

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
Friday, 2nd September, 2016

Present:- Councillor Steele (in the Chair); Councillors Allcock, Clark, Cowles, Mallinder, Price, Sansome, Short, Walsh and Wyatt.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Albiston and J. Turner.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made at this meeting.

2. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public or the press.

3. OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSAL FOR A PLANNED CLOSURE OF 'SILVERWOOD' AND 'CHERRY TREE HOUSE' CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL CARE HOMES

Further to Minute No. 24 of the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making meeting held on 6th June, 2016, consideration was given to a report, presented jointly by the Deputy Leader and the Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services, concerning the consultation on the proposal for a planned closure of the Silverwood (East Herringthorpe) and the Cherry Tree House (Masbrough) residential homes for children and also the relocation of the Leaving Care Service from Nelson Street to Hollowgate in Rotherham.

The submitted report stated that the consultation period had begun on Thursday 9th June, 2016 and had concluded at 12.00 noon on Friday 29th July, 2016. The affected stakeholders had been fully engaged during the consultation period and the report outlined the robust approach to the consultation and the subsequent outcomes and options, which were based on feedback from a range of key affected stakeholders.

Discussion took place on the report about the outcome of the consultation on the proposed closure of these Children's Residential Care Homes and the relocation of the Leaving Care Service. It was noted that the effective date for closure of the Homes was 31st December 2016.

Members discussed the following salient issues:-

: ensuring sufficient capacity to accommodate vulnerable children, whenever possible, within the Rotherham Borough area;

: the difficulty of accessing placements for vulnerable children, sometimes at very short notice and at different times of day or night; the continuing use of children's residential homes;

- : the availability and provision of respite care;
- : the use of 'crash pads', which is a comparatively expensive service provision;
- : the placement of children at times when their foster care arrangements break down;
- : the specific arrangements for the placement of children formerly resident in the two residential care homes – ensuring that there are better quality placements for these children, which will meet their needs and also ensure value for money;
- : the preference that vulnerable children should have family-based placements, rather than accommodation within residential homes;
- : the use of the sufficiency strategy to ensure that there are enough family-based placements available, as well as emergency or short-term placements for children;
- : discussion about the media reporting in the 'Rotherham Advertiser' newspaper (Friday 2nd September 2016 edition) concerning children in care;
- : confirmation that both of the children's residential homes (Cherry Tree House and Silverwood) are now empty, but have not yet been decommissioned; the redeployment of employees affected by the closure of these homes;
- : discussions between Children and Young People's Services and Housing Services about accommodation for young people leaving the care of the Local Authority;
- : arrangements for the future use or sale of the closed and decommissioned children's residential homes; the possible use of capital receipts realised from any sale of these properties;
- : meeting the needs of children whose vulnerability may include complex issues such as learning and/or physical disability, special educational needs, emotional difficulties, mental health difficulties, etc.;
- : the role of this Authority's Corporate Parenting Panel;
- : ensuring (by means of the sufficiency strategy) that there are placements for vulnerable children within the Rotherham Borough area or within a maximum distance of twenty miles from the Rotherham Borough area;
- : a comparison of in-house service provision and provision by private sector agencies and organisations; the use and monitoring of services

provided by organisations other than the Council.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the outcome of the targeted consultation with affected stakeholders, as described in the submitted report, be noted and the forthcoming Cabinet and Commissioners' meeting be informed of the following comments of this Board on the issues described:-

(a) the service proposals shall include provision for emergency placements for vulnerable children and young people, including the provision of 'crash pads';

(b) a service review ought to be undertaken, as soon as practicable, to ensure that vulnerable children and young people have foster placements, appropriate to their individual care needs, which are situated either within the Rotherham Borough area or within a maximum distance of twenty miles from the Borough area boundary.

(3) That, in accordance with the options appraisal and giving due regard to the feedback elicited from the consultation, the planned closure of both children's homes by the end of December 2016 be supported insofar as this Board is concerned.

(4) That the proposed budget transfers outlined within the submitted report be supported insofar as this Board is concerned.

4. OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION AND PROPOSED FOSTER CARERS PAYMENTS SCHEME, SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Further to Minute No. 35 of the Cabinet and Commissioners' Decision Making meeting held on 11th July, 2016, consideration was given to a report, presented by the Deputy Leader, concerning the proposal to improve the care experience for children in the Rotherham Borough area by ensuring, wherever possible, that they are looked after, in the Borough area, in a foster family environment. The report stated that the formal consultation period of six weeks had been held during July and August 2016, with foster carers, regarding the rationale and options for a revised scheme, in advance of scheme's proposed implementation during October, 2016. This revised scheme and 'sufficiency strategy' for foster care in Rotherham is based on providing financial incentive, good quality support and training.

The scheme's purpose is for the investment in improving the service offer to foster carers to facilitate attracting additional carers to foster for Rotherham and also to support the retention and development of existing foster carers. In addition, this scheme is an important enabler for the Council in meeting sufficiency of placement provision for Looked after Children and ensuring that, wherever possible, this provision is in a Rotherham foster family environment. Alongside other initiatives, this

scheme will enable the reduction of overall placement costs and avoid use of more expensive Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and residential placements.

The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board discussed the following issues:-

: it was confirmed that the 'sufficiency strategy' for this service is intended to be a short- to medium-term campaign, rather than a long-term campaign;

: service development is happening against a background of an increasing number of Looked After Children who are in the care of this Council;

: the historic preference in Rotherham to have a small number of children allocated to a foster carer;

: after incurring costs initially, it is expected that the scheme will achieve financial savings in the medium term;

: currently, this Council has fewer than the average number of registered foster carers, when compared with other similar local authorities;

: some local authorities have allowed Council Tax reductions for foster carers, although that issue has not been considered by this Council;

: the alternatives of the placement of vulnerable children either in (i) residential homes, or (ii) with foster carers living within the Rotherham Borough area, or (iii) the use of out-of-Authority placements;

: there will continue to be children's residential homes provided within the Rotherham Borough area, although there will be service changes and improvements;

: ensuring the quality of foster care; the impact on issues such as the educational attainment of fostered children and their access to further education, training or employment and apprenticeships, after leaving school;

: the 'sufficiency strategy' intends to improve foster care for children and to ensure that a larger proportion of the fostered children remain resident within the Rotherham Borough area, instead of being placed with out-of-Authority carers;

: ensuring that foster carers, registered with this Authority, share the Council's moral sense of purpose;

: obtaining and using best practice from other local authorities;

: future analysis and monitoring of the foster care service and of the financial savings which the sufficiency strategy expects to achieve;

: the proposed increase in payments to foster carers will ensure that foster carers are not disadvantaged in terms of other state benefits they may receive;

: recruitment of a Marketing Officer to assist in the recruitment of more foster carers.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the following proposals detailed within the submitted report be approved insofar as this Management Board is concerned:-

(a) the proposed foster carer payment scheme, including short break foster carers' fees;

(b) the implementation of the amended relevant policy (on fees and allowances) as set out in appendix 1 of the report;

(c) the implementation of quality support and training as part of the improved offer for foster carers.

(3) That appropriate monitoring and review be undertaken, beginning as soon as practicable, of the recruitment of additional foster carers, to ensure that the appropriate targets are being achieved.

(4) That the appropriate officers examine the possible use of a Council Tax reduction or discount as an additional benefit for foster carers registered with this Council.

(5) That the appropriate officers examine whether the proposed payment of fees and allowances to individual foster carers may have a detrimental impact upon their receipt of other state benefits.

(6) That a further report, updating the progress of this scheme, be submitted to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board during April, 2017.

5. LIBRARY STRATEGY AND FUTURE LIBRARY & CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFER

Consideration was given to a report, presented by the Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood Working and Cultural Services, summarising the consultation undertaken on the Library Strategy 2016-19, the future service offer for Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs and a range of savings proposals connected to the implementation of the Library Strategy and service offer.

The Library Strategy set out the vision, key principles and core offer for the Service and had been developed after an analysis of local need for the service and informed by feedback received during the consultation period. The assessment of local need identified a role for the Library Service in supporting employment opportunities, developing and improving key skills, including literacy, improving mental health, community cohesion and enabling access to digital information and services.

The submitted report included details of the feedback received and the proposed revisions to the original savings proposals. The report recommended the adoption of the Library Strategy and core service offer and the implementation of the revised savings proposals. The 2016-17 revenue budget related to the area of Libraries and Customer Services considered by this report was £5,034,590. This amount included property budgets of £1,220,333. The proposed reductions in expenditure across the review area would total £474,000 over the 2016/17 and 2017/18 financial years.

It was noted that the specific proposals included the retention of library provision in all existing static locations, the implementation of further self-service, online and assisted digital options for service delivery and changes to the Mobile Library and Book Link services.

Members' discussion included the following issues:-

: levels of public use of the libraries; means of counting occasional visitors, ie: people who may not have joined/registered as a member with a library; means of assessing the impact of the service;

: the role of libraries within communities;

: the success of specific schemes such as the 'Summer reading scheme';

: replacing the face-to-face cashiering service with payment kiosks – ensuring that assistance is provided for the public during the change-over period;

: mobile libraries and "books in the community" schemes;

: budget and service reductions affecting the mobile libraries and some community libraries;

: ensuring that community libraries are accessible, especially for people who have mobility or travelling difficulties; the impact of neighbourhood working and delivery of services, including the use and shared use and the cost of buildings;

: the effectiveness of the consultation process; impact of the needs analysis on future service delivery;

: equality impact assessments – copies to be provided for Elected Members;

: suggested use of external organisations to assist/become partners in the provision of a range of services within community libraries; also the possible co-location of services (eg: NHS services, job clubs);

: possible re-use of the wealth of statistical data collected to inform other service delivery by this Council;

: ensuring that library services are accessible by people who are living in the more remote communities within the Rotherham Borough area;

: commercial opportunities within libraries;

: promotion of the wide range of services available within libraries, including e-books;

: the digital infrastructure within the Borough to support access to services.

Resolved:- (1) That the report be received and its contents noted.

(2) That the results of the public consultation on the draft Library Strategy, future service offer for Libraries and Neighbourhood Hubs and associated savings proposals, as now submitted, be noted.

(3) That the Library Strategy 2016-19 and future service offer be endorsed and recommended for approval by the Council at its meeting to be held on 19th October, 2016.

(4) That the implementation of the revised savings proposals be endorsed and recommended for approval by the Council on 19th October, 2016, including the adjustment to the Medium Term Financial Strategy as detailed within the submitted report.

(5) That it be noted that further and more detailed analysis of local need will continue to inform and drive the future service offer.