

## Brighton & Hove City Council

**Meeting:** CYPT board  
**Date:** 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008  
**Report of:** Assistant Director – Specialist Services  
**Subject:** Children in Care Strategy for Change  
**Wards Affected:** All

### **1 Purpose of the report:**

1.1 To brief members of the CYPT board on the completed Children in Care (CiC) Strategy for Change.

### **2. Recommendations:**

2.1 That the CYPT board note the content of the report and endorse the strategy.

### **3 Information/background:**

3.1 In 2006/7 the CYPT adopted 3 key targets:

- Reduction of numbers of Children in Care (CiC)
- Reduction in Children not in Education, Employment or Training (NEETS)
- Reduction in exclusions

3.2 This strategy addresses the first of these and also the target first outlined in the Joint Area Review in 2006 and most recently restated in the 2007 APA ie 'ensure implementation of a comprehensive commissioning strategy that improves the effectiveness of preventative services in safely reducing the number of looked after children and young people, and extends placement choice for those who need to be looked after'. The strategy is appended to this report.

3.3 Within the City numbers of CiC are high with the most recent set of national figures from May 2007 showing Brighton and Hove as having 84.8 per 10,000 of the 0-19 population as CiC compared to 65.7 in cohort authorities.

Because of this, the per capita spend on personal social care for children and families is 20% higher than our statistical neighbours at £773 compared to £511 and as result critical CYPT budgets overspend each year.

3.4 In that there are benchmark authorities, within our statistical neighbours group, which perform better in terms of CiC numbers and costs it is both reasonable and feasible for the CYPT to set itself reduction targets, providing they are realistic, reflect our demography and CiC cohort, and we are clear that we have to triple-track placement changes with the demands for quality inherent in the task of corporate parenting and alongside the need for cost reductions. Reduction of numbers of CiC per se is not the whole task and it is necessary to reduce proportions in subgroups and specifically within the population of children in IFA placements since these are relatively expensive placements.

#### **4. Process undertaken:**

4.1 In order to carry out this task safely and competently corporate project management support was secured, a high level project board was established and a commissioning group was set up with supporting work streams focused on particular subsets of the CiC cohort eg young people aged 16 plus, parent and baby placements etc. A number of quick wins in terms of process were undertaken in 07 whilst a fuller strategy was developed and these are outlined in Appendix 4 of the strategy.

4.2 Child specific planning was instigated at a team level to ensure that work was focussed appropriately and was achievable. The cohort of CiC was broken down into three subgroups:

- Children mostly 11+ who are largely static in the sense that they are unlikely to return home because of their age and legal status.
- Children mostly under 11 who are a changing and churning group in the sense that children enter and leave this group as the result of social work intervention.
- The children who are 'beyond our control' in the sense that staff can neither predict nor control numbers. This group will include:
  - Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
  - Children remanded into custody
  - Children leaving the secure estate ie. Young Offenders Institutions- commonly known as Sutton Judgement young people.

4.3 Clearly different subgroups of CiC will require different interventions and responses and for those children who cannot return safely to their families of origin the task is to ensure that placements are good quality and procured using a VFM focus.

#### **5. Outcomes so far:**

5.1 Performance for CiC have not been compromised during the push to reduce overall numbers of CiC and the CYPT continues to see good and improving outcomes across a range of indicators relating to health, education and placement stability for CiC. The 2007 APA judgement for

the CYPT as a whole and for the ECM outcome Stay Safe specifically has moved from 'satisfactory' to 'good'.

- 5.2 At the end of the calendar year 07 numbers of CiC had fallen to 374, an overall total reduction of 27 from a high of 401 in the autumn of 2006 and 112 children had gone out of the system in that year.

**6. Financial Implications:**

- 6.1 Clearly the drive to reduce CiC numbers is designed to reduce the budget pressure on an area that is classed as a Corporate Critical budget. The base budget for 07-08 is £14,785,900 and the projected year end position will show an overspend of £459,400. Within that total however there are hopeful signs of improvement including a reduction in the spend on residential agency placements of £248,100 and a slightly reduced use of IFAs. It will be important to nurture and develop this work further.

**7. Next steps:**

- 7.1 Work has begun on child specific planning for 08-09 and team targets will be set shortly. Based on this detailed intelligence, staff are confident that 08-09 will see a continuing downward trend in numbers and costs. Monthly reporting to lead members on the underlying detail of numbers and costs will continue.
- 7.2 Performance reporting and detailed analysis on outcomes for CiC will also continue to ensure that the balance between numbers, costs and the responsibilities of good corporate parenting is preserved.

**8. Conclusions:**

- 8.1 there has been a much greater focus by all staff within the CYPT on reduction of CiC numbers in 07-08. This has resulted in a reduction and targeted and specific work will continue in the coming year to ensure that this trend continues.
- 8.2 Standards and outcomes for CiC have not been compromised and the CYPT continues to ensure good levels of support for our CiC.
- 8.3 The CiC Strategy for Change has been a useful development thus far and will continue to act as the road map for developments into the future.

Liz Rugg.  
Assistant Director- Specialist Services.

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<b>Subject</b>	<b>Children in Care Strategy for Change.</b>
<b>Wards affected</b>	<b>All</b>

**Financial implications:**

The 2008/09 overall placements budget is £16.4m, in 2004/2005 the equivalent budget was £11.5m. In the past 4 years Brighton & Hove City Council has been required to invest £4.9m (43% increase) in this service area, predominantly due to increases in the number of IFA and residential agency placements. In order to prevent further resources being redirected to this service area it is vital that the number of Children in Care and in particular that the number of children in agency placements are reduced.

The higher costs of placements with independent fostering and residential agencies does not represent good value for money and when compared to other local authorities across the country Brighton & Hove City Council currently has one of the highest spends per head of population on services for Children in Care. When looking at the key performance indicator in this area, the unit costs of children in Fostering or residential placements (BVPI 51) Brighton & Hove is also higher than the national average. This strategy seeks to address these issues and if successful, a reduction in the overall number of children looked after, coupled with a change in the configuration of placements as described would have a positive impact on both of these performance indicators.

Finance Officer consulted : David Ellis

Date: 4.3.08

**Legal implications**

The Board is recommended to note the content of this report and endorse the strategy. In endorsing the strategy the Board must have regard to the statutory duties imposed upon the Local Authority by legislation pertaining to the protection of children within it's area. Further in endorsing the strategy the Board must have regard to the Human Rights Act 1998 implications which arise in terms of the impact of planning and provision for Children in Care, most specifically Article 8 ECHR; which provides for the Right to Family Life.

Lawyer Consulted: Sandra O'Brien

Date: 05.03.08

**Corporate/Citywide implications**

The budgets covered by residential and agency foster placements are significantly under pressure and this causes pressure in turn on CYPT and corporate budgets, Thus every effort must be made to control and reduce spending whilst also ensuring the best quality placements for children for whom there are corporate parenting responsibilities.

**Risk assessment**

Provided that officers maintain the capacity to balance the demands of good corporate parenting with VFM challenges the risks will be minimal.

**Sustainability implications**

None

**Equalities implications**

As stated in the report

**Implications for the prevention of crime and disorder**

None

**Background papers**

Care Matters – Transforming the Lives of Children and Young People in Care (2006);  
Care Matters: Time for Change (2007); Lord Laming's report Care Matters: Placement Working Group Report)

**Contact Officer**

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