

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE : 9 SEPTEMBER 2004

THE BEST VALUE REVIEW FOR LOOKED AFTER AND ACCOMMODATED CHILDREN

Report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise Social Work Committee of the implications arising from the recommendations in the Best Value Review for Looked After and Accommodated Children.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Social Work Committee on 20 May 2004 received a report from a Member/ Officer Group which conducted a review of services for looked after and accommodated children (Item 4, Page 779).
- 2.2 The Member/Officer Group made a number of recommendations regarding services which were accepted in principle by Social Work Committee, subject to a report by the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services.
- 2.3 There were a number of recommendations which had direct implications for resources and budgets and this report gives particular attention to these areas.

The principles behind the recommendations were;

- to ensure that the Council had services which met the standards required to register with the Care Commission.
 - to retain those services which were identified as providing best value and invest to save on the need to purchase more expensive services from external providers.
 - to provide good quality care for young people who are cared for by the Council.
 - to increase by 33 the number of placements available to young people.
- 2.4 Particular attention in this report will be paid to residential care, adoption services and fostering services. Although there were recommendations in the report for both throughcare and aftercare services and fieldwork services, these had already been addressed through the report on the Scottish Executive investment in throughcare and aftercare services (Social Work Committee, 29 January 2004, Item 10, Pages 45-48) and the Social Work Committee report on strengthening front line services (Social Work Committee, 29 January 2004, Item 15).

3. RESIDENTIAL SERVICES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

- 3.1 The report of the Member/Officer Group identified that the unit cost of providing residential care in-house was less than that which could be purchased from either the voluntary or the private sector. It was also noted that the Council's own provision was located within East Ayrshire which assisted with planning for the rehabilitation of young people to their families and the wider community whilst third party accommodation was generally provided outwith the Council area and therefore inhibited the progress of rehabilitation.
- 3.2 The report also highlighted that the existing council units, Bellsford and Kilmaurs, would fail to meet the requirements of the Care Commission for registerable standards. Enquiries were made on both the cost of refurbishing the units and replacing them with new build and the recommendation to Social Work Committee was that the units be replaced as this was a more cost effective option.
- 3.3 The Member/Officer Group also considered the most appropriate size for units given the need for high quality care for young people and recommended, after due consideration, that the existing two units, providing 14 beds but generally operating with 16 residents, be replaced with three six bedded units.
- 3.4 Whilst capital expenditure had already been identified within the Prudential Borrowing Framework for replacement of the units, (£1.4 million), the proposal to move to three units had additional staffing costs which were not in the departments budget allocation. In a full financial year these costs would amount to some £400,000 at 2003/04 cost levels. To meet this proposal the department would need to receive an additional grant allocation from the Council.
- 3.5 In addition to the recommendations regarding the number of units two other issues were identified. Due to the European Working Times Directive governing the maximum number of working hours the department, through the Member/ Officer Group recommended that additional staff be appointed to cover night shifts within each of the existing units. Part of the costs for implementation being met through savings in sleep over allowances and overtime for existing staff. The additional cost to social services will be £19,000 in a full year and will be met through the department's budget allocation as this is part of the existing main line service.
- 3.6 The second issue related to the provision of catering and cleaning services for the units which is currently provided by Onsite Services. The recommendation was that these elements should be integrated into the existing service provision and that staff are appointed directly to the units and that the units become responsible for the purchasing of all catering and cleaning supplies. There are no additional cost implications in this recommendation, and indeed it may be possible to achieve some savings through prudent house keeping. The proposal has been discussed with the Head of Onsite Services and the Executive Director of Educational and Social Services both of whom support the recommendation.

4. ADOPTION SERVICES

- 4.1 Adoption services will also require to register with the Care Commission and to meet the National Standards which form a part of the registration requirement. This is an area of service which has improved its performance in the last two years but will be unable to continue to do so without additional investment. Adoption services can be purchased from other agencies but they are expensive and there are no agencies operating at a local level.
- 4.2 The importance of providing an adoption service is that it allows young people who are unable to return home the opportunity of permanent placement with a family who will take on the full legal responsibility for the child. In addition to placing children the service will also have to deal with increasing demands for post placement support and for continued contact between children and their birth parents.
- 4.3 In order to meet this increasing demand the Member/Officer Group recommended that the staffing level within the adoption service be increased by one full time social worker and that the team manager's hours be increased from half time to full time. The full year costs of this recommendation are £57,000 at 2003/04 cost levels.

5. FOSTERING SERVICES

- 5.1 In terms of providing cost effective care for young people whilst meeting the requirements of best value, fostering was seen as the most cost effective service. Family placements are also the preferred option for young people as it usually gives them a positive experience of family life and allows them to be cared for in a setting with fewer children than would generally be accommodated within a residential unit.
- 5.2 The Member/Officer Group noted that the department had recently lost some carers to other authorities and voluntary agencies where the allowances paid were higher than those of East Ayrshire and part of the review included a benchmarking exercise on allowances, which demonstrated the gap between East Ayrshire and other neighbouring authorities.
- 5.3 The recommendation from the Member/Officer Group was that the fostering service required to expand in order to meet the increasing demand for services and that in order to remain competitive with other agencies recruiting carers that there was a need to increase the allowances paid to carers in East Ayrshire.
- 5.4 Expansion of the service will be achieved through the recruitment of two additional social workers to the fostering team and an increase in the number of carers recruited. The full year costs of such an expansion will be £395,000. Broken down this includes; additional staff, (£75,000), increase in allowances (£130,000) and creation of an additional 16 placements at £190,000.

6. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OVERVIEW

- 6.1 The recommendations of the Member/Officer Group are to be welcomed as they recognise the importance of the service for accommodated young people and the need to ensure that the Council has services which are fit for the 21st Century. There has been an increase in the numbers of young people who are accommodated and the needs of young people have become more complex and created greater demand on our services. It is also clear that we will continue to see an increase in numbers and as a Council we need to ensure that we have adequate resources in place to meet the increased demand.
- 6.2 A summary of the recommendations from the Executive Director are contained in Appendix 1
- 6.3 The proposals would require an overall additional investment in social services of £870,000 (based on 2003/04 prices) in recurring revenue to meet all of the recommendations. The Council has already committed the capital resources through the prudential borrowing framework to allow for the replacement of Kilmaurs and Bellsford Children's Units and therefore the key issue to be addressed in the recommendations to Committee relate to revenue expenditure.
- 6.4 The revenue expenditure recommendations fall into two broad areas; the development and increase of community/family based placements for children and the development of residential resources.

7. FAMILY BASED PLACEMENTS

- 7.1 The Member/Officer Group recommended that there is additional investment in adoption and fostering resources through the recruitment of additional staff to support and recruit carers and to pay additional fees to carers both in real terms through increasing allowances to remain competitive with other providers but also to compensate for the increase in numbers of young people accommodated. All the evidence would suggest that family based placements are preferable for young people as it allows for continuity of contact with the community and gives the young people a positive experience of parenting.
- 7.2 Providing an increase in the fees to carers in line with the recommendations of the Member/Officer Group will require an additional £130,000 in a full year. Through the strengthening of frontline services the Executive Director was given an additional allocation of £90,000 for this area of work. This additional allocation would allow the implementation of the higher payments in the current financial year without the requirement for any additional resources.

In the year 2005/06 the department would require an additional budget allocation of £381,639 to meet the requirement to increase staffing levels as well as providing for the increase in the number of young people being cared for.

- 7.3 The Executive Director supports the recommendation that fostering and adoption services are strengthened subject to additional resources being made available.

8. RESIDENTIAL CARE

- 8.1 Residential placements are required for a relatively small proportion of the looked after and accommodated children's population. These are generally teenagers who have experienced significant family problems which are then reflected in challenging behaviour beyond which could be coped with in family/carer placements.
- 8.2 At the present time the Council operates two units offering a total of 14 beds. The recommendation is to move to three six bedded units which will increase the costs to social services by an additional £400,000. Appendix 1 gives an indication of the phasing of such costs. The phasing relates to the capital expenditure programme already agreed for the replacement of the existing units on a like for like basis but assumes that the development period would take longer because three units were being built.
- 8.3 The Executive Director considered two options; firstly that we replace the existing units with two eight bedded units which would result in a small increase in staffing costs. Secondly, that we move to three six bedded units which is the recommended option from the Member/Officer Group. In cost terms it is clear that two eight bedded units is financially less expensive than would be required for three six bedded units. In care terms however it is also clear that children benefit from being in smaller units where they can receive closer support from the staff and more individualised attention. If the additional resources could be made available by the Council then the Executive Director would recommend that we develop three six bedded units.
- 8.4 It may be possible however to delay the decision in relation to the number of units that are developed. If the additional investment in foster care is successful in recruiting additional carers then it would be possible to report back to Committee on whether or not a third residential unit is required. This would involve Committee agreeing to the development of two six bedded units at this point but as these would not actually be in place until 2006/07 a decision on a third unit would not be required until 2006/07. The Executive Director would commend this option to Committee as it would allow progress on the development of community based family placements to be assessed and further expenditure planned on the basis of need in two years time. Experience from the development of the Intensive Support Unit would suggest that as long as an appropriate site can be identified and outline planning permission agreed then the actual building can be erected fairly quickly and reporting to Committee in 2006/07 would not delay the opening of a third unit in 2007/08 if it was required and resources were available.
- 8.5 There are two other outstanding matters in relation to residential care. The first is the immediate requirement to create additional night staff posts to meet the requirements of the European Working Times Directive. As this requires an alignment to current working arrangements the Executive Director will meet the additional costs for the existing residential care budget. The Committee is asked to approve this recommendation and refer the matter to Corporate Governance for approval for the additional posts to be created.

8.6 The second matter relates to the transfer of the catering and cleaning services from Onsite Services to Social Services. As noted at paragraph 3.6 this has been agreed within the senior management team of Educational and Social Services and Committee is asked to refer the transfer of posts to Corporate Governance.

9. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no legal or policy implications arising from the report.

10. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The report recommends that the staff previously employed by Onsite Services for catering and cleaning be transferred from Onsite Services to Social Work.

10.2 The report recommends that additional waking night staff are appointed to ensure compliance with the European Working Times Directive.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 It is recommended that Social Work Committee:

- (i) agree with the comments from the Executive Director of Education and Social Services in relation to the recommendations of the Member/Officer Group;
- (ii) refer the staffing matters to Corporate Governance for approval;
- (iii) note the resource implications in approving the report and refer the bid for additional resources to Policy and Resources Committee;
- (iv) request the Executive Director to report back to Social Work Committee on the outcome of the discussions with the Policy and Resources Committee and produce an action plan on implementation of the recommendations for which funding is available; and
- (iv) otherwise note the contents of the report.

John Mulgrew
Executive Director of Educational and Social Services
17 August 2004
Enc (1)

LIST OF BACK GROUND REPORTS

1. Report from the Working Group on the Throughcare and Aftercare of Children in Scotland – Scottish Executive ISBN 0-7559-0519-9

For Further information please contact:
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IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER : JACKIE DONNELLY

APPENDIX 1

| Recommendation of the Member/Officer Group | Recommendation of the Executive Director of Education and Social Services |
|--|--|
| Increase the number of overall child care placements by 33 | Agreed |
| Retain residential care services for young people as an in-house service | Agreed |
| Replace the two existing children's units with three six bedded units | To develop two six bedded units and provide a further report to Committee in 2006 which will determine the need for a third unit dependant upon the success of recruiting additional foster carers |
| Retain fostering services as an in-house service | Agreed |
| Increase the allowances paid to foster carers | Agreed, subject to sufficient resources being made available to the department |
| Increase the staffing establishment within the fostering service by two qualified social workers | Agreed, subject to sufficient resources being made available to the department |
| Retain the current ratio of in-house and bought in services for adoption | Agreed |
| Increase the staffing establishment within the adoption service by one qualified social worker and one .5 whole time equivalent team manager | Agreed, subject to sufficient resources being made available to the department |
| Retain the in-house throughcare and aftercare support service for young people | Agreed |