME LOOKED AFTER

- 3.1 As part of sector led improvement, Wolverhampton invited Lambeth to undertake a Peer Challenge of our strategy to reduce the number of Looked After Children. Key findings from that Peer Challenge were:
- That our ambition should be to create an improved family support environment and work more effectively with families so that children do not need to come into care rather than a target for numbers of LAC.
 - That the issue is both a whole Council and whole partnership challenge as well as a children's social care challenge, with the success of regeneration, housing, tackling worklessness, reducing alcohol and substance misuse and domestic violence, and education and mental health services all having a contribution to make, and
 - That the high caseloads for our social workers are likely to be impacting on their ability to do proactive work with families pointing out that ours are currently 25, while in Lambeth they have kept caseloads to 14.
- 3.2 This latter point has been confirmed by some other local authorities including Essex which has reduced the number of LAC by 350 through investment in social work to support families.
- 3.3 Caseloads across CiN/CP are currently running at approximately 25. A high proportion of these involve children subject to child protection plans and children subject to Care Proceedings which, especially the latter, make intense statutory requirements on social workers for the production of plans, Court reports and court attendance etc.
- 3.4 This means that social workers are struggling to meet these expectations and to engage more intensively with families themselves to help improve people's parenting skills, to resolve problems and so to prevent difficulties escalating. We want to enable social workers to be able to work more intensively with families, to assess needs and to deliver services that will meet those needs and so reduce the frequency of problems escalating from child in need, to child protection, to children becoming looked after.
- 3.5 We believe that by improving the capacity of the service, we will be able to improve the quality and effectiveness of social work intervention, taking note of the advice received during the Peer Challenge which identified reducing the caseloads of social workers working in the community in order to increase the effectiveness of earlier intervention.

- 3.6 The key social work teams in this scenario are the 3 Locality Teams which between them employ 42 social workers, each with an average FTE caseload of c.25.
- 3.7 In order to reduce all caseloads to c.20 we would need to redistribute c.200 cases (representing an additional 10 social workers); to reduce all caseloads to c.15 we would need to redistribute c.400 cases (representing an extra 27 social workers).
- 3.8 Cabinet (Resources) Panel approved that additional investment of £384,000 should be considered but that specific proposals should be drawn up, that the investment should be in 2 stages and that impact should be monitored with the second stage of investment being demonstrable evidence of positive outcomes.

4.0 HOW WILL THE INVESTMENT BE USED?

- 4.1 Key members of the Children, Young People & Families Management Team met to consider the best way to deploy resources in order to achieve reduced caseloads and an increase in quantity and quality of early intervention.
- 4.2 Managers were clear that we were looking for significant change and that therefore we did not want to do “more of the same” (e.g. additional social workers in current Locality Teams).
- 4.3 We reflected on our overarching strategic direction which is driven by the New Operating Model (NOM) itself committed to a shift in emphasis from high threshold to lower threshold (earlier) intervention and noted that this needed to be the foundation for our thinking.
- 4.4 The management team agreed therefore that we needed to do something new that would also be a step towards rather than away from the NOM.
- 4.5 It was agreed therefore that the additional resource should be used to establish 2 Social Work Units within one of the new Child & Family Support Areas. This would create capacity to reduce caseloads, would be located within a multi-disciplinary early intervention context and would serve to enhance the pilot and roll out of the NOM.
- 4.6 The management team took note of recent discussion at CYP Scrutiny Panel about the need to test out our new model in some of the more demanding areas of the city and therefore agreed that we should invest this new resource in areas where demand on social care services is high (e.g. Bilston, Heath Town).

- 4.7 Each Social Work Unit will consist of 1 Consultant Social Worker, 3 Social Workers, 0.25 Psychologist, 1 Family Support Worker and 1 Clerical Officer, in line with the overarching strategic plan as laid out in the New Operating Model. The Units will also be supported by family support workers who will be deployed from existing resources.
- 4.8 The 2 Consultant Social Workers will require access to social work supervision which will be covered by a temporary agency appointment to the Deputy Head of Children in Need & Child Protection, which is currently vacant pending the creation of a lower level management post under layers and spans. The budget for this is in place, an unspent element of which will go to in-year savings.
- 4.9 These two Social Work Units will pick up all new referrals within their geographical area. This will enable us to reduce caseloads in the current Locality Teams covering those areas over time as cases are closed/passed on to other services and are not replaced by new referrals which will be directed to the new units.
- 4.10 This approach ensures that we maintain our overall strategic direction while making best use of additional resources with least disruption to service users.
- 4.11 This additional investment will be completed by a review of existing service configuration to ensure most effective use of current resources.

5.0 MONITORING

- 5.1 Taking on board the message of the Peer Challenge, our focus needs to be on facilitating an improvement in quality social work.
- 5.2 Measuring overall improvement in quality is a long term and difficult challenge, however there are some more tangible and short term indicators we will measure including:
- Average caseload size.
 - Average number of visits to families to spend time on early intervention for child in need cases alongside caseload size.
 - The number of completed Core Assessments in place for CiN cases.
 - The number of up-to-date child in need plans in place.
- 5.3 All these measures can be monitored against separate teams to compare impact of reducing caseload.
- 5.4 We anticipate that more effective earlier intervention will result in us avoiding the need for some children to become Looked After, while in other cases it will lead to the earlier identification of problems resulting in children becoming Looked After at an earlier age with a better prospect of adoption and therefore to shorter average stays in care.

- 5.5 In order to monitor the impact of this, in an environment where other factors like welfare reform may also be impacting on LAC numbers, we will seek to get real time information from a number of statistical neighbours for comparative purposes, as well as comparing the conversion rates of children in need/child protection cases into LAC between teams.
- 5.6 It is anticipated that this initiative will all commence in December 2013 once the recruitment of the additional staff has taken place and monitoring will commence at that point.
- 5.7 Further performance measures are being developed for the New Operating Model and this will be applied to these two units that will form part of the pilot.
- 5.8 The development of the New Operating Model is subject to a multi-agency Executive Group, while the effectiveness of this additional investment will be monitored by reports to Cabinet (Resources) and Cabinet (Performance Management) Panel as well as to regular scrutiny by the Cabinet Members for Resources and for Children & Families.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The cost of a Social Work Unit at the top of the grade, including on costs for a full year is £264,000, as detailed in the table below. The total cost of two Social Work Units for a full year including on costs is £527,000. The part year effect for the 2013/14 financial year is £88,000, as detailed in the table below, with the part year effect in 2014/15 being £176,000.

Post	Grade	Local Pay Point	Full Year Cost (including on costs)	December 2013 -	
				March 2014 Cost (including on costs)	April 2014 - November 2014
			£000	£000	£000
Consultant Social Worker	GR8	38-42	55	18	37
Social Workers x 3	GR7	30-35	142	47	95
Clerical Officer	GR3	3-6	20	7	13
Family Support Worker	GR5	15-19	30	10	20
Educational Psychologist x 0.25	SPEP03	S2-5	17	6	11
			264	88	176

- 6.2 Initial funding from the Efficiency Reserve of £384,000 was approved at Cabinet (Resources) Panel on 23rd July 2013. Funding required for two Social Work Units in 2013/14 amounts to £175,000. The remaining £208,000 is sufficient for further four and a half months expenditure in 2014/15.
- 6.3 Financial monitoring will be performed to assess the extent to which this Invest to Save proposal has been successful in preventing costs that would otherwise have been incurred.
- 6.4 The average cost of a LAC is calculated to be £40,000. Therefore, in order for this proposal to achieve a successful pay back of the £384,000 the LAC population requires a reduction of ten clients.
- (JB/06082013/D)

7.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Child Protection services and services to Looked After Children and children in need provided primarily under the Children Act 1989, are statutory Social Services functions under Schedule 1 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970. Under section 7 of the Act these services must be provided under the direction of the Secretary of State. The Council as a Social Services Authority does, however, have discretion as to how it organises its services. This report also supports the Council's duties as an employer under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to provide a safe system of work and manage employee workloads.

[FD/05082013/Q]

8. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 We will focus the additional resource in delivery services to some of our most deprived communities.
- 8.2 Should this prove effective we will then explore the potential for wider roll out through Stage 2 of the planned investment and beyond that into mainstream budgets should savings result.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 None