

# **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

## **Agenda item 57**

Brighton and Hove City Council

**Subject: Children in Care Strategy for Change**

**Date of meeting: 25th March 2009**

**Report of: The Director of Children's Services**

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**Wards Affected:** All

### **FOR GENERAL RELEASE**

#### **1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 In March 2008 the CYPT board agreed to endorse a Children in Care Strategy for Change in the context of high numbers of children in the care system and budget pressure as a result.
- 1.2 This report was requested by CYPOSC to gain an understanding of the Council's current position within Children in Care.

#### **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 CYPOSC to consider the enclosed report and decide what action, if any, they wish to take on a specific issue.

#### **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 The strategy addressed the first of these and also the target first outlined in the Joint Area Review in 2006 and restated in the 2007 Annual Performance Assessment i.e. '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 At the time of writing the strategy within the City numbers of CiC were high with the most recent set of national figures at that time 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 was 20% higher than our statistical neighbours at £773 compared to £511 and as result critical CYPT budgets were overspending each year.
- 3.4 In that there were benchmark authorities, within our statistical neighbours group, which performed better in terms of CiC numbers and costs it was both reasonable and feasible for the CYPT to set itself reduction targets, providing they were realistic, reflected our demography and CiC cohort, and there was a clear understanding of the need to triple-track placement changes with the demands for quality inherent in the task of corporate parenting and the need for cost reductions. Reduction of numbers of CiC per se was not the whole task and it was necessary to try to reduce proportions in subgroups and specifically within the population of children in Independent Fostering Agency placements since these are relatively expensive placements.
- 3.5 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.
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 Clearly different subgroups of CiC required different interventions and responses and for those children who could not return safely to their families of origin the task was to ensure that placements were good quality and procured using a VFM focus.
  - 3.8 In November 08 a sub regional procurement process tendered jointly with colleagues from West Sussex for agency placements for children went 'live'.  
This process focussed equally on improving/sustaining outcomes for individual children and on reducing placement costs. Although it is early days as yet there are encouraging early signs of improved VFM and continuing good performance against outcome targets for CiC.
  - 3.9 Monthly reporting to lead members on the underlying detail of numbers and costs has continued throughout.
  - 3.10 Performance for CiC has 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 moved from 'satisfactory' to 'good'. This position and grade judgement was retained in 2008.
  - 3.11 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. At the end of the calendar year 08 numbers of CiC stood at 377 having been as low as 366 in the summer of 2008.
  - 3.12 The context within which this work and strategy is set has now changed substantially with the death of baby P in Haringey and the consequent Laming Review. It is clearly also related to the in-house stocktake on safeguarding that is ongoing.

#### **4. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN:**

- 4.1 No formal consultation was undertaken

#### **5. FINANCIAL AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

##### Financial Implications:

- 5.1 The drive to reduce CiC numbers and improve the VFM position was designed to reduce the budget pressure on an area that is classed as a Corporate Critical budget. The end of year position in 2007-08 was an overspend on the placement budget for children of £348,600. The total placement budget in 08-09 for CiC is £16,378,800 with a current projected outturn spend of £14,937,800 and thus a projected underspend of £1,441,000. This has largely been achieved by a

sustained focus on the procurement of agency placements and it will be important to nurture and develop this work further.

*Finance Officer:* David Ellis

*Date:* 13.03.09

Legal Implications:

5.2 No legal implications are anticipated and no legal advice has been sought.

Equalities Implications:

5.3 No equalities implications have been identified

Sustainability Implications:

5.4 No sustainability implications have been identified.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

5.5 No crime and disorder implications have been identified.

Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

5.6 No risk and opportunity management implications have been identified.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

5.7 In determining the reports, members should be aware of the Council's corporate priorities, particularly the priority to "reduce inequality by increasing opportunity" and their duty as a Corporate parent to CiC.

**6. CONCLUSIONS:**

6.1 There was a much greater focus by all staff within the CYPT on reduction of CiC numbers in 07-08, this work has continued in 08-09 to ensure that all alternatives are explored before a child enters the care system and to work towards a swift and lasting resolution and permanency plan, including rehabilitation to the family system if it is safe to do so.

6.2 Standards and outcomes for CiC have not been compromised and the CYPT continues to ensure good levels of support for our CiC. VFM performance has improved. 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.

**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices:**

**Appendix a** is the Children in Care Strategy for Change

**Documents in Members' Rooms:**

Not applicable.

**Background Documents:**

1. None.