

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet Member for Children and Families held on Thursday, 13 July 2017 at 3.30 pm in Conference room A, Second Floor, Civic Offices.

Also Present

Councillor Rob Wood

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Sarah Newman, Deputy Director Children's Social Care.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no pecuniary interests declared. However, Councillor Wood wished to place on record that his son-in-law works for the Harbour School, his daughter works for Motiv8 and his Step Grandson works for the Housing team and his sister-in-law is the Director for Academies and Free Schools at the Education Funding Agency. He also wished to record that he is a local authority governor at both Charter Academy and Ark Dickens Primary Academy.

3. Children and Families Budget Outturn

Graham Smith introduced the report and explained the reasons for the portfolio overspend in 2016-17 and the financial projection for 2017-18.

In response to questions from Councillor Wood, the following points were clarified:

- The overspend for looked after children is mainly due to placement pressures and in particular the high cost of the external residential placements.
- The offsetting underspends within the Children's Social Care service were a consequence of staffing and operational changes. This was led by a structural review of the department and the subsequent holding of vacancies. These underspends were therefore one-off and are not expected to occur in 2017-18.
- The Public Health funding of £1.367m referred to in paragraph 5.3 of the report is income for the Portfolio and therefore offsets off the expenditure incurred by the Portfolio, which is why the cash limit for the Early Years and Children's Centre activities appears low. the commissioning of health services for children.

Councillor Wood congratulated officers for their work on the budget and paid tribute to the staff who had continued when there were vacancies. If the service had been fully staffed the council would not have been able to offset this against the overspend.

The Cabinet Member passed on his thanks to the whole service for their work in particular the resilience of staff working in the areas where vacancies had been held.

DECISIONS: the Cabinet Member

- (1) Noted the portfolio financial outturn position for 2016-17 of £0.335m in excess of the approved cash limit provision.**
- (2) Noted the current expectation that overspends represent a first call against the following year cash limit allocation. The overspend for 2016-17 has been accepted against corporate contingencies; given the actions that have been undertaken and continue to be developed to mitigate future overspending.**
- (3) Noted the ongoing budget pressures within the portfolio, as highlighted within the report, together with the need for continues action to reduce the service expenditure so that it can operate within its authorised cash limit for 2017-18.**

4. Bi-annual adoption report

Kate Freeman, Head of Looked After Children introduced the report. She added that since the report had been written the proposed date for the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) to go live had been moved to 1st October 2018. This was for a number of reasons; the primary reason was to ensure that any potential issues had been resolved prior to going live.

There had been a slight increase in the number of adoption orders in 2016/17 however a decrease in the number of children's plans for adoption agreed. If children are not moving through the system through seeking permanence for adoption this is a risk and Kate said they needed to work closely with court colleagues to make sure they are identifying the right children. Jackie Clark, Adoption Manager added that she had just completed the first quarter figures and it looked like the trend was continuing. It was positive to note that there had been no placements disrupted in 2016/17.

The average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted was very positive. This had reduced from 541 days in March 2016 to 493 days in March 2017. The national average is 515 days. In addition, the average time between the LA receiving a court order to place a child and the LA deciding on a match to a family had reduced from 251 days in March 2016 to 241 days in March 2017. The national average is 229 days. This included three hard to place sibling groups which was very positive.

In Portsmouth there are on average 21 adoption panels a year and across the RAA area there are currently 91 panels a year in total. It is anticipated that once the RAA is in place this will reduce to around 50 panels which will help generate some efficiencies.

In response to questions the following matters were clarified:

- The process of obtaining a court order does take some time. The expectation from the court is that families are the best environment for children and often they expect several family members have to be assessed simultaneously.
- The council is seeing a slight reduction in the number of under 5 year olds in care and it is hoped that this is an effect of the early help offer.
- The numbers of placement orders are currently being analysed and are being discussed tomorrow at the adoption forum. Most plans presented to the court are accepted.
Adoption is not the only permanence option for a child in care. The adoption team work closely with Cafcass colleagues (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service). Portsmouth's reputation with the courts is excellent with regard to the quality of social workers assessments.
- It can be complex to report on the success of an adoption campaign, for example at a recent event 50 families attended resulting in 3 assessments however 20 people were doing extra preparation and would likely come through for assessment after several months.

Kate said that in the next update she could include adoption leadership data which would show the regional picture.

The Cabinet Member suggested that a short commentary be included within the next adoption recruitment literature to explain the adoption context. He thanked officers for their work and the increasing performance of the team.

RESOLVED the Cabinet Member noted the information report.

The meeting concluded at 4.05 pm.

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Councillor Ryan Brent
Cabinet Member for Children & Families