

CHILDREN AND ADULTS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

25 MARCH 2010

FOSTER CARE CAPACITY PLANNING AUDIT

Report from: Rose Collinson, Director of Children and Adults

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Summary

Medway Council's Audit Committee on 24 September 2009 agreed to, "refer the findings from the Foster Care Capacity Planning audit to the Children and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information".

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 The terms of the Audit present no direct implications to the budget and policy framework. All measures taken by the fostering service as a result of the audit will be met within the existing financial arrangements.

2. Background

2.1 Media publicity had indicated that a high percentage of foster carers nationally were over the age of 50. Clearly this has potential to impact on Medway Council's ability to operate should the number of carers retire faster than replacements can be recruited.

3. Advice and analysis

3.1 The Foster Care Capacity Planning audit produced evidence that the age profile of carers in the Medway Council resource is favourable and "slightly younger" than the national picture.

3.2 The fostering service monitors the carer workforce to maintain carer numbers as part of the ongoing management of the service.

3.3 With regard to outcomes for children the service performs well in meeting the needs of children. In comparison with Medway's benchmarking group (from CIPFA analysis Feb 2010) Medway's performance is:

- average for number in foster care, with the highest number in own care provision and second lowest in Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA)

- third best in keeping the number of moves of placements for children down
- second best in keeping children in placements for longer than 2 years
- second lowest for the use of residential homes

- 3.4 Monitoring 'carer age profiles' does contribute to the overview of service effectiveness. However, it is importantly complimented by monitoring the local patterns of recruitment and retention.
- 3.5 The evidence in Medway is that fostering attracts people from a middle age group of 45 to 50 years, when their own children have grown into adulthood or moved into independence, this offering room and space in their homes to consider foster care.
- 3.6 A significant proportion of carers enter the market mainly in middle age and subject to proven fitness and suitability, successfully continue to provide care up to and beyond the age of sixty years.

4. Risk Management

The following is a synopsis of risks identified by the audit process:

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Foster carer details are not held on a central database and some data is not available	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This may inhibit the ability to plan recruitment strategies effectively 2. Data is not available to compare demographics and map age profiles of carers over time 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain existing data 2. Format of spreadsheets altered to facilitate monitoring and analysis 3. The Children's Care IT system will be developed to include the needs of the fostering service
Risk of inability to match children with carers	Lack of strategic approach to recruitment of foster carers, specifically to ensure carer numbers and age profile are retained	Review Foster Carers recruitment strategy

5. Implications for looked after children

- 5.1 The fostering resource and service provide a central community based provision for looked after children and children in need. It is therefore essential that sufficient foster carers are retained and recruited to provide options of carers who offer high standard care.

6. Financial and legal implications

- 6.1 The CIPFA analysis referred to in 3.3 identifies that looking at the gross cost of LAC per week (homes and foster placements) Medway is lowest in the bench marking group at £600 per week per child (£243 less than average). The analysis identifies that 73% of the efficiency comes from being the best at using the most cost effective option – i.e. provision of Medway’s own foster care.

7. Recommendations

- 7.1 The Committee is recommended to note the action detailed in the report.

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Background papers

Audit Committee papers – 24 September 2010