

Cabinet

29 February 2012



Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children 2012 - 2015

Report of Corporate Management Team

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Councillor Claire Vasey Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People

Purpose of the Report

1. To advise Cabinet of the Commissioning strategy for Looked After Children in County Durham. The purpose of the strategy is to understand and plan for the current and future needs of our Looked After Children, young people and Care Leavers, as corporate parents. The strategy covers the period 2012 – 2015 and is based on good commissioning principles and processes as set out in the Joint Commissioning strategy agreed by the Children's Trust in 2009.

Background

2. The need to deliver the right services for Looked After Children has been recognised by successive government administrations over the last 15 years. This has been demonstrated through a number of programmes from Quality Protects to Care Matters and in some cases has been supported by legislation in continued attempts to ensure that local authorities take action to improve life chances and outcomes for what has been a significantly disadvantaged group in society. Details are outlined in Section 4 of the strategy, which is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
3. The need to identify and deliver the appropriate range of services has become increasingly important in the last few years as numbers of Looked After Children have increased locally and nationally in a context of major financial pressures on councils. Recent research Quality Matters in Children's Services (Every Child Matters 2009 DfE) indicates that despite high ambitions and a shared commitment for change, the outcomes for children and young people who are Looked After and for Care Leavers have not sufficiently improved and there remains a significant gap between the quality of their lives and those of other children.
4. A critical aspect of service development is the need to effectively plan and commission service based on a needs analysis in partnership with Children's Trust partners and a range of stakeholders, including young people and their parents. It is through such a process that the likelihood of delivering improved outcomes and cost effective services is greatly increased.

5. The attached strategy outlines in Section 6 the local context and vision for commissioning improved services and results.
6. Section 7 of the report shows how needs and prevalence across the Looked After population are estimated and analysed.
7. Section 8 outlines current services and their effectiveness. This information is all collated and evaluated in order to identify any gaps and the findings of this are outlined in Section 10.
8. Commissioning priorities are set out in Section 11 and can be summarised as follows:
 - Support to children and young people on the edge of care through a “Think Family” and integrated service delivery model
 - Improve Placement Stability
 - Management of the external market and out of County placements
 - Maximise the potential of Looked After Children and Care Leavers
 - Promote and improve the health of Looked After Children and Young People and the transition to Adulthood.
9. For each priority area the strategy outlines the planned actions and accountabilities. Delivery and implementation will be monitored and driven forward by the board of the Multi Agency Looked After Partnership (MALAP).
10. The strategy has been evaluated by Ofsted inspectors during a recent inspection of Safeguarding and Looked After Services and was described by inspectors as “strong”.

Recommendations and reasons

11. Cabinet is asked to note the Commissioning strategy and support its delivery as outlined in the report.

Background papers

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

The costs of services to Looked After Children have increased over recent years and are acknowledged to have had a major impact on council budgets. In 2011-12 the budget for Safeguarding and Specialist Services for Children and Young People is £42.747m. In 2012-13 the County Council has agreed a growth figure of £1.5m to offset the increasing costs associated with the number of young people in internally and externally provided foster care and the transportation costs in relation to contact visits authorised by the courts and excess placement to school travel costs. This strategy has been developed on the basis that future delivery will be within budget provision and indeed, is aimed at reducing cost of provision through achieving greater efficiencies in services.

Staffing –

None

Risk -

Potential risks include costs and finance, and outcomes for individual children and young people. Such risks will be regularly and closely monitored to mitigate impact.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty -

Looked After Children are a group of society that can face disadvantage and discrimination. It is for this reason that the principles upon which the commissioning strategy is based include the need for specific attention to issues of equality and diversity. The strategy has been the subject of an equality impact assessment.

Accommodation

None

Crime and Disorder

No one

Human Rights

All legislation and guidance upon which services to Looked After Children are based were formulated within the context of the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Consultation

The Multi Agency Looked After Partnership young people's reference group and the Children in Care Council are both recognised mechanisms for consultation in relation to both strategic and operational developments.

Procurement

All external procurement is carried out through recognised procurement arrangements, both locally and regionally. Such decisions are informed through internal processes such as Value for Money and market testing exercises which are conducted to examine the cost effectiveness and value of service delivery.

Disability Issues

A small number of Looked After Children are disabled. The principles upon which commissioning of services are based specifically recognises the need to take account of and respond to the needs of disabled children and young people.

Legal Implications

There is a range of legislation upon which the delivery of services to Looked After Children is based. These are listed in Section 4 of the report and have been taken into account in development of the strategy.