

21st June 2021

Agenda Item: 13

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES

CHANGES TO THE STAFFING ESTABLISHMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES AND THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN PLACEMENTS SERVICE

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks approval for the staffing changes within the Commissioning and Resources Division as set out below.

Within Early Childhood Services to:

- disestablish the 1 fte (full-time equivalent) Early Childhood Services Contracts and Performance Officer (Band B) post with effect from 31st August 2021
- establish a new 1 fte Early Years Senior Technical Specialist (Band A) post with effect from 1st September 2021.

Within the Looked After Children Placements Service to:

- establish a new 1 fte Commissioning Officer (Band C) post with effect from 28th June 2021
- establish a new 1 fte Payments Assistant (Grade 3) post with effect from 28th June 2021.

Information

Background

2. Early Childhood Services fulfil the statutory childcare duties placed on the Council to ensure there is sufficient high-quality childcare provision across Nottinghamshire including the provision and promotion of funding entitlements for children and families. The Service also provides the Children's Centre Service and the Families Information Service.
3. The Looked After Children Placements Service provides the departmental 'hub' for securing foster care and residential home placements for children in care, together with management of the payment process for all forms of care placement - from individual foster carers, adopters or guardians, to large organisations who operate and manage children's homes and independent fostering agencies in the private sector.
4. This staffing changes outlined in this paper within these two services reflect:

- the recent transfer of the management of key early childhood services; and to address as an increased priority in relation to financial audits of the Early Years Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant; and
- the continuing increase in the number of children placed in the care system is an acknowledged national issue and for which the impact locally is evidenced by a 25% increase over the past four years. The consequent increase in workload that this has brought to the placements service has reached the point where additional resource is now required in order for the service to fulfil its statutory duties to secure homes for the Council's children in care in an appropriately efficient and timely manner.

Proposals

Early Childhood Services

5. The Children's Centre Service and Families Information Service have historically been procured via external providers; however, both have been brought back under the direct management of the Council over the course of the past year. The Children's Centre Service, in particular, required the Council to manage substantial performance and contracting responsibilities that fell to the Early Childhood Services Contracts and Performance Officer. Many of these are no longer required now that the service is being delivered by the Council. Furthermore, the Children's Centre Service has 1.8 fte Data and Performance Officer posts to fulfil the current performance and monitoring functions.
6. The Families Information Service formed part of the service contract for Inspire Culture, with a budget of £90,000. The small Families Information Service team transferred under the management of the Council on 1st April 2021, alleviating the need for additional contract and performance capacity in this area too.
7. Early Childhood Services currently commission a speech, language and communications needs programme called Home Talk with an annual budget of £500,000. The Council jointly commissions speech, language and communication needs services and activities with Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group and the Children's Integrated Commissioning Hub located in Public Health. Other commissioning activity includes ad hoc commissioning of training, evidence-based programmes and childcare provision.
8. The Contracts and Performance Officer focuses on the procurement of evidence-based interventions, training, and procurement of early years providers to operate from our properties. They have also been given additional tasks to support communications activities; however, however these tasks are required on an ad hoc basis and can be picked up by existing staff members. Therefore, the post is no longer essential, and funding is required to increase capacity of the small Early Years Technical Specialist Team.
9. Early Childhood Services also includes a small team of 2.2 fte Early Years Technical Specialists (Grade 5) who process Dedicated Schools Grant payments to the early years sector, data and monitoring of take up rates, childcare sufficiency, guidance in relation to financial auditing, Provider Agreements and data analysis. Capacity of the team is stretched and despite the requirement to complete financial audits this year, this has not been possible because other tasks have taken precedence.
10. It has become evident in the last 12 months that the functions required of this team have increased to include more audits, additional financial reporting and tracking of vulnerable children in receipt of childcare funding.

11. It is proposed that a new 1 fte Senior Early Years Technical Specialist (Band A) post is established to carry out the following key functions:
- to lead and manage the team of Early Years Technical Specialists to ensure the delivery of Early Years provision is conducted in accordance with national policy, guidance, and the Council's statutory duties
 - to have overall responsibility to ensure that relevant data and performance information is collated, recorded, and reported to Senior Managers
 - to manage and monitor the funding streams, budgets and payments associated with the provision of Early Years services up to the value of £16 million
 - to establish and manage financial audit processes to ensure that the use of Early Years funding complies with the requirements of the Education and Skills Funding Agency and any other relevant local and national regulations.
12. The new Senior Technical Specialist post has been evaluated as an indicative Hay Band A. The new job description and person specification for the Senior Early Years Technical Specialist are available as Background Papers.
13. The proposals within this paper will ensure that statutory duties are prioritised, and staffing budgets are used appropriately to meet the changing demands and requirements of the service.
14. The proposed structure of Early Childhood Services is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Looked After Children Placements Service

15. The number of Commissioning Officers and Payments Assistants within the Placements Service has remained unchanged for a number of years during which time the number of children in care within Nottinghamshire has risen by 25%. Whilst this increase is in line with national trends, the care system - and in particular the private sector market through which the majority of placements are secured - has changed immeasurably during this time and the process of securing placements is increasingly challenging.
16. Additionally, a number of internal audit reviews conducted during the past year that have covered the work of the payments team has identified a shortfall in resource / capacity that is impacting on the effectiveness of the payments process, including financial controls. It noted the proportional increase in the number of carers (and therefore the volume of individual payments) is even greater than the headline increase in the number of children in care referred to above.
17. The service took on additional staff on a temporary basis during the past year and used the evidence from this to secure permanent funding for these two posts. The situation will remain under review during the current year to determine whether any further staffing changes are required. The cost of running the Placements Service remains very low with overall staffing costs representing just 1% of the spend on externally procured placements alone.

Other Options Considered

18. The workload of the Contracts and Performance Officer has reduced following the transfer of the Children's Centre Service and Families Information Service to the Council. Consideration has been given to widening the role to include more work regarding communications,

however the Commissioning and Projects Manager and the Families Information Service have taken on these tasks. The Commissioning and Projects Manager will also lead on any ad hoc commissioning tasks and will work closely with Commissioners in the Children's Integrated Commissioning Hub to performance manage the Speech, Language and Communication Needs contract.

19. Maintaining the current capacity of the Early Years Technical Specialist Team has been considered, however demands on this small team have increased substantially with increasing requests from central Government for data collection and analysis, as well as increased demands for financial reports to the Early Years and Schools Forum and Early Years Consultation Group.

Reasons for Recommendations

20. There is no longer a requirement for the Council to deliver contracting and performance functions for the Children's Centre Service following transfer to the Council. The Service has two dedicated Data and Monitoring Officers and all managers have duties to performance manage their teams and targeted activity. Other commissioning and procurement activities will be delivered by the Commissioning and Projects Manager who also now has responsibility for managing the Families Information Service following transfer to the Council on 1st April 2021.
21. The workload of the Early Years Technical Specialists has increased in the last year or so, which has meant that financial audits have not been carried out. By establishing a Senior Early Years Technical Specialist post, the intention is to provide some dedicated senior capacity to lead on auditing, funding reports and helping to plan and prioritise tasks for the team.

Statutory and Policy Implications

22. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

Early Childhood Services

23. The Contracts and Performance Officer post is funded through the local authority revenue budget. The funding allocated for this post will be used to fund the new Senior Early Years Technical Specialist post.
24. Disestablishing the 1 fte Contracts and Performance Officer post (Band B) will save £47,228 with on-costs, and the 1 fte Senior Early Years Technical Specialist post (Band A) will cost £41,212 with on-costs, making an overall saving of £6,016 to contribute towards further promotion of childcare entitlements and work to increase the take-up of early education places by 2 year olds from low income households.

Looked After Children Placements Service

25. Funding for the additional Commissioning Officer and Payments Assistant posts (£77,000 in total) is contained within the Placements Service budget, having been included within the growth in external placements budget pressure that was approved as part of the budget setting process for the current year.

Human Resources Implications

26. If this proposal is approved, the deletion of the 1 fte Contracts and Performance Officer post would result in redundancy for the current post holder unless they can be redeployed into another vacant post within the Council. The post holder will be supported by their line manager to find alternative employment.
27. A formal consultation meeting will be held with the post holder affected, and further consultation is planned with other members of the service that could be impacted on by this proposal.
28. Recruitment for the three new posts arising from this report will follow normal procedures and be advertised internally in the first instance.

Implications for Service Users

29. By making these staffing changes, children and families will still be able to access the Children's Centre Service, online information, and their free childcare entitlements. These services and interventions will enable parents to work, to better support their families and, help children achieve a good level of development.
30. Equally, the staffing changes within the Placements Service will enable the Council to continue to fulfil its statutory duties as corporate parent to secure homes for children in care in an appropriately efficient and timely manner.

Data Protection and Information Governance

31. Data protection and information governance are key roles for Early Years Technical Specialists and the new Senior Technical Specialist will take on the lead role in relation to Privacy Notices, Data Protection Impact Assessments and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).
32. The Contracts and Performance Officer also has duties in relation to GDPR when commissioning services and performance management. These tasks have reduced over time and are only required on an ad hoc basis when commissioning tasks are planned, this function will therefore fall to the Commissioning and Projects Manager and all other managers within the service.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee:

- 1) approves the following changes to the staffing establishment in the Early Childhood Services:
 - disestablish 1 fte Early Childhood Services Contracts and Performance Officer (Band B) post with effect from 31st August 2021

- establish a new 1 fte Early Years Senior Technical Specialist (Band A) post with effect from 1st September 2021.
- 2) approves the following changes to the staffing establishment in the Looked After Children Placements Service:
- establish a new 1 fte Commissioning Officer (Band C) post with effect from 28th June 2021
 - establish a new 1 fte Payments Assistant (Grade 3) post with effect from 28th June 2021.

Laurence Jones
Service Director, Commissioning and Resources

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Irene Kakoullis
Group Manager, Early Childhood and Early Help Locality Service
T: 0115 97 74431
E: irene.kakoullis@nottsc.gov.uk

Jon Hawketts
Group Manager, Commissioning & Placements
T: 0115 97 73696
E: jon.hawketts@nottsc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (CEH 21/05/21)

33. The report and recommendations fall within the delegation to Children and Young People's Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 28/05/21)

34. Disestablishing 1 fte Contracts and Performance Officer post (Band B) will save £47,228 with on-costs and establishing 1 fte Senior Early Years Technical Specialist post (Band A) will cost £41,212 with on-costs, making an overall saving of £6,016. The net staffing budget for the Early Years team is £156,828.
35. The cost of 1.0 fte Commissioning Officer (Band C) and 1.0 fte Payments Assistant (Grade 3) is £77,000 in total and this will be contained within the Placements Service staffing budget of £527,895.

HR Comments (BC 09/06/21)

36. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. Newly established posts will be recruited to in line with the agreed recruitment and vacancy control procedures. Formal consultation will occur with the employee who will be displaced by this proposal, and every effort will be made to find them alternative employment via the redeployment process.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Job Description and Person Specification for the Senior Early Years Technical Specialist post

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.

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