

THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA
FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
4 MAY 2011

REPORT BY FAMILY SERVICES MINI-GROUP
(Chairman: Councillor Andrew Dalton)

This report sets out the main points made by members of the Family Services Mini-Group at three meetings.

FOR DECISION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Family and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee earlier this year established a mini-group on Family Services. The membership comprised Councillors Dalton (Chairman), Blakeman, Jones and Rutherford, and two co-opted members - Dr Al-Zaher and Mr Quinn. The group was advised by Mr John Page, Acting Director of Family Services, Ms Karen Tyerman, Director for Community Learning and Ms Joanne Hay, Acting Director of Commissioning, Strategy and Performance. Meetings were clerked by Governance Services.
- 1.2 As background information, the Group noted the mini-group procedure note, previously agreed by the committee, and an extract about Family Services from the conclusions of the report of the Finance and Priorities In-Depth Working Group, which had met in early 2010.
- 1.3 The intention of the Group was to hear from officers about three areas of Family Services and to consider possible savings that might be made in the years 2012/13 and 2013/14 before the business planning process for those years began in the summer.

2. MEETINGS

- 2.1 The group met three times - on 22 March, 5 April and 12 April. The three subject areas considered and points made at each meeting are set out below.

3. FIRST MEETING - PROPOSALS FOR SAVINGS FROM A COMBINED FOSTERING SERVICE

3.1 The following points were noted:

- The Budget Report for 2011/12 contained a modest saving of £10,000 from efficiency savings in the fostering service arising from the flexible use of commissioned staff. This was part of previously identified savings for the service of £100,000 - £90,000 of which had already been taken.
- Savings for 2012/13 and 2013/14 could be achieved by focusing on sharper foster care recruitment practice and continued gate-keeping of those entering care, supported by strong early intervention services. Improved recruitment practice is most likely to be delivered through the work on combined services with Westminster and Hammersmith and Fulham.
- The fostering service has always been a mixed economy. The Council has its own foster carers, but also uses Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). However, local carers are preferred as it is very rare to get a local carer from an IFA, as well as IFA placements being more costly.
- It is expensive to recruit foster carers to the Council's pool. The Council's costs are made up of "front door" recruitment and advertising; five months, on average, of assessment of suitability; and supporting carers and supervising visits and training.
- The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) benchmarking costs show the Council's average costs for in house carers were £712 per week. This increases to about £820 if the costs of recruitment activity are apportioned to exclude friends and family carers. The benchmark average IFA cost was £880; for the Council this was just over £1,000, as placements sought in this sector mainly provide for harder to place teenagers who might otherwise be in residential care. The Council did not have figures for Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster.
- OFSTED judged the Council's service to be outstanding; Hammersmith and Fulham's was adequate and Westminster's was rated as good.
- Allowances paid to carers varied between the three boroughs, but not to a significant degree. Work would need to be undertaken to harmonise allowances, without carers losing out and leaving the service.

- The Council's foster carers valued the infrastructure provided by the Council, i.e. the support, training, supervision, access to qualified social workers and the virtual school.
- Across the three boroughs there is a shortage of foster carers so they were a very valuable resource. A loss of carers could lead to a dramatic increase in costs, by buying in more expensive IFA placements and also costly residential provision if external foster placements cannot be maintained.
- The Council had reduced the number of children coming into the Council's care by better management of early intervention and support, and by more focussed gate-keeping.
- In the tri borough proposals it is intended that savings ought to be made from management posts and not from front line services. Recruitment and advertising costs would be shared by the three boroughs and each borough would have access to a larger pool of carers. This should make the service more cost effective and reduce the use of IFAs. The proposals to date indicate management posts were being reduced from 11.4 to 9, and including other posts the total reduction was 5 posts.
- For 2012/13 it was intended to reduce management costs in the combined fostering and adoption services by £240,000.
- By reducing the use of IFAs, it was hoped to reduce costs across the three boroughs by £125,000 in 2012/13 and by a further £250,000 in 2013/14 and 2014/15. Additional savings could be made by using the three boroughs collective power to procure more smartly. There was also an opportunity to sell some of the Council's capacity in carers where there was a mismatch with current needs and this year the Council had produced £100,000 in income from this.
- The needs of children requiring placements would continue to be assessed locally – social workers would be borough based; the proposals are for commissioning and management of fostering placements to be from a combined single management team.
- It was important that staff ethos and morale remained high, with good management and a wider Council commitment to the service.
- The group wanted to see a high quality service maintained, with a good work ethos of officers and positive morale amongst carers in order to meet the variety of looked after children's needs.
- The question of costs, especially comparisons between the Council and Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster, was highly

complex. There was, for example, a disparity in the salaries paid in the three boroughs. There would also be the need to ensure that capital costs and savings were apportioned equitably between the three boroughs.

- Morale, continuity of good management and quality of service were highly important and the Council should seek to ensure that those were not compromised.

4. SECOND MEETING - PROPOSALS FOR SAVINGS FROM INCREASED SOCIAL WORK PRODUCTIVITY

4.1 The Group noted the following points:

- The Council has six social work teams across the borough, each with seven social workers, giving a total of 42. There is also a hospital-based team and a team looking after children with disabilities.
- The Council operates a patch based model, which avoids the unnecessary transfer of cases between teams and ensures continuity between the social worker and family. This model will be retained under the tri-borough plans, as it forms part of the Council's 'sovereignty'.
- The caseload per social worker is eight to nine cases, which is considered reasonable and is less than other boroughs.
- It is important for managers to allocate cases sensitively. Giving all the 'difficult' cases to the more experienced social workers would lead to 'burn out' and loss of such staff. Retaining a mix of cases is important.
- Allocating social workers to a particular family means that some will not get experience of some of the more specialist processes, such as taking a child through the adoption process. However, this lack of specialism is offset by giving social workers training and advice in these areas.
- There has been a general decline in Children in Need cases and referrals since 2009, largely as a result of improved early intervention. This reduced workload has already enabled the number of teams to be reduced from seven to six. The consequent savings were re-invested to improve case supervision and address staff retention issues. Social worker pay was increased and staff career progression was helped by planning a more specialist role in areas such as parental mental health, substance abuse and domestic violence, while retaining staff in their teams.

- Social workers currently spend 23% of their time in direct contact with clients, although only 15% of their time is spent in face-to-face contact. Recording information accounts for 21%, phone calls or meeting other agencies 11% and travel 9%. It is recognised that more face-to-face contact should be taking place. The Munro Review will be recommending this. Managers would prefer to see face-to-face contact increase from 15% to 25% and time spent in direct contact up from 23% to 35%.
- The potential reduction in Government prescription is welcomed.
- Savings might be achievable through changes to thresholds, so that early intervention is not carried out by qualified social workers, but by less costly social care workers. Risk assessments would be important to avoid unintended consequences.
- Budget reductions of 10% were being looked at.
- The pairing of patch teams has already produced some savings. The World's End team, for instance, has already moved to Chelsea Old Town Hall, allowing savings in office space and creating a closer working relationship between teams. There may be further opportunities for pairing. Currently, there are four paired teams in the north of the borough and two in the south. This may be changed to two in the north and one in the south.
- Hammersmith and Fulham and Westminster operate a different model, where social workers are not allocated to a particular family.
- Tri-borough savings in the social care field are mainly looking at reducing staffing at Director-level, although once a new structure is in place, other savings may become apparent. Tri-borough will not have an adverse effect on front-line services.
- Any move to change social work services would need to ensure sufficient staffing levels. This would be particularly important at team manager level where responsibility for risk and case management lies.
- The Group concluded that savings of 10% may be possible through:
 - The further combination of teams;
 - Changes to thresholds so that early intervention work is carried out by less-qualified and less costly social care staff.

5. THIRD MEETING - PROPOSALS FOR SAVINGS FROM EARLY INTERVENTION REDESIGN

- 5.1 At the previous meeting, on social worker productivity, the Group had noted the attribution of a decline in 'children in need' cases to early intervention work locally. So what did early intervention (EI) consist of?
- 5.2 EI is at present made up of a range of services and individuals at the Council and in the community/voluntary sector doing things which contribute to reducing the likelihood of children becoming 'children in need' or their problems worsening so that they so become. Broadly the services comprise EI functions:

- within early years services (including at children's centres) - £3.7m;
- within youth and play services - £4.6m;
- such as parenting programmes.

Overall the local spend (not just Council) on EI is something in the region of £9-10m per annum. However, some of these services are more geared to universal provision and less targeted on specific individuals.

- 5.3 Up to 2010/11, funding came from a number of specific Government grants but now there was one 'Early Intervention Grant', which was £6.7m in the current year - £1.8m less than the sum of the various specific grants in 2010/11.
- 5.4 The effect of the £1.8m reduction - even before any EI redesign, as proposed - had already resulted in reduced spend on:
- Connexions (for 13 to 19 year olds), especially on more universal career guidance in schools;
 - targeted support for groups of young people, e.g. youth offenders and care leavers;
 - 'Positive outcomes for young people' which often involves one-to-one mentoring and support; and
 - Parenting programmes, in some cases run with voluntary sector providers (and where an 'exit strategy' was already in place).
- 5.5 Officers anticipated three main ways to achieve additional savings and efficiencies:
- (i) Re-organise the way we deliver EI, i.e. rationalise programmes and management. Sometimes different local organisations were working with the same clients. Furthermore, the pattern

of service provision had developed over time, often influenced by the funding streams from Government. Now there was a clear need to stand back, reassess and redesign.

- (ii) Identify and focus on the types of EI work which are demonstrably effective in preventing the need for higher intensity intervention at a later stage, at much greater cost.
- (iii) Streamline assessment/referral processes.

5.6 Having heard the background to the redesign proposals, the following points were raised and discussed:

- (i) There might well be scope for greater voluntary engagement within local EI provision and this was being factored into the redesign work.
- (ii) It was noted that around 500 children in the borough were living with substance-abusing parents/adults, and that other children lived in other equally unsatisfactory environments (e.g. had parents in prison). EI took a whole family approach in such circumstances, with a dedicated professional working with the family over a long period.
- (iii) It was noted that problems with particular children or young people with needs that called for intervention often came to light at the following key stages in their development:
 - transition from junior to secondary school;
 - a bit later, at the transition to adulthood; then
 - at the stage when an individual becomes a parent.
- (iv) The Group heard that in addition to saving money, the redesign was looking to achieve a more accessible service for families who needed help, with 'no wrong front door' and streamlined processes to reduce costs and make the service easier for staff and users to understand. At present, there looked to be three 'high level' design elements/options:
 - locality teams with a geographical basis matching that of, and co-located with, social work and other related teams.
 - multi-disciplinary teams, bringing together a range of professionalisms, skills and techniques. EI should not be seen in isolation from other social work.
 - more generic (properly trained) support workers to help with caseloads, leaving specialist social workers nearby to be called upon when needed.
- (v) The Group felt that service continuity for users was important, so that they were clear who to turn to as they grew up and entered difficult phases in their development. It was also

important that a child who leaves 'the system' is not lost, but instead receives 'step-down'/low-level support so that they remain in contact or at least 'on the radar' until it is clear they do not need further help.

- (vi) The Group heard that the voluntary sector was very much part of the redesign plans and the Council would probably commission some services from voluntary organisations that it hitherto had not used. The Group was interested to know what scope there might be for unpaid volunteers also to play a role in EI activities and noted that there were already volunteers doing reading support in schools, sports coaching etc. Whilst accepting that there was minimal scope for 'well-meaning volunteers' to play a role in relation to high needs families, it suggested that there did need to be avenues for volunteer involvement and asked that 'family buddying' and 'social aunts and uncles' schemes be further explored. However, care was needed when putting paid staff and unpaid volunteers side-by-side to avoid volunteers feeling exploited. Also, there were training needs and costs to factor in.
 - (vii) It was noted that conclusions on (iv) above would be reached by early May. Thereafter, these would be further tested before a decision in June on which model to run with. Implementation would take place at 1 April 2012.
 - (viii) The Group discussed the theoretical and practical implications of tri-borough. It considered that, despite the 'sovereignty guarantee', service standardisation was likely over time, hopefully with 'what works best' becoming the model across the three boroughs. It was noted that, at present, there were some significant service differences with, notably, LBH&F's higher EI threshold and Westminster's 'Family Recovery Project' also focusing very much on high end needs rather than EI.
 - (ix) The Group noted that there was still considerable uncertainty over the extent to which current proposals for GP commissioning might impact on local EI services.
- 5.7 The Group noted that the service redesign sought to realise savings of £0.5m in 2012/13. This would be achieved through the loss of some posts (but not necessarily through redundancy) and a rationalisation of what services are delivered and commissioned, with a particular focus on eliminating overlaps in provision. Achievement of the above held out every hope of a better EI service resulting, over time, in the need for less spend at the 'higher need' end of the spectrum.
- 5.8 The Group set out its priorities as follows:

- (i) the need to identify, as accurately as possible, the risk factors that made EI crucial so as to prevent a child developing high end needs. Maximum clarity about key risk factors would help ensure that services are best targeted. Factors such as:
 - parental substance abuse;
 - parent in prison;
 - misbehaviour at school;
 - antisocial behaviour coming to Police attention; and
 - geographical factors, e.g. schools/estates with known high concentrations of social problems.
- (ii) achieving savings, though not because they had to be realised - rather that they were possible through reducing overlap and staff (especially management) costs, and by improving efficiency.
- (iii) the implementation of multi-disciplinary teams with streamlined working methods and, perhaps, a mix of experienced social workers and generic support staff working closely together.
- (iv) re-assessment of ongoing property requirements.
- (v) the scope for volunteer activities.
- (vi) the quality of service - especially the maintenance of effective local EI services as proven mechanism for reducing 'high end' need cases - and any potential or known knock-on effects from the service redesign and from tri-borough working.
- (vii) through ongoing monitoring of outcomes - the redesign needs to be aired and tested.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- 6.1 The Committee has previously agreed a clear procedure for considering mini-group reports. The options are:
- 6.2 The Committee may adopt some or all of the points and suggestions made in this report and ask the relevant Cabinet Member to provide a response to these suggestions at the next meeting.
- 6.3 The Committee may agree that it is satisfied with the information received and wish to take no further action.
- 6.4 The Committee may agree that the topic requires further time and attention. It could:

1. Grant an extension to the mini-group to carry out further work. The Committee may wish to give specific guidance to the group on the aspects it would like to see developed.
2. Mark the topic for a Deep Level Scrutiny session at the next meeting. The Committee may wish to identify specific officers to call for further questioning.
3. Raise some general questions that can be dealt with via the standard reporting process to the next meeting.
4. Establish a traditional in-depth working group review with formal terms of reference.

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 The Committee is RECOMMENDED to decide whether to adopt option 6.2, 6.3 or 6.4.

FOR DECISION

Andrew Dalton

Chairman

Public background papers used in preparation of this report:

None.

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