

22 September 2014

Agenda Item: 8

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

HOUSE OF COMMONS EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT ON RESIDENTIAL CHILDREN'S HOMES

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide an update on a report issued by the House of Commons Education Committee which makes a series of recommendations in relation to Residential Children's Homes.
2. To outline activity which is underway or planned in Nottinghamshire to address issues highlighted in the report.

Information and Advice

3. The House of Commons Education Committee published the findings of their inquiry on Residential Children's Homes in June 2014.
4. The Committee received over 30 written submissions in addition to receiving evidence over the course of three oral sessions. The focus of the inquiry was to consider the Government's proposed reforms to Residential Children's Homes, which were proposed in response to the recent Rochdale sexual exploitation case.
5. The main themes of the report relate to:

Ensuring children's homes are located in safe and suitable areas

6. The report noted that there are significant concerns relating to children being placed far away from where they came in to care from. National analysis has highlighted that some homes are located in close proximity to risks such as drug crime, registered sex offenders and prison releases.
7. It also noted that the market was made up of a relatively small number of large providers, and so Government needed to consider the impact if a children's home went bankrupt. The report drew a parallel to the collapse of care operator Southern Cross in 2011.

8. Finally, in relation to this theme the report suggested that some local authorities were not having enough regard to the sufficiency duty placed upon them, to ensure there is suitable accommodation for looked after children in their area.
9. Within Nottinghamshire, 72% of looked after children are placed within 20 miles of the address they came in to care from. This is above average when compared with other county councils and when compared to our statistical neighbours.
10. Where children are placed further than 20 miles, it is often because they are placed in residential care due to a current lack of residential care provision in the north of the County.
11. Through Nottinghamshire's Looked After Children Strategy, there is currently an action plan in place to minimise the use of out of county placements.
12. In May 2014, the Children and Young People's Committee agreed a proposal for the fixed-price purchase of residential care placements which would reduce cost by securing provider's income over a longer period, and will set targets for providers to open up new homes in Nottinghamshire. This will ensure they can stay at the same school wherever appropriate, are closer to their family networks, and can receive better support from police and health through better information sharing.
13. In addition, Nottinghamshire continues to operate five residential children's homes that provide 23 looked after children placements. These homes are all rated good or outstanding by Ofsted, are within the Nottinghamshire borders, and have particular expertise in managing behaviours of our most complex looked after children.

Encouraging commissioning consortia

14. The Committee concluded that when local authorities have worked together to improve outcomes for looked after children and achieve value for money, they have been more successful than when they commissioned in isolation. It noted that joint commissioning strategies maximise economies of scale across regional areas.
15. Nottinghamshire is currently part of the East Midlands Regional Framework for the commissioning of independent fostering placements. This has helped to standardise costs across the region and share best practice in relation to all elements of placement commissioning. This is due to come to an end in 2015, and so discussions are currently ongoing to clarify whether there is a regional consensus to proceed with the current arrangement.
16. Nottinghamshire has its own framework for the commissioning of residential care placements (NAPL) and works closely with neighbouring local authorities where appropriate to share information and commissioning approaches.
17. A fixed-price purchase of residential care placements is currently being developed in collaboration with Nottingham City Council, with tender processes being twin-tracked so that the market is approached concurrently.

Ensuring children are listened to

18. Sector leaders noted that while much progress had been made in ensuring that children are listened to, more could be done. Dr Maggie Atkinson, the Children's Commissioner for England, gave evidence at the Committee on this point. It was argued that listening to children's concerns about their lives and supporting them to overcome these concerns can reduce the chances of children running away from care and decrease other risky behaviours.
19. The Committee noted the essential role of staff within children's care homes in ensuring a children's home is running effectively. It was recommended that local authorities and children's homes providers give children in care a greater role in selecting their care workers.
20. Nottinghamshire has a Children in Care Council which comprises currently looked after children and care leavers. This forum meets regularly to talk about the issues that matter to children in care.
21. At present staff will meet young people currently in residential care as part of their interview process. There is also currently an effective model in place at Clayfields Secure Unit that ensures young people's views are fully embedded in interview processes. Given the success of this model, the plan is to extend this to all internal residential children's homes from October 2014.

Other Options Considered

22. The report is for noting only.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

23. The report is for noting only.

Statutory and Policy Implications

24. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That the Sub-Committee:

- 1) notes the recommendations made by the House of Commons Education Committee in relation to Residential Children's Care
- 2) notes the activity taking place in Nottinghamshire to address the issues highlighted in the House of Commons Education Committee report.

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Constitutional Comments

25. As this report is for noting only, no Constitutional Comments are required.

Financial Comments (KLA 28/08/14)

26. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

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.

House of Commons Education Committee Report on Residential Children's Homes – June 2014

Nottinghamshire County Council Looked After Children Strategy 2012-2015

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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