

Subject:	Independent Visitors		
Date of Meeting:	13th March 2017		
Report of:	Executive Director for Children's Services		
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Wards affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

Note:

The special circumstances for non-compliance with Council Procedure Rule 3, Access to Information Procedure Rule 5 and Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), (items not considered unless the agenda is open to inspection at least five days in advance of the meeting) were that the report could not be finalised in time for inclusion with the publication of the agenda.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

Purpose of the report is to update the Committee on the Independent Visiting Service that is managed within the Families, Children & Learning directorate and which seeks to meet the needs of children who are in care and who want an Independent Visitor.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee notes that the Independent Visiting Service is currently unable to meet the needs of providing an independent visitor for each child in care who would like one. However performance in Brighton & Hove is significantly better than the reported performance nationally.
- 2.2 The Directorate to explore ways of increasing the overall capacity of the service to extend the provision to more children in care.

3. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3.1 Role of Independent Visitors

- 3.1.1 Independent Visitors (IVs) were introduced in the Children Act 1989 to ensure that children and young people in care who had little or no contact with their families can have someone independent of the local authority to visit, befriend and advise them. The role was widened in the 2008 Children and Young Persons Act to include all children in care who would benefit from having one. An Independent Visitor cannot be allocated against the wishes of the child.
- 3.1.2 Independent Visitors are volunteer befrienders for children in care. They visit, befriend and advise children and young people aged 6-21 yrs for a minimum of 2

years. For many they become lifelong friends. They provide children in care with a positive role model, continuity and consistency in the relationship which they often lack elsewhere in their lives. They visit approximately twice a month and enjoy an activity together.

3.2 Training, Assessment and Support of Independent Visitors and matching with a Child

3.2.1 In addition to the Independent Visitors service children in care can also access an advocate from the Youth Service if they have a concern with the support they are receiving from the social care service.

3.2.2 Following submitting an application form, Independent Visitors are asked to undertake a 2 day training/preparation course, introducing them to the role and purpose of being an independent visitor. IVs are then assessed looking at their knowledge skills and motivation to undertake the role. Safeguarding is a primary focus of this training both for the children and for the volunteer. The assessment includes a number of safeguarding checks relating to working with vulnerable children as well as taking up references. The completed assessment is then presented to a Panel consisting of 2 managers, for approval.

3.2.3 Following on from approval the IV is matched with a child looking at what the child would like from the IV and what the IV can offer. The IV Coordinators will have met with the child beforehand (and often their foster carer) so will have a good sense of them, including their likes and dislikes. Following on from matching, the IV Coordinators monitor the relationship and reviews the arrangements 3 monthly, then 6 monthly and then subsequently annually. Again safeguarding is an important focus. The IV Coordinator will meet with both the child (and foster carer) and the IV separately when the review takes place. It is important that these matches are monitored and the volunteers are supported to carry out their role.

3.2.4 In terms of other support, there is an IV support group bi-monthly. This has a training element and with trainers and guest speakers attending. IVs are encouraged to seek advice from the IV coordinators who operate an open contact system. IVs frequently have played an important role with young people who have very complex situations such as complex placement issues, mental health problems and drugs and relationship problems. So it is essential that they have the access to advice and support they need provided by the IV Coordinators.

3.2.5 In terms of staff time the IV National Standards for the Provision of Independent Visitor Services (2016) recommend a standard of 60 mins per match between IV and child. Brighton and Hove IV Service works at approximately 40 mins per match. This has proved sufficient for the task.

3.3 Current Statistics

3.3.1 Staffing

3.3.1.1 The Independent Visiting Service consists of two part-time Coordinators (1.1 FTE or 41 hours per week). There is part-time admin support provided by

existing admin staff within the Fostering, Placements and Permanence Service. The Fostering Service Manager currently holds line manager responsibility for the IV Service. This is a historic arrangement which the directorate is currently considering.

3.3.2 Current Statistics

- 3.3.2.1 Currently there are 54 matches between IV and young people. The majority of these matches (23) are for children in the 12-17 years age range. This equates to 21% of children in care in this age range. There are 13 matches for young people aged 18+ years. It is considered good practice that the relationships of IVs with Care Leavers is continued to be supported.
- 3.3.2.2 The IV service is planning to hold a training session for prospective IVs in May 2017. Through the network that the IV service is linked into, 59 people have expressed an interest in becoming an IV. Each person has been asked to submit an application form ahead of the May training session to indicate their intention to proceed with the assessment process. So far 9 application forms have been received. Currently there is estimated to be capacity to take forward 10-12 new IVs through the assessment process. If the number of application forms is greater than this the Directorate will seek to identify additional resources in order to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet this need.
- 3.3.2.3 17 young people are currently waiting for an IV. A few new referrals have been accepted and matches made where there has been a priority need. Each year there are a few relationships that end as well as young people moving beyond 21 so this does create some additional space within the service.
- 3.3.2.4 Of the 17 children and young people waiting for an IV, there are matching issues for 5 due to the geographical location of their placement. IVs do not generally wish to travel for more than an hour to visit the child/young person. Of the remaining children who are waiting for IVs, 2 are close to their 18th birthday and may decide they no longer need this service. It is anticipated that the IV training and assessment planned for May 2017 will facilitate new matches for the remaining children on the waiting list.
- 3.3.2.5 There are currently 207 children in care who fall between the ages of 10-17. While it is unlikely that all children and young people will wish for an IV, perhaps because they are in a stable and long term placement, it is reasonable to assume that with further promotion the total number of IVs required will continue to increase.
- 3.3.2.6 However it should be noted that national Independent Visitor Data Report 2016 conducted by Barnardo's shows that Brighton and Hove compares favourably with national statistics in terms of matches for the size of the children in care population with 14% of our children having an IV matched with them. This is amongst the highest in the country with the national average of matches with IVs being only 3%. Many services are aiming to increase their matches to 10% as a goal which Brighton and Hove have already achieved. Brighton and Hove fits with other services in that 'in-house' resources tend to

have more matches that others spot purchased or contracted out to independent providers.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Brighton & Hove operate a successful Independent Visitor service. However our current capacity is unlikely to meet the increasing demand for the service. The directorate is committed to ensuring that children who are in the Council's care have access to both advocacy support and an independent visitor service. As overall funding is unlikely to increase new ways of delivering this service will need to be explored in the future.

4.2 Following the consideration of this report at the Neighbourhoods, Communities & Equalities Committee a further report will come to the Children Young People & Skills Committee in June 2017.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

5.1 There are no Financial Implications resulting from agreement to the recommendations proposed within this report.

Finance Officer Consulted: David Ellis

Date: 08 February 2017

Legal Implications:

5.2 There are no legal issues to raise and the Legal Team are content with this report.

Lawyer Consulted: Andrew Pack

Date: 15th February 2017

Equalities Implications:

5.3 There are no equalities implications resulting from the report.

Sustainability Implications:

5.4 There are no sustainability implications associated with the report.

Any Other Significant Implications:

5.5 There are no other significant consultations in relation to the report.