

**REPORT TO:** Children and Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 11 November 2024

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director - Children's Services

**PORTFOLIO:** Children & Young People

**SUBJECT:** Children's Social Care High Cost Placements

**WARD(S)** All Wards

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To provide an update on high cost placements within Children's Social Care.

**2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Children's Social Care has seen an increase in the need to use residential provisions over a number of years due to a reducing number of foster carers and difficulties nationally to recruit foster families. The shortage of foster families has meant not only an increase in the use of residential placements but the age of children living in residential provisions has reduced.

3.2 Residential provisions for children are not routinely the first consideration of care when children are unable to live within their own families. <sup>1</sup>It is recognised that for most children outcomes are better when they reside within a family environment receiving care consistently from one or two carers. There are studies that evidence that for some children who reside in smaller residential provisions with a consistent staffing group and who remain in the care of the provider that they can also achieve positive outcomes.

3.3 Placement cost £15K per week. 9<sup>th</sup> placement. Placement searches were difficult with only this regulated provider identified following notice from his previous home.

3.4 Placement cost 15K per week. Previous placement requests have resulted in a number of unregulated providers as no regulated provision would provide accommodation. This current placement has therapeutic provision and is managing to engage child in education. 9<sup>th</sup> placement.

- 3.5 Placement cost £15,982 – short term crisis placement. Further placement searches remain live and no offers have been made.
- 3.6 All three children in high cost placements have diagnosis of ADHD. All three children have experienced adverse child experiences, including abandonment, separation, domestic abuse. Whilst there continues to be live placement searches none of the children above have had any providers come forward to care for them. Prior to each placement, negotiations have taken place with the providers to reduce the cost of the placements, none of these negotiations have been successful and it is likely due to a number of children both regionally and nationally looking for placements. Failure to agree the placements would have resulted in the child having no placement.
- 3.7 Over the last 9 months, significant efforts have been made to engage with providers to establish provisions locally for children that meet their needs. The local authority have engaged with not for profit agencies and those agencies who reflect similar ethics as the council in respect of prioritising the needs of children, the priority being their welfare and the care being of high standard, agencies who do not profiteer of children's trauma. One not for profit has commenced the process to open up a provision in Halton that will allow for children like those above to be placed locally in a provision that works with the LA to secure stability and thus improving the outcomes of our children. If the provision is granted planning permission, the organisation will work with Halton council to identify three young people in higher cost placements to occupy those beds.
- 3.8 The strategies implemented to date have resulted in some reduction to placement costs for individual children and there has been a reduction of the numbers coming into care due to efforts made in improving practice and risk management and diversion strategies. Further work is needed to bring the numbers of children in care down and improve placement sufficiency.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 No policy implications

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The local authority can not continue to pay high cost fees for children's accommodation due to the financial implications on the council and the impact on children. The progression of a number of work streams to reduce the placement expenditure are underway and include the following areas:
- 5.2 Developing effective relationships with organisations that prioritise the care needs of children above making a profit. Developing further

residential and foster carers to meet the needs of children with complex needs and have a diagnosis of ADHD. Challenging providers who charge significant fees but deliver a less than satisfactory service which results in further rejection for children and compounds their presenting behaviours. Targeting our foster carer recruitment strategy to include emergency placements, respite placements and specialist in house foster carers to care for children who other carers find challenging.

- 5.3 Implementing an edge of care team that reduces the number of children who come into care. Developing the discharge from care service to ensure that discharges are timely for children and families so only those children who need to be in our care, are in care. Improving social work practice to appropriately assess the needs of children and respond quickly to reduce the risk of children coming into care.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

By strengthening our service delivery we can support families to remain together safely due to being able to access services at an earlier stage, improving coping strategies. Provision of care will support the development of independence for our children so that they can live in suitable accommodation and have regular contact with services that support; emotional wellbeing, reduce isolation and respond to changing situations.

### **6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

Keeping children local to Halton and improving outcomes will build stronger communities, supporting talent within Halton to remain in Halton.

### **6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

The multi approach to reducing the need for social care statutory intervention, will support keeping families together safely, improve the local resources to keep children in Halton, support family time for those who cannot remain with families.

### **6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

Progressing our offer to care leavers and those in care so that they have the same life chances as their peers re-dressing the inequalities they face.

**6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**

Reducing the travel requirements for visits and family time, reducing our carbon footprint.

**6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

Investing in organisations that wish to give back to the local Halton community.

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 To take no action will result in significant pressures on the Local Authority and limit the services provided to all residents

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 Children who can not live safely at home should have the opportunity to stay in their local area with providers that support our aspirations and children's aspirations.

**9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 Reducing the travel requirements for visits and family time, reducing our carbon footprint.

**10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.