

7<sup>th</sup> March 2022

Agenda Item: 13

## **REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES**

### **CHANGES TO THE STAFFING ESTABLISHMENT IN THE INDEPENDENT CHAIR SERVICE**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek approval to establish 3 FTE posts within the Independent Chair Service: 1 FTE Child Protection Co-ordinator (Hay Band D), 1 FTE Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C) and 1 FTE Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to meet the activity and cost pressure within the service.

#### **Information**

2. The Independent Chair Service provides statutory interventions that are a legal requirement of the Local Authority under the Children Act 1989 and Working Together 2018 (updated 2020).
3. The national and local context is one of increasing demand on services for children in need of help and protection or care.
4. The work with this specific group of children and young people is increasing in its complexity particularly in respect of contextual safeguarding and children in care.
5. In March 2019, Children and Young People's Committee approved the proposed implementation of a strength-based approach to practice. The Independent Chair Service has been instrumental in its implementation including an expansion of its primary offer to contribute to practice improvement and outcomes. This approach has recently been endorsed by the government's review into Children's Social Care and additional funding will enable Nottinghamshire to be practice leaders within the region.
6. This enhanced offer will respond to feedback from Ofsted in 2019 that the service was not always closing the loop in terms of concerns regarding practice. This is identified in the current Ofsted Improvement Plan
7. The offer will also provide more robust oversight and quality assurance of children's plans and of Local Authority Foster Carers, in line with the recommendations of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

8. The Independent Chair Service is crucial in providing a regulatory focus to drive practice improvement, outcomes for children in need of help and protection and care which is inextricably linked to cost reduction and avoidance.
9. Through this function standards are improved leading to a reduce in demand as work is progressed more efficiently.
10. The current establishment does not take account for these additional responsibilities as outlined above.
11. The cost of the three posts is £161,599, which is around 10% of the overall Independent Chair Service budget. This financial year it is currently predicted that there will be an overspend of £241,118 which is 14% of the overall Independent Chair Service budget. This in the main is due to the cost of agency social workers to cover work related absence and increasing demand. Increasing the overall budget by this year's predicted overspend would allow for a permanent increase in capacity at a lower cost and would address the issues of staff wellbeing within the service. This would increase efficiency, quality, and outcomes.

## **Demand and Forecasting**

### **Child Protection Co-ordinators**

12. Child Protection Plans fluctuate and have decreased in the last reported year: April 2020 (797) – April 2021 (693). Child Protection Co-ordinators also chair several other meetings in addition to child protection conferences including child criminal exploitation, child sexual exploitation, allegations against professionals, harmful sexual behaviour and supervision order reviews. The number of these additional meetings has increased in the last reported year from an average of 36 per month to 68 per month, an increase of 88%. A Child Protection Co-ordinator has capacity to chair 6-7 meetings per week including preparation before the meeting and administrative tasks following the meeting. They cannot do more than two meetings per day. This increase equates to an additional 3.2 meetings per day, 16 per week which would require 2 FTE Child Protection Co-ordinators. This does not consider a workforce that is already struggling with capacity or cover needed for Vacancy Level Turnover and absence. An additional 1 FTE Child Protection Co-ordinator would enable more flexibility in this regard and reduce agency spend.

### **Independent Reviewing Officers**

13. The number of Looked After Children is predicted to continue to rise by nearly 7% by the end of 2022. This is an increase of around 110 Looked After Children. The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook gives statutory guidance of a case load of between 50 and 70. This does not consider the factors mentioned in the 'Information' section of this report. To be able to have capacity to manage this increase a minimum of 1.5 FTE Independent Reviewing Officers would be needed. This does not consider a workforce that is already struggling with capacity or cover needed for Vacancy Level Turnover and absence. An additional 1 FTE Independent Reviewing Officer would enable more flexibility in this regard and reduce agency spend.

## **Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers**

14. There are currently 3 FTE Fostering Independent Reviewing Officers. One of these is a temporary post. They have caseloads of around 90 Foster Carers and currently undertake 5-6 meetings per week. Without the additional temporary post each Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer would have about 140 Foster Carers each and would have to undertake around 10 meetings per week. This is not possible due to the administrative responsibilities around each meeting and does not consider any absence or annual leave cover arrangements. The additional temporary post which was recruited to initially due to long term absence has addressed the capacity issues within this part of the service and is needed on a permanent basis. The capacity within this service since it was put in place around five years ago has never been able to meet demand.

## **Recruitment**

15. The Independent Chair Service seeks to establish 3 FTE posts within the Independent Chair Service as follows from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 to meet the activity and cost pressure within the service as outlined in this report:
  - 1 FTE Child Protection Co-ordinator (Hay Band D)
  - 1 FTE Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C)
  - 1 FTE Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C).

## **Other Options Considered**

16. This is a statutory duty conferred upon the local authority by the Children Act 1989 and Working Together 2018 (updated 2020). Without changes to legislation, or a significant change to the demographic of the population of Nottinghamshire, there is very limited scope for other options to be considered.
17. There is evidence in outstanding local authorities that increased capacity will improve the quality of the interventions through strength-based practice, thus reducing the number of children on child protection plans and those who are looked after due to improved quality of plans and the needs of complex children and young people being met more effectively thus reducing costs and improving outcomes in the longer term.

## **Reason/s for Recommendation/s**

18. The recommendation is made in order that the service can meet its statutory duty conferred upon the Local Authority by the Children Act 1989 and Working Together 2018 (updated 2020).

## **Statutory and Policy Implications**

19. 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**

20. The establishment of the 3 FTE posts within the Independent Chair Service: 1 FTE Child Protection Co-ordinator (Hay Band D) and 1 FTE Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C) and 1 FTE Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C) from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, with on-costs, has a maximum cost of £161,599 per annum.

### **Human Resources Implications**

21. The post will be recruited to in accordance with the agreed Vacancy Control Process and recruitment and selection policies.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1) That Committee approves the establishment of the following posts in the Independent Chair Service from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022.
- 1 FTE Child Protection Co-ordinator (Hay Band D)
  - 1 FTE Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C)
  - 1 FTE Fostering Independent Reviewing Officer (Hay Band C).

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**Service Director, Commissioning and Resources**

### **For any enquiries about this report please contact:**

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### **Constitutional Comments (KK 11/02/22)**

22. The proposal in this report is within the remit of the Children and Young People's Committee.

### **Financial Comments (CDS 10/02/22)**

23. The cost of the three posts would be approximately £161,599 p.a. and has been factored into the draft budget for 2022-23 (subject to approval at Full Council in February). The budget for this service area is currently £1,647,320.

### **Human Resources Comments (BC 11/02/22)**

24. The staffing implications are contained within the body of the report. Recruitment will be subject to the vacancy control 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.

[Youth, Families and Social Work Framework for Practice – report to Children & Young People’s Committee on 18th March 2019](#)

## **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

All.

C1552