

Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Tuesday 09 May 2023

Update on Progress Made Within C&F Following Cabinet Investment

Recommendation

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Scrutinises the matters raised in this report.

Local Member Interest:

N/A

Report of Cllr Mark Sutton Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Summary

1. An extensive analysis of efficacy and impact of services was undertaken within children and families during Q3 and Q4 of 2021-22, and during Q1-Q3 of 2022-23. This analysis was done to understand the overspend in the areas of Children in Care, and challenges presented within SEND services. The findings of this analysis were shared with Cabinet members and deliberated upon.
2. After careful scrutiny, a total of £5.7m has been agreed for Children and Families with a view to improve our staffing and workloads within the directorate. It is understood that with improvements in recruitment and retention, and manageable workloads, much needed change in service delivery can be achieved especially in the areas of SEND and Children in Care.
3. This investment was primarily focussed at improving recruitment, retention and progression of social workers, residential staff, SEND key workers and Education Psychologists, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), exploitations workers, fostering mockingbird coordinator, and improvements in placement service.

Report

Background

4. Following the six-month review of Transformation, a paper was presented by C&F leadership requesting further investment of £5.7m in the directorate budget to improve service delivery across Children and Families. This investment would support improved service in key areas such as Children in our Care, addressing challenges in child exploitation, improved offer of SEND, and commissioning.
5. The Cabinet approved this request in Feb 2023 as part of MTFs plans.
6. This paper is being presented to provide transparency and oversight over this budget spend and its impact on overall performance.

Progress update:

Recruitment –

7. For existing positions - Recruitment for existing positions began in Q4 of 2022-23. These positions are – Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs), Lead IROs, Exploitation workers, Education Psychologists, and commissioners. We have had good response to the Job adverts and currently whilst some positions have been recruited to (exploitation staff, IRO leads, commissioners), there are others where offers have been made (IROs, Education psychologists). We have maintained high standards in recruitment; therefore, some positions were not filled within first round of interviews, however, we are confident that we will recruit to those positions in due course.
8. For new positions – Where new positions were needed to be created, for example – Deputy District Lead, Social Work Practice Lead, SEND senior Key Workers we are pleased to inform that all these positions have been through the Job Evaluation process, and we are now ready to plan our recruitment drive. Positions like Deputy District Lead and SEND Senior Keyworkers have already been advertised and have had a great response. We are in the process of shortlisting and interviews.

Retention –

9. Retention was a particular issue with two job roles – Social Workers, and residential staff. In relation to social work retention, the news of cabinet investment was sufficient to provide immediate relief and instil confidence in staff. Our Workforce Steering Board continues to provide

direction and is supporting in maintaining pace and traction. We launched our SW progression offer during our Practice Week in March 2023, which has been well received. Social work retention is closely linked to our progression offer which aligns our aspirations to be financially competitive as well as provide a sound platform for personnel ambitions. With the new social work roles and grades being approved at March JE Board, we are now able to land our progression offer.

10. Recruitment and retention of residential staffing continues to remain a challenge. We have taken a measured approach to this matter and are aligning our residential review in line with sufficiency strategy. We need to assure ourselves that our residential offer meets the emerging and future needs of children in care within Staffordshire. To this end, we are currently undertaking a full residential review with an aim of developing a service and structure fit to meet our current and future needs. Once this review is complete, we will implement the recommendations. We aim for the review to be completed before the end of Q2 2023-24 with a clear plan of action.

Measuring Impact –

11. Qualitative impact – The qualitative impact of Cabinet investment has been immense, and this has been triangulated from various sources of information like feedback from frontline managers and practitioner’s forums, feedback from staff conferences and engagement events, sickness data, feedback from DCS, Lead member and Senior leadership team contact with frontline staff, and various staff surveys (LGA, Thinkwell survey and eNPS). Staff feel valued, supported, and despite the challenges they face; are working with enthusiasm to support children and families in Staffordshire. As more positions get recruited into, and the structure stabilises, we are confident that we will start to see tangible outcomes in terms of workloads and timeliness.
12. Qualitative impact on service provision – Managers are reporting an improvement in the recording of child’s lived experience and wishes and feelings in the child’s file, which reflects increased direct work and understanding of meaningful social work intervention. Although capacity remains a challenge for some teams, others are now permanently fully staffed and feeling like they are improving as a result. Overall, in learning & improvement hubs managers spoke about communication and relationships between teams improving steadily.

Quantitative Impact –

13. **We have fewer children in our care.** More children left care than entered care in Dec-March 2023, leading to a reduction in the overall number of children in care (1278 excluding UASC compared to 1301 at the end of November 2022). This is the first reduction since August last year and has been positively impacted by work undertaken by the Children in Care Program Board (rate of 81 per 10,000).
14. **Initial review timeliness and review timeliness for children in our care has improved in February.** An increase of 10% for both initial and review conferences (now 78% and 88% respectively). We are doing further work to address some issues with recording in this area.
15. **We know that we are visiting our children in a timely manner.** Our children visit performance is being monitored on a weekly basis by District Leads, who ensure that every child is visited within required timescales.
16. SEND timeliness remains challenging but this is to be expected as additional capacity not in position yet. A positive picture though for phase transfers compared to previous years (97% of phase transfers now completed for pre-16s, currently 38% of post-16 completed.)

Final Summary:

17. As the cabinet investment was approved in February 2023, this report is only able to reflect upon early progress that has been made so far within Children and Families Directorate. We are progressing plans at pace which are being monitored via workforce steering board. This board meets monthly and reports directly into C&F SLT. The overall performance of the directorate is linked and monitored via the corporate delivery plan.

Link to Strategic Plan

18. Corporate Delivery Plan.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

None

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