

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 27 January 2020

Report Title: Innovative approaches for Children in Need

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Kathryn Flavell, Portfolio Holder for Children and Families

Senior Officer: Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 Children's Social Care seeks to improve support for children in need through investment in specialist services for vulnerable adolescents on the edge of care and at risk of exploitation. This reflects the changing needs of the children in need population within Cheshire East and is an opportunity to invest funding previously used to commission Fact 22 following successful impact of the service.
- 1.2 FACT 22 is a commissioned service, providing intensive support to our children in need and their families. It was established in 2015 with innovation funding from the Department for Education (DfE).

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To endorse the proposed developments around our approach to improve our work with children in need, particularly our cohort of vulnerable adolescents.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 This report provides an update on plans to develop specialist services for vulnerable adolescents on the edge of care and at risk of exploitation in response to the changing needs of the child in need population. It will also set out how we will continue to support and improve outcomes for our wider children in need population.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1 There was an option to make no changes, but this would not address the needs of our vulnerable adolescents. This would mean that they were potentially at an increased level of risk and more likely to become cared for children. This would not be in line with the approach and ethos of children's social care that every child should be able to live with their birth family, where it is safe to do so.

5. Background

- 5.1 FACT 22 was originally commissioned and launched in 2015 as part of a national innovations programme to work intensively with children in need and their families in Crewe. The focus of the intervention was to reduce the number of escalations to child protection and to reduce the rate of re-referrals to the service. For children and families this meant that they would receive the right help at the right time and children would be healthier, happier, safer and make good progress educationally as an outcome. The innovation part of the project was the team structure, where unqualified workers were the lead family practitioner. Statutory responsibilities such as reviewing the child in need plans were held by a social work consultant, who managed up to 4 family practitioners.
- 5.2 At this time there were widespread vacancies within the Crewe Child in Need/ Child Protection Service and significant numbers of agency social workers and team managers. Case loads were too high and morale was low. Children in need were not prioritised as a result and the impact was evidenced through the lack of timely assessments and planning, leading to a high re-referral rate and increased numbers of children subject to child protection planning.
- 5.3 Over the last 4 years the model has evolved. In its current form there is one hub located in Crewe and a second hub in Macclesfield. These hubs cover the entire Cheshire East footprint and work with a maximum of 96 children. The impact of Fact 22 is positive, alongside a number of other successful measures to improve the quality of social work practice, such as the introduction of the Signs of Safety practice model. The recruitment and retention of social workers has improved considerably with a successful approach of "grow your own". In 2019 this meant that for the first time in a number of years Crewe Child in Need/Child Protection Service was able to establish a fifth social work team.

6. Briefing Information

- 6.1 A review has taken place of our current child in need population, whose needs have changed over the last three years. Children on the edge of care and at risk of exploitation are an increasing demand on the service. Our understanding of Contextual Safeguarding continues to grow as well as increased knowledge about the importance of intensive support and relationship building with some of our most vulnerable adolescents.
- 6.2 Our Contextual Safeguarding Strategy was launched in December 2019. In order to respond proactively to the emerging demands, we are planning to divert £150,000 of funding for Fact 22 to improve our response and support for these specific groups of vulnerable adolescents. The remainder of the funding (£150,000) was from the mainstream Child in Need/ Child Protection Service budget and will be used to fund social work positions now that vacancies have been filled.
- 6.3 This review has been informed by consultation with our children and young people. This includes My Voice, our children in care council, children on the edge of care and at risk of exploitation. Consultation has also taken place with front line practitioners and managers within Children's Social Care.
- 6.4 Children in Need casework will be managed within the standard Child in Need/ Child Protection Service establishment and the current commissioned service Fact 22 will end in March 2020. A plan has been put in place for all children currently open to the service so there is a smooth transition from April 2020. For some children and their families this means that their involvement with children's social care will have naturally ended following successful help and support. For a small number of children they will step across to a social worker within Child in Need/ Child Protection or step down to early help services.
- 6.5 The population of adolescents on the edge of care and custody is increasing in numbers and complexity. We have established a 'Bespoke' project board, which is chaired by the Director of Children's Social Care. The role of the board is to:
- develop our wrap around services for children in residential care to transition where possible into a family environment, whether within their own family or foster care.
 - support young people on the edge of care and prevent entering the care system.

- offer wrap around support and collaboration with multi agency services to prevent placement breakdown and to support transitions in to supported accommodation and adulthood.
- 6.6 Up to 15 young people will be supported in our Cheshire East children's homes once they are fully mobilised over the next few months. Bespoke will also provide intensive support to children who are on the edge of care to help them to remain living within their immediate or extended family network. This will build on the support currently offered by our excellent edge of care team, @ct.
- 6.7 Contextual Safeguarding is a developing area of practice in all Local Authorities and in Cheshire East we are developing a strategic and operational framework in which to support children who are risk of exploitation. The funding which had previously been used to commission FACT 22 will support us to increase the number of support workers who can creatively and intensively work with this vulnerable group of young people.
- 6.8 The number of children at risk of exploitation has increased significantly over the last 12 months and we envisage, as awareness increases by all partner agencies and parents, that this number will increase again in the coming 12 months. Currently, there are 77 children and their families being supported across the authority due to Contextual Safeguarding, as well as a significant number who are proactively supported within Early Help and by our partner agencies to prevent escalation to Social Care.
- 6.9 We have developed a successful operational model that is effective in engaging children quickly and supporting them to understand their vulnerability, empower them to make safe choices, build relationships to increase their safety and increase awareness to their parents. This model is to be further strengthened through the development of a multi-agency team dedicated to supporting and working alongside children and families at risk of exploitation as well as supporting the professionals around the child to reduce the risk.
- 6.10 In summary the Fact 22 commission will end and resources will be diverted into the additional fifth social work team in Crewe Child in Need/Child Protection Service and the development of specialist provision for vulnerable adolescents on the edge of care and at risk of exploitation through the delivery of Bespoke and the implementation of our Contextual Safeguarding operational model. Fact 22 cases will be transferred back to the social work teams.

7. Implications of the Recommendations

- 7.1 The development of specialist services for some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable adolescents will mean that they are safeguarded more effectively from the risk of exploitation and more young people are able to remain safely living within their birth family.
- 7.2 FACT 22 is a successful service that has had a positive impact for vulnerable children and their families over the last 4 years. A strengthened children's social care is now in a strong position to continue this work within the Child in Need/ Child Protection service.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1.1 The contract with FACT 22 is due to end in March 2020. Notice has been given to Catch 22 who are commissioned to deliver the service.

9. Finance Implications

- 9.1 Financial resources from Crewe Child in Need/Child Protection that were previously used to fund Fact 22 will be reallocated to staffing the fifth social work team. £150000 of the £300000 additional funding agreed in 2019-20 will be invested in intensive support services for vulnerable adolescents on the edge of care and at risk of exploitation.

10. Policy Implications

- 10.1 Cheshire East is ambitious and committed to ensuring it is a great place to be young and every child has the best start in life. This is demonstrated through the Council's core priorities that people live well for longer and have the life skills and education they need to thrive. These priorities are supported and driven through the Children and Young People's Plan and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

11. Equality Implications

- 11.1 There are no equality implications for this proposal. Children and young people and their families who need our services will continue to be supported.

12. Human Resources Implications

- 12.1 The recruitment of social workers is driven by our recruitment and retention strategy. The practitioners within Fact 22 are employed by Catch 22 as this was a commissioned service. They delivery of services by Fact 22 was different to mainstream social work teams as the practitioners were unqualified workers. Therefore, there are no Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employees) (TUPE) implications as the service is not being

replicated within the Child in Need/ Child Protection Service as frontline practitioners are qualified social workers.

13. Risk Management Implications

- 13.1 These proposals are intended to reduce the risks associated with the vulnerable group of children and young people at risk of exploitation including sexual abuse, crime, neglect, disrupted education, family breakdown and challenges around transitioning from adolescents into adulthood.

14. Rural Communities Implications

- 14.1 There are no direct implications for rural communities.

15. Implications for Children & Young People/Cared for Children

- 15.1 These proposals are intended to strengthen the support for some of Cheshire East's most vulnerable children.

16. Public Health Implications

- 16.1 There are no direct implications for public health.

17. Climate Change Implications

- 17.1 The development of a multi-agency team to respond to the needs of children at risk of exploitation will ensure that our children remain safely at home in their own families and reduce the number of children being placed within our care potentially at a distance from their own homes. This will result in fewer miles being travelled by staff, children and their families. The majority of travel undertaken by officers in the Council is undertaken in cars, therefore there will be reduction in reliance on fossil fuels and a reduced carbon footprint.

18. Ward Members Affected

- 18.1 Although the number of Cheshire East children at risk of exploitation is relatively small, they are a vulnerable cohort, who live across Cheshire East and in other local authority areas.

19. Consultation & Engagement

- 19.1 Consultation and engagement with children and young people has taken place as part of the development of specialist services with My Voice and young people who have had experience of being exploited.

20. Access to Information

20.1 Information on contextual safeguarding can be found on the following link:

<http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/professionals/contextual-safeguarding.aspx>

20.2 The Children and Young People's Plan 2019-21 can be found on the following link:

<https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/livewell/childrens-trust/children-and-young-peoples-plan-2019-21.pdf>

21.1 Contact Information

21.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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