

25th April 2022

Agenda Item: 16

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES

CHANGES TO THE STAFFING ESTABLISHMENT IN THE COMMISSIONING AND PLACEMENTS GROUP

Purpose of the Report

1. This report seeks approval for the staffing changes within the Commissioning and Placements Group as set out below:

Within the Looked After Children Placements Service to:

- establish 3 fte Service Organiser (grade subject to Job Evaluation) posts with effect from 1 May 2022.

Within Commissioning and Contract Management Service to:

- establish 1 fte Project Manager (grade subject to Job Evaluation) on a temporary basis for 12 months with effect from 1 May 2022

Information and Advice

Background

2. The Commissioning & Placements Group performs the role of a commissioning hub for the department, bringing together the commissioning and contract management of a range of specialist care / education provision for vulnerable children and young people, including:
 - 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
 - semi-independent / supported accommodation for older Looked After Children and Care Leavers, homeless 16/17 year-olds, and vulnerable 18-21 year-olds
 - alternative / specialist education placements in the independent and non-maintained sector for children and young people with an Education, Health & Care Plan, whose level and complexity of need is such that appropriate education provision cannot be provided in a mainstream setting

- Short Break services for children and young people with a disability – to promote independence and to provide parents/carers with a break from their caring responsibilities.
3. The changes to the Group staffing establishment described in this report fall within the services that manage the first two of the above functions. In both cases the need for additional resource is based upon the continuing increase in the number of children placed in the care system, an acknowledged national issue for which the local impact is evidenced by a 25% increase over the past four years. The consequent increase in workload across these two services has reached the point where additional resource is required to enable the respective services to fulfil their statutory duties to secure homes for the Council's children in care, and to provide a range of support for care leavers, in an appropriately efficient and timely manner.

Proposals

Service Organiser Posts

4. The Placements Service continues to secure high quality, Ofsted registered and approved placements for all Nottinghamshire children in care. The overall staffing level within the Placements Service has remained largely unchanged for a number of years during which time the number of children in care within Nottinghamshire has risen markedly - in line with national trends. Moreover, the care system - and in particular the private sector market through which the majority of placements are secured - has changed immeasurably during this time.
5. The day-to-day process of securing a placement is increasingly challenging and requires a bespoke approach for many placements because availability is so limited relative to the cumulative demand from local authorities effectively competing with one another for the same placement. One of the consequences of this is that commissioning officers can become tied up for long periods doing tasks that could be delegated to other more junior staff.
6. It is proposed that 2 fte new Service Organiser (grade subject to Job Evaluation) posts be established in the Placements Service to work alongside and support the commissioning officers in securing placements. This would free up commissioning officers to ensure other key parts of their role, e.g. quality assurance and provider relationship management, are not compromised by their spending all of their time on the 'duty desk' finding placements.
7. It is proposed that a further 1 fte Service Organiser post be established via transferring the funding from a (currently vacant) post within the Business Support Service which has been agreed following discussions with colleagues in that service regarding the best way in which to provide the necessary support to the placements' duty function.
8. These proposals will provide an appropriate mix of skills, knowledge and experience within the service and allows scope for staff to develop and grow into more senior roles, whilst also providing the most cost-effective way of providing the overall capacity that is required effectively to secure sufficient placements on a day-to-day basis.

Project Manager – Staying Close, Staying Connected

9. The Staying Close, Staying Connected approach has been piloted with funding through the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to reform support to care leavers that have been in residential care to avoid the (so-called) 'cliff edge' as they attain their 18th birthday. The transition from adolescence into adulthood is a learning curve

for all young people but is often much more challenging for those moving on from residential care. Without the financial and emotional safety net families often provide, research has shown that those leaving residential care tend to be poorly prepared for independent living and are particularly vulnerable to risk. They are at greater threat of housing instability and homelessness, lower engagement in education and employment, are more likely to be involved in criminal activity and experience mental health difficulties and loneliness. In recognition of this, eight Staying Close pilots were developed, and their successes have been evaluated.

10. Nottinghamshire has provided a strong offer to care leavers for many years, enabling them to access supported accommodation up to their 22nd birthday to maintain positive relationships with support workers and engage in wrap around services. As a result of this, many of the recommendations of the pilot projects and examples of best practice are already in place within Nottinghamshire.
11. The window to bid for funding from the Department for Education to implement the Staying Close, Staying Connected approach is due shortly, and in preparation for this it is proposed that a temporary Project Manager (grade subject to Job Evaluation) post is established to support the bid writing process, and drive forward the plans for Nottinghamshire. The funding for this post has been provided via the regional improvement alliance, i.e. it comes at no additional cost to the County Council.

Other Options Considered

12. Consideration has been given to the use of temporary agency staff and the Group does procure agency staff from time-to-time to cover short term resource issues. For example, an agency member of staff is currently fulfilling the duties of the vacant business support role that will transfer to the Placements Service. However, there is a cost premium attaching to agency staff, especially where there is an identified long-term need, and establishing these posts will allow the Council to invest in training staff and provide them with the skills they need to achieve positive outcomes for children in care.

Reasons for Recommendations

13. The staffing changes outlined in this report 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.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. 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

15. The additional full-year cost of the 3 fte Service Organiser posts within the Placements Service (£85,104 in total) is contained within the Placements Service budget, the funding for 2 posts 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 and a transfer of budget from business support contributing to the third post. Likewise, there is provision within to the Group's budget fund the temporary Project Manager post, for which the maximum cost could be £52,392. The necessary income from the regional improvement alliance to fund this post has already been received. The precise grades are subject to job evaluation and therefore the actual costs may vary slightly.

Human Resources Implications

16. Recruitment for the new posts arising from this report will follow normal procedures and be advertised internally in the first instance.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee:

- 1) approves the following changes to the staffing establishment in the Commissioning & Placements Group:
- establish 3 fte Service Organiser (grade subject to Job Evaluation) posts with effect from 1 May 2022
 - establish 1 fte Project Manager (grade subject to Job Evaluation) post on a temporary basis for 12 months with effect from 1 May 2022

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Constitutional Comments (KK 28/03/22)

17. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee.

Financial Comments (CDS 28/03/22)

18. The additional full-year cost of the 3 fte Service Organiser posts within the Placements Service (£85,104 in total) is contained within the Placements Service budget, the funding for 2 posts 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 and a transfer of budget from business support contributing to the third post. Likewise, there is provision within to the Group's budget fund the temporary Project Manager post, for which the maximum cost could be £52,392. The necessary income from the regional improvement alliance to fund this post has already been received. The precise grades are subject to job evaluation and therefore the actual costs may vary slightly.

HR Comments (EVM 04/04/22)

19. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. Posts will be evaluated in line with Job Evaluation and will be appointed to in line with the agreed employment and recruitment procedures.

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.

None.

Electoral Divisions and Members Affected

All.

C1567