

Summary Sheet

Council Report

Title: Out of Authority Placements for Children in Care

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan? No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report Ian Thomas

Report Author(s)

Ian Walker, Service Manager

Ward(s) Affected

All Wards affected.

Summary

In this report the term 'Out of Authority' (OoA) placements refers to situations in which Rotherham children are placed in foster care or residential care where in house resources are not used. The placement may be geographically within the Rotherham MBC boundary.

The current level of use of OoA Children's Homes and Independent Fostering Agency placements is unsustainable and conflicts with the Sufficiency Strategy. The current level of use is not sustainable because:

- Young people are placed 'at a distance' to their family, friends and familiar networks.
- These placements place a significant financial pressure on the Council.
- They have a significant impact on social work capacity due to the time spent by social workers visiting young people placed at a distance.

As a result, a strategic plan to review these placements has recently been re-launched with the aim of reducing these placements both in number and cost over the course of the coming financial year.

Recommendations

- 1.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of this report.
- 1.2 Members of the Panel are encouraged to promote the rewards of being a foster carer for Rotherham MBC.

List of Appendices Included

N/A

Background Papers

N/A

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

N/A

Council Approval Required

N/A

Exempt from the Press and Public

N/a

Title – Out of Authority Placements for Children in Care

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the contents of this report.
- 1.2 Members of the Panel are encouraged to promote the rewards of being a foster carer for Rotherham MBC.

2. Background

- 2.1 As of the 1st March 2016 there were 44 children in care placed in Out of Authority Children's Homes and 78 children in care placed with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) with one young person being placed on remand in a Youth Offender Institution. Thus 29% of the 425 children in care were not placed within Rotherham placements. This creates a significant pressure on both financial and personnel resources within the service. The recent closure of some of the children's homes within Rotherham has exacerbated this pressure.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 The Department for Education's research into achieving positive outcomes for children in care evidences that those children placed in children's homes are far less likely to achieve positive outcomes in terms of education, health and placement stability than their peers. Placement stability with a trusting and supportive adult has been identified as the key factor in the attainment of successful outcomes for young people. Out of the 47 children who have experienced three or more placement moves over the course of the past 12 months, 19 of them have had a placement disruption from an OoA Children's Home and 15 from an IFA. Therefore despite the additional costs these placements incur, there is no guarantee of placement stability.
- 3.2 In placing children outside of Rotherham Borough we have less control over how their needs are to be met. This includes access to appropriate education, health and dental checks and CAMHS provision.
- 3.3 Having reviewed the data, systems and processes the following strategies will be implemented with the aim of reducing both the numbers of children placed out of authority and the costs they carry with them :-
 - At present there are 19 young people aged 16 or 17 who remain placed in OoA placements. Historically these young people have drifted back to Rotherham as they approach adulthood and yet there has been no strategic proactive planning to support this process. As from April the Leaving Care and Children in Care Services will co-facilitate a newly formed Transitions Panel which will drive effective Pathway Planning for all children in care aged over 16. This cohort of 19 young people will be in the first tranche of plans that are reviewed

so as to ensure a timely and considered move to in-house or semi-supported accommodation provision.

- There are also 28 children aged 5-11 years who have been placed with their IFA foster carers for more than 12 months. Given the shortfall of in-house foster carers these young people are unlikely to move to in-house provision within the foreseeable future and thus face remaining in an IFA for the next 7-12 years. At an average cost of £750 per week this is a significant financial commitment of over £1m per year and the lack of formalised permanence for them is inappropriate. In each case the social worker will be tasked to instigate a conversation with the foster carers regarding the possibility of them agreeing to obtain a Special Guardianship Order in respect of the children for which an allowance equivalent to their current foster allowance could be paid. By eliminating the element of the fee paid to the agency the cost of each placement could be approximately halved. This process will also ensure permanence is achieved for these young people.

If the foster carers are not willing to apply for an Special Guardianship Order, permanence will be secured via a long-term match.

- The Residential Placement Panel and Fostering Placement Panel are effective in providing robust gatekeeping process for new placement requests and a review of the continuation of placements. Where a move of placement is not in the best interests of the young person the Panels will review and challenge any additional services from the placement provider including additional staffing, transport and therapeutic provision.
- This Panel is attended by a representative from the Children's Commissioning Group (Health). This will enable Rotherham MBC to highlight young people who should attract a contribution from Health.
- The high number of IFA placements is, in most cases, as a result of an absence of appropriate Rotherham foster placements. To address this the Council are considering/ implementing the following:
 - Introducing a revised foster carer remuneration scheme. This will enable the Council to be more competitive in attracting new carers and retaining our existing approved carers.
 - Re-launching the Local Hero Recruitment Campaign. This campaign when initially launched in November 2015 involved a new brand and marketing recruitment strategy with the emphasis on strengthening our Digital/Social Media Marketing Activities to support an increase in number of enquiries.
 - Re-structuring the fostering team to establish a new dedicated marketing recruitment team to improve customer response handling at point of enquiry through to approval to increase the percentage of Expression of Interest that move successfully through to full approval.

- Enhancing the links with the Communication Team for supporting Online & Offline marketing & recruitment activities.

A review of the Placement Finding Service to ensure it always identifies the right placement in a timely manner

- Improved care planning by the Children in Care social work teams in which tailor made packages of 'Team Around the Child' support are formulated should enable more of our young people to continue to have their needs met within Rotherham placements.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1 N/A

5. Consultation

5.1 N/A

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 N/A

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 Out of Authority placements are the most significant spend within the Children and Young People's Service. By the end of the current financial year the forecast spend will be £7.86m on Out of Authority Children's Homes and £5.42m on Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) making a total spend of £12.98m.

7.2 A total of 64 children are placed more than 20 miles from the Rotherham MBC boundary with children being placed as far afield as Carlisle, Northumberland, Hull, Portsmouth and London. With a requirement for social workers to visit young people on at least a 4 weekly basis the travelling times do place significant pressures on social work capacity which impacts on their ability to fulfil other responsibilities.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 N/A

9. Human Resources Implications

9.1 N/A

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

10.1 Having more young people in our direct care is likely to improve their outcomes.

10.2 The views of young people will be taken into account before any placement episode is ended. Where it is the expressed wish of the young person to remain in a placement, they are likely to be sustained if they are being appropriately safeguarded and their welfare is promoted.

11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

N/A

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

N/A

13. Risks and Mitigation

N/A

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Approvals Obtained from:-

Strategic Director of Finance and Corporate Services:- Named officer

Director of Legal Services:- Named officer

Head of Procurement (if appropriate):-

Name and Job Title.

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