

# **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**11 JANUARY 2024**

## **ADOLESCENT SERVICE**

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive

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### Summary

In August 2023, a proposal was put forward which provided an option to the ongoing challenges in the adolescent service to address the identified areas of concerns regarding capacity, management oversight, supervision and would enable the realignment of resources to better support the work with adolescents and their families.

This report provides an overview of the realigning of the adolescent service for the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report provides information about the changes made following the publication of Medway's ILACS Judgement in September 2023.

### 1. Recommendations

1.1 The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the report and agree that further adolescent updates will be included annually, within the missing and exploitation annual report.

### 2. Background

2.1 The adolescent service was launched in 2020. Throughout the time the service existed different structures were tested; however, the final structure was for two small teams comprising 10 staff in total.

2.2. Since its inception, a significant challenge has been the ability to recruit staff with the relevant experience, to manage this intense and high-risk work. In August 2022, the decision was made to transfer the service alongside the children's social work teams to build resilience and capacity. An interim

Service Manager was also recruited to provide dedicated support and enhance management oversight.

- 2.3 Additional action was taken in December 2022 to commission a project team of social workers to try to fill the continuing vacancies in this specialist area. Although a small team was procured, it was not possible to fill all the vacancies.
- 2.4 In July 2023, it was clearly evident that the position in the adolescent teams remained significantly challenging. There was insufficient resilience in the service to effectively support young people. Another significant issue was the insufficient amount of management oversight and supervision of the work around this cohort of young people, where there are concerns about risks of harm including county lines, criminal and sexual exploitation.
- 2.5 Exploitation is a critical safeguarding factor, which was an area for development for the service. . This required a new approach to working with young people most at risk, to ensure they receive an effective and responsive service.
- 2.6 The ILACS feedback also highlighted some concerns about the quality and effectiveness of practice in respect of vulnerable adolescents and the initial response to 16/17-year-old young people presenting as homeless.
- 2.7 The formal consultation commenced with staff and trade unions on 18th September 2023 and was open for 30 days which ended on 17th October 2023. A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) was completed for both service and impact on staff. No adverse impact was identified against any specific group of service users or staff.
- 2.8 The new structure proposed was to create additional assistant team managers posts with the 8 children's social work teams to support practitioners and provide an additional layer of managerial oversight. In addition, it was proposed to create a specific joint housing assessment Social Worker post to carry out the social work assessment aspect of joint housing assessments. The reconfiguration of the service included plans to commission resources and provide direct support for young people responsive to need and crisis, to prevent their entry into care, but also work to build relationships with young people, and manage contextualised safeguarding risks.
- 2.9 The review was conducted in accordance with Medway Council's Organisational Change policy. The Head of Service for Children's Social Work, Adolescents and Children and Young People with Disabilities and the Head of Service for First Response and Family Solutions and a member of the Organisational Change team led the organisational change process.

### 3. Advice and analysis

- 3.1 The consultation period ended on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023. There were no counter proposals; the proposed organisational change was welcomed by staff. The proposed organisational change proceeded in accordance with the timetable although the recruitment of the Assistant Team Managers was brought forward by one week.
- 3.2 All internal candidates have now been interviewed and have appointed permanently to four out of the eight Children's Social Work Assistant Team Manager posts. There are further permanent interviews scheduled and interviews continue to take place to recruit to these new posts.
- 3.3 The adolescent service was disbanded on 24<sup>th</sup> November and the realignment happened on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Since this date once a contact and referral is assessed as needing statutory intervention, all children (including adolescents) are assessed by social workers within the assessment teams.
- 3.4 Currently any homeless 16/17-year-old will be assessed by a social worker within the Assessment teams as the specific Joint Housing Assessment Social Work post has not yet been recruited to despite an internal advert.
- 3.5 Work is underway with both Provider Services and with commissioning colleagues to develop adolescent support services to provide wrap around and edge of care support.
- 3.6 It is anticipated that the changes made will have positive impact on the intervention undertaken with adolescents within Medway and that the impact of this will be;
  - A dedicated 16/17 year old homeless Social Worker who will assess and support young people who are at risk or have become homeless ensuring support commences from the first point of contact.
  - Additional management capacity enabling, increased and greater oversight in respect of plans for adolescents and children in need.
  - Training for practitioners and managers to support in working with adolescents and in our duties and responsibilities in undertaking housing.
  - Identification and the co-ordination of edge of care and bespoke exploitation support.
  - An improved assessment, intervention, and support response to the adolescent young people with whom the services are working with.

### 4. Financial implications

- 4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report. No additional budget pressure was credited by the removal of the

two adolescent teams and the newly created eight assistant team manager posts and the one joint housing assessment social worker post as outlined in the main body of this report.

## 5. Legal implications

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

### Lead officer contact

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### Appendices

None

### Background papers

None