

REPORT TO: Education Committee

MEETING DATE: 22 March 2022

BY: Executive Director for Education and Children's Services

SUBJECT: Redesigning Children's Services for Better Outcomes

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 Given the strong links and joint working across the Education and Children's Services Directorate, this report seeks to update the Committee of the rationale, the aspirations and intended outcomes of the whole-service review of children's social work service; Redesigning Children's Services for Better Outcomes.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the report.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 During 2017/18, it became clear that an increasing number of children needed to be accommodated away from their families, and an increasing number of children were requiring care outwith East Lothian. There was evidence that this was not resulting in positive outcomes for most young people and we also recognised that the resulting budgetary pressures were unsustainable.
- 3.2 Beginning in 2018, we undertook three significant pieces of self-evaluation - Children Social Work Service Self Evaluation Report (November 2018), and the Vulnerable Children's Project and the Analysis of Budget Overspends in Children's Services in 2019. This led to the creation of the Transforming Services for Children Project, overseen by the council's Chief Executive.
- 3.3 Reviewing the evidence from our self-evaluation activities, we recognised that we were not suitably organised to ensure the best possible outcomes

for children, young people and their families. We identified key pressure points in the child's journey through Children's Services. We acknowledged that we could not change one part of the structure without impacting upon other areas of the service. We collectively reached the conclusion that a whole service redesign was necessary to improve outcomes for children that were also essential in order to meet the aspirations of The Promise.

3.4 REVIEW PROCESS

3.4.1 With the support of the council's transformation team we took an evidence-based approach through mapping our systems and processes. We considered the child's journey from the "front door" of duty social work through to the "back door" of aftercare services. We consulted widely with families, staff and other stakeholders. We identified our key purpose, outcomes and operating principles for the whole service and individual areas of business. We mapped existing resources and designed new structures required to achieve the desired outcomes.

3.5 KEY SERVICE CHANGES

- Increased capacity and staffing resource at the "front door" with a dedicated child protection team and stronger approaches to initial assessment and planning.
- From existing resources we have created a welfare and justice team, to strengthen capacity to intervene at the right time to avoid escalation of concerns when young people are involved in anti-social behaviour, high risk behaviour or offending.
- Young peoples' transition to the throughcare and aftercare team will be needs led and not age led. Staff must consider the long-term and future needs of our young people from an earlier stage in their care journey.
- The support and intervention service will include three long-term practice teams and a dedicated family support team that will focus on meeting the SMART outcomes identified in the child's plan.
- The fostering and adoption team has been split to create greater capacity for operational and strategic developments including a greater focus on kincare.
- Development of an intensive outreach service for children and young people at risk of being accommodated. Available evenings and weekends, this service will operate from Lothian Villa, making use of residential and family support staff.
- Piloting a joint Early Intervention Support Team with the Education service including specially recruited family support workers and teachers. This is an up-stream approach aimed at those children who

are beginning to disengage with education and designed to prevent the need for targeted social work or educational support

3.6 SUPPORTING PRACTICE CHANGE

3.6.1 Children's Services has re-committed to *Signs of Safety* as a framework for practice. This is a relationship-based, strength and safety based approach to child welfare and protection work. It is created from research about what works for professionals and families in building meaningful safety for vulnerable and at-risk children. Leaders from across Children's Services and Education have benefitted from some initial professional learning on this approach.

3.6.2 We are reviewing our policies and procedures to ensure they support effective interventions and the child's journey through the service and are compliant with United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the requirements of The Promise.

Ensuring we have high quality, future and outcome-focused children's plans is a priority for the service and the broader directorate in 2022/23 alongside strengthening the voice of the child, young person and their family within assessments and plans.

3.7 WHAT IS REQUIRED FROM PARTNERS

3.7.1 Children's Services recognise that we need the support of all our partners to bring about lasting and meaningful change to the lives of children, young people and their families. Referrals to children's services continue to rise. This service redesign will not achieve its intended outcomes if it is not supported by change across other council services and key partner agencies in order to provide early and effective intervention with children and their families to reduce vulnerability and demand for targeted services.

- We need all services for children to prioritise the upstream, preventative supports and interventions that can stop concerns and difficulties from escalating.
- We need our communities to be nurturing and loving towards our children and young people. We need to create safe spaces where they want to be and where they feel a sense of belonging.
- We need all services to be trauma informed and understand that children and young people's behaviour is a form of communication and prioritise service development and practice that can better meet their needs at the earliest possible opportunity.
- We need everyone to be signed up to the same goal... *Where children are safe in their families and feel loved they must stay – and families must be given support together to nurture that love and overcome the difficulties which get in the way. (The Promise, 2019)*
- We need everyone to recognise that it is not usually in a child's interest to be removed from their communities and connections and prioritise

solutions, creativity and persistence from everyone who has the power to make a difference.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5 INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

5.1 The subject of this report does not affect the wellbeing of the community or have a significant impact on equality, the environment or economy.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial - The costs of the service redesign have been met within the existing children's services budget. The costs were met by using a portion of the budget uplift in 2021/2022. Three additional frontline posts have been created and five newly-graded posts were created from the deletion of five existing posts.

6.2 Personnel - Staff were consulted at various points throughout the service redesign process and staff feedback influenced the development of the structure. There were also numerous points of consultation with the Union representative and HR advisors.

Staff affected by the redesign were given the opportunity to provide their preferences for which new area they wished to work in. 93% of those affected were allocated to their first preference, with the others being placed in their second area of preference.

There are a number of frontline vacancies to be recruited to before we can fully implement the new structure. Maintaining safe oversight of open cases while minimising change and disruption for families is crucial. The ongoing recruitment challenges are a current risk for children's services and is a significant barrier in achieving the desired impact of the redesign.

6.3 Other – none.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 None

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