OSCC Report to Cabinet

Title: Out of County Placements Review

Date: 7 June 2010

Date can be implemented: 15 June 2010

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Electoral divisions affected: All

Portfolio areas affected: Children and Young People

Executive summary

This report summarises the key findings of a review by members of a task and finish group, commissioned by the Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee, to look at spend on out of county placements for children in Buckinghamshire. The work was carried out as part of the statutory, mandatory and discretionary spend review, which aimed to make recommendations to Cabinet to help inform its decisions around possible different delivery methods, and to identify any possible options for savings to help meet the £27 million deficit.

During the course of the review, members learned that the Council is working hard, through a range of methods and joint work, to reduce pressures on both budget and resources in what is a complex, demand-led service area. Members were unable to identify potential cost-cutting initiatives, although their recommendations aim to result in improved practice and in many cases lower costs. They believe that, in order to reduce pressures on resources, it is crucial for services and staff to continue to embrace different and imaginative ways of working, including jointly with partnerships and other authorities around commissioning. Finally, members acknowledged the importance of all placements offering the greatest value for money whilst meeting the child’s assessed need.

In reaching its recommendations, members were conscious that the Council is already undertaking a number of change programmes to provide the most cost effective service for residents, which means that the recommendations from the review are made at a time of significant and continuing change.
Members recommend that:

1. The Council strengthens the links between each service and the contribution they can make to the role of corporate parenting, as demonstrated in other authorities such as South Tyneside. (Paragraph 41)

2. With respect to children in care, there should be a single, senior officer with the responsibility for ensuring that all the necessary links are in place and timelines can be met for each stage of a child’s journey through the legal process. (Paragraph 56)

3. The current training for social workers around legal and court processes is reviewed to ensure it is fit for purpose, is a requirement for all social workers and links to the Council’s appraisal and performance management systems. (Paragraph 57)

4. Delays in court processes are minimised by effective joint working prior to legal proceedings taking place. (Paragraph 58)

5. The Service continues to explore ways with partners to offer increased support to families on the edge of care, through multi-agency resourced community initiatives and based on best practice examples. (Paragraphs 62 – 64)

6. An action plan for implementation of accepted recommendations is drawn up and progress against actions will be brought before the Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee in 12 months time.

Introduction

1. In October 2009, the Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee embarked on a review which examined statutory, mandatory and discretionary spend in the Council. The overall aims were to make recommendations to Cabinet that may help inform its decisions around possible different delivery methods and to identify options for additional savings in order to meet an anticipated £27 million deficit in funding.

2. The review has been undertaken at a time when the Council is facing pressure to improve service provision whilst making savings, and is in the light of future plans by Government to reduce funding to the public sector.

3. During the first phase of this review, members compiled a resource pool of information about statutory and discretionary services and minimum levels of service provision, from evidence provided by service areas.

4. Phase 2 of the review involved looking in more detail at aspects of two service areas, Achievement and Learning and Transport, to learn more about the activities that take place within the service, to establish how funding is currently used and to identify how well the Council is working with partners in this area.

5. As part of this, in January 2010, a task and finish group was set up to look at out of county placements for vulnerable children, for the following reasons:
   - The budget is consistently overspent
   - There are increasing pressures on this area with rising costs
   - It is a complex, individualised and demand-led service
• It is a statutory duty but discretionary services have an impact
• There are potentially high risks for the authority if things go wrong

6. Members learned that this area of work cuts across education and safeguarding and all three divisions of the Children and Young People portfolio (Safeguarding, Achievement and Learning, Commissioning and Business Improvement).

Methodology

7. The review took place between January 2009 – April 2010. The following frontline councillors were appointed to the Task and Finish Group: Margaret Aston, Noel Brown, Brenda Jennings (Chairman), Martin Phillips and Brian Roberts. In addition, two co-opted members were appointed, namely John Bajina and Roy Davey,

8. The review was carried out using the following methods:
• Initial planning meeting to clarify the key lines of enquiry
• Evidence gathering Task and Finish meetings
• Visits to Buckinghamshire County Council’s Children’s Homes
• Meetings with Cabinet Member and officers
• Written information
• Desktop research

Background Information

9. There are different types of placements including:
• Foster care
• Children’s Homes
• Residential
• Boarding
• Special schools (including maintained Special Schools, which are for the most part boarding placements but some are day placements, and other LA schools which are mostly day placements but a few are residential.)

10. The term ‘out of county’ or ‘external’ placement refers to placements for children that are commissioned rather than directly delivered by Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC). They may include independent schools, private foster carers and other authorities. They may be within Buckinghamshire or in another county. External placements are used when the Council’s internal provision cannot meet the specific needs of a child.

11. Children are placed according to the best match for their needs, including factors of age, gender, faith, ethnicity and disability. In Buckinghamshire, there are low rates of placements of looked after children compared with our statistical neighbours, and high numbers of placements for Special Educational Needs (SEN). Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups are over-represented in looked after children figures.¹ (29% of children looked after at 31st January are from BME backgrounds²)

How placements are funded

12. Funding is often through a mix of:
• Dedicated School Grant (DSG) – this is ring-fenced and funds SEN provision including special schools, placements and residential placements

¹ Procurement Strategy for External Placements of Children 2009 - 2012
² CLA at 31st Jan 01.02.10v3
- Safeguarding – Local Authority-funded, not ring-fenced and includes safeguarding placements
- National Health Service – where a clear health need is assessed, although there is currently no agreement regarding the sharing of funding for identified mental and emotional health issues.

| Table 1: Costs paid by Safeguarding in respect of external placements (£’000s) |
|---------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
|                                 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | Total |
| Looked after children           | £5,733  | £6,220  | £7,683  | £19,636 |
| SEN-Independent schools         | £10,295 | £19,483 | £11,352 | £32,130 |
| Total                           | £16,028 | £25,703 | £19,035 | £51,766 |

13. There is a small contingency of £500k, which has already been applied against the overspend. The costs of out of county residential placements can range from £2,400 to £5,400 per week, the majority of which are funded through the local authority and dedicated schools grant. The Safeguarding service is currently looking at ways to share some of the placement costs with the PCT, where a clear health need has been identified.

14. Members were provided with expenditure figures comparing out of county and internal placements for looked after children (Appendix 1) but there is some difficulty in comparing like with like. Given the differences in the way local authorities and independent providers are set up, it is difficult to produce overheads on the same basis. A similar issue applies to the costs of capital.

15. Members were told that it will be possible to use the Loughborough cost calculator, which is purpose-designed software that currently calculates the costs of social care processes and placements for looked after children, to determine the full costs of a child entering care with the local authority and their stay in care. This will provide useful benchmarking figures and facilitate comparisons between the relative values of different types of care.

**Procurement**

16. Historically, ‘the procurement of placements for vulnerable children has been undertaken by a range of staff with varying degrees of knowledge about the purchasing of placements.’ In the last three years, the purchasing of external placements has been managed centrally by the Access to Resources Team.

17. Members learned that the Access to Resources Team, set up in November 2007, provides a single access point to provision for all children and young people whose specific needs cannot be supported within current BCC resources. The team’s role is to:
   - Advise, commission and monitor placements
   - research new out of county placements
   - negotiate and develop the use of National Contracts
   - ensure best practice between internal and external providers
   - work regionally and cross-regionally
   - provide quality data relating to external placements.

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3 Procurement Strategy for External Placements of Children 2009 - 2012
18. Since 2007, considerable savings towards the costs of both education-led and safeguarding-led placements have been made. £500k of savings were made in the first year, and £450k per year after that, through ensuring all external providers the Council uses are on the approved providers list, pre-placement contracts are in place and placement fees have been re-negotiated.

19. Members were keen to know how the quality of care in external placements is monitored. Checks are carried out annually by the Council, along with spot checks (See Appendix 2). In addition, an Independent Reviewing Officer visits the homes twice a year to talk to the children. If any issues are highlighted during the monitoring, these are explored further. However, regional monitoring is always an issue and training has been provided to ensure that there is a standard approach.

20. The Council is a member of the Children's Cross Regional Arrangement Group (CCRAG) & Pan London / London Care Placements. These groups enable the Council to benefit from lower negotiated fees from external children's residential, fostering and education providers and enable sharing of the work load of contract and quality monitoring of all of the external providers on the approved lists. A membership list is attached (Appendix 3).

21. The Council is working with five other local authorities, namely Oxfordshire, Milton Keynes, Slough, Reading and Hertfordshire, to jointly commission local residential placements for children with highly specialised education, care and other support needs. 30 residential placements are to be commissioned jointly, five of these being for Buckinghamshire children, leading to not only savings but children placed locally. The block price will be £3000 per week per child, which is estimated to be £500 per week cheaper than the current average. It is difficult at this stage to predict accurately, but it is thought that when the full quota of beds is available, the full year savings based against the average cost would be £130k. The contract is for a minimum of five years, with a possible extension for five more. Under the contract, a new special school is to be provided (location not yet clear) offering day pupil places for initially 24 pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, rising to 34.

22. Members learned that none of the residential respite units for children with disabilities are being used fully – out of 30 beds available, only 20 are used at any one time. Further savings of £217k have been identified in the Medium Term Plan through a tendering process which will allow work to be carried out on a more efficient basis.

23. The Special School Re-provisioning Programme aims to address in-house shortages of different types of SEN provision, including the growing need for Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD) provision and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) provision. The Council currently maintains 2800 statements of SEN. Of these 178 children are placed externally in independent or non-maintained schools. A further 92 pupils are placed in other local authority Special Schools. The programme is seeking to align some of the current special school provision with forecast need. A consultation is due to take place in June and July 2010.

**Key challenges**

24. Members learned that the key challenge for children with special educational needs, requiring residential provision as an aspect of their education provision, is availability of residential places in Buckinghamshire schools. The Special School re-provisioning programme aims to address this issue.
25. Members looked in more detail at the key challenges with respect to children in local authority care. These are:
   - An overall increase in demand
   - An overall increase in numbers of children coming into care
   - Shortage of suitable foster placements
   - A shortage of social workers
   - Increased costs and delays in court processes and children leaving care at a slower rate
   - Limited resources for early intervention with respect to families in crisis, particularly for families with older children
   - New sufficiency duty in the Children and Young People Act 2008 requiring children to be placed locally
   - An increase in unaccompanied asylum seekers.

Increase in demand for out of county placements for children who are in care

26. There are a number of reasons as to why there is an increase in demand for out of county placements. These include increased numbers of children in care, a shortage of in-house foster placements and an increase in certain types of special needs which the Council currently does not have provision for.

27. Many authorities across the country are experiencing a rise in demand for services and predicting further increases in out of county placements. A benchmarking exercise with comparator and neighbouring authorities shows some consistency in increases in demand for out of authority placements costs with rises from between 11% - 36%, with Buckinghamshire at 24%.

28. Some of the challenges associated with long distance placements are:
   - The further away from home, the greater the risks to the quality of care as social workers monitor less frequently. However, joint commissioning arrangement with local authorities and partners should help with long distance placement monitoring arrangements.
   - The provision of contact time with family members, which is a statutory duty for the local authority set by the court during care proceedings, is more complex and costly.
   - Links with family, social networks and, for example, health services can be broken
   - The new Sufficiency Duty for Looked After Children, which comes into force in April 2010, requires local authorities to secure, as far as practicable, placements for children that are within the local authority’s area. This requirement will clearly raise challenges for the Council with respect to commissioning.

29. Members requested details of costs incurred by social workers when carrying out long distance placement monitoring and family contact visits. However detailed work on this is not yet complete and accurate figures could not be given at this stage.

Overall increase in numbers of children coming into care

30. Cafcass, the organisation that represents children’s interests in the family courts, released data in January 2010, showing that nationally the rate of increase of care demand is stabilizing at a new higher level following the publicity around the Baby Peter case in November 2008. It is acknowledged that this places massive pressure on all agencies working in the child protection system.

31. Members learned that demand across all services in Safeguarding has increased by between 30 - 47% since April 2008, with the greatest rate of increase being between April and August 2009. Possible reasons identified for this are the concerns raised
through the Baby Peter case, the economic downturn leading to increasing pressure in families, improvements in identifying children at risk and increased numbers of asylum seekers.

**Placement data**

- At the time of the review, there are 360 Looked After Children (LAC) in Buckinghamshire *
- Provision by the Council or families themselves account for 57% of all placements
- 133 placements (37%) are outside of Buckinghamshire and of these 110 (83%) are provided by the private or voluntary sector
- Of the 112 placements that are more than 20 miles from the child’s home, 21 (19%) are within Buckinghamshire
- Of the remaining 91 however, 53 are more than 50 miles from the child’s home
- 63 children are placed with out of county foster carers
- 45 looked after children are in out of county residential placements/ special schools, i.e. 52 week care.
- Four placements are in mother and baby units (where assessment is needed around the parenting capacity of the mother). The cost of these placements start from £1300 per week and a 12 - week placement in the unit could cost £40,000).

There are currently no placements abroad.

*Post-review note: As of 31 March 2010, there were 347 children in the care of Buckinghamshire County Council*

32. The decision to take a child into care is never taken lightly. When they come into care, children will be placed either within their own family circles, with the Council’s in-house fostering services or with independent fostering agencies, or in residential homes – either the Council’s Children’s Homes or an independent provider.

33. Members learned that every effort is made to keep the children at the same school and only in exceptional circumstances are they placed in care further than 20 miles of their home address. Once in care, a Looked After Children review is held after 28 days, 3 months and 6 months, by an Independent Reviewing Officer. Funding for the placement is monitored at monthly meetings.

34. Members acknowledge that the Council offers a good quality of residential care. As part of their evidence gathering, members visited both the Council’s Children’s Homes. They learned that although recruitment of staff can be a struggle, both homes have good staff retention. One offers a stable placement for a maximum of six young people aged 10 – 18 years. The second can house up to seven young people between the ages of 13 -16, for a period of 12 weeks, during which time they are assessed for a placement. An eighth bed is for 72-hour emergency placements, including referrals from the Police. There are currently six young people in the home, of whom five have returned for reassessment following a placement breakdown. The Statement of Purpose for the Home is to be reviewed over the coming year.

**Shortage of suitable foster placements**

35. A lack of suitable in-house foster placements has led to more children needing to be placed in more expensive out of county foster placements. Members learned that the rate of retirement of foster carers in Buckinghamshire has not yet been matched with the...
rate of recruitment. There are shortages of carers for some specific groups e.g. those willing to foster teenagers and Black and Minority Ethnic foster carers. Currently there is a 4.2% conversion rate from initial enquiries to new fostering placements (National conversation rate is 5%).

36. The Family Placement Recruitment Team offers a countywide service, raising awareness and marketing across all placement services. To increase the number of initial enquiries which translate into assessments, there has been a considerable change in the way recruitment takes place since November 2009. It is now based on ‘Invest to Save’ and is more proactive, with expressions of interest from the public followed up within a week. The Team aims to significantly increase the number of in-house foster carers, with a target to recruit 60 new households by the end of 2012. If these targets are achieved, there is the potential to have fewer children placed in external placements, leading to considerable financial savings.

37. Members have anecdotal evidence of cases where potentially suitable foster carers are prevented from fostering due to their accommodation. Members suggest that further work could be undertaken to find out whether partnership working with housing trusts might help to resolve issues of this kind if and when they arise.

38. In order to save costs, there is agreement to explore what can be delivered in partnership with other authorities and with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). The IFAs have a higher conversion rate of those expressing an interest in caring to those becoming foster carers.

39. It is important that the Council can compete with IFAs in terms of financial and practical support and on-going training. The Council pays well compared to other local authorities but not compared with private agencies.

40. Members support the efforts of the Council to look at ways to carry out aspects of fostering provision in partnership with other local authorities, for example, marketing, training of applicants, support of carers, particularly for those working with more challenging young people, and the recruitment of new placements. All authorities involved have the same issues in terms of recruitment, expertise and panels. There is the potential to reduce overheads and delays by working on these areas regionally.

41. Members discussed the need for the corporate parenting responsibility to be considered as a council-wide concern, not only by all elected members but by all service areas. There are examples in other authorities, such as South Tyneside, where service areas have identified where they can promote the role of corporate parent within their own service. Examples include service areas offering workshops to looked after children on interview skills, advice to foster carers on their finances and apprenticeship schemes. By strengthening the role of members and officers in the corporate parenting responsibility, awareness could be raised around what to do in the event of coming across a child who is possibly at risk.

**Recommendation 1**

The Council strengthens the links between each service and the contribution they can make to the role of corporate parenting, as demonstrated in other authorities such as South Tyneside.
Shortage of social workers

42. A challenge for the service is recruiting and retaining qualified social workers. There are insufficient numbers of permanent social workers in post and vacancies are filled by agency staff. Some of the reasons for this include:
   • a general skills shortage in social care and social work, which is reflected nationally
   • locum agencies offering more money than the council at a local level
   • a lack of affordable housing

43. The weekly cost of a permanent social worker is £806 compared to the weekly cost of agency staff, which is £1,295. It is clearly in the Council’s interest to find ways to increase the numbers of permanent social workers. A comparison was carried out in January 2010 on social worker salaries, with seven neighbouring authorities. Against the top of the pay scale, the Council was the highest paying council. A comparison of non-monetary benefits showed that the benefits on offer were similar. A review is currently being undertaken to assess where current employees have been appointed to on the pay scale, for retention purposes.

44. The turnover of agency staff has contributed to drift and delay in progressing cases, resulting in only half as many looked after children leaving the system this year as in the same time last year. Members learned that of 72 agency staff employed by Children's Services during 2009/10, 39 left with an average of 11.5 weeks employment. This is close to the 3 month contract that agency staff are usually given on commencement with the Council. The remaining 33 agency staff are still employed, and their average length of employment is 31 weeks. Ten locum workers have transferred to being permanent employees. Whilst the number of locum workers employees is not ideal, and reflects the high demand low supply market place for permanent Social Workers, the figures above are a positive reflection of the support and collaboration the Council has with locum workers, and provide a good level of consistency for children and their families.

45. Members were told of the excessive administrative workload for social workers. They were pleased to learn that, through the transformation programme, work is being carried out to examine whether there are tasks which could be allocated elsewhere. This will aim to maximise the time that social workers spend with children.

46. Members learned that a number of panels are involved in joint placement decisions with the entire process in some cases lasting a number of weeks. Members are concerned that the number of panels a child has to go through is not only potentially damaging and time-consuming for the child, but resource intensive for the Authority. However, work has just been completed on rationalising the panel system and changes will take place after September, resulting in a reduction in the number of panels from 18 to six.

Increased costs and delays in court processes

47. The Legal and Democratic Childcare section provides a professional legal service to the Director of Children's Services for the Council under a Service Level Agreement covering all areas of social services work and, in particular, children's services.

48. Members learned that there is currently a £750K overspend of safeguarding legal costs, which include the in-house service and barrister costs, due to:
   • An increase in the number of cases
   • An increase in the complexity of cases
   • Lengthy court proceedings and court delays
   • An increase in the number of high court cases, requiring the additional cost of barristers
• An overall increase in legal proceedings.

49. Court costs themselves have increased dramatically since 2008. Costs for care proceedings have increased from £400 to as much as £5000 per application. Members learned that initially the Council received around £200K to cover the increase. An Emergency protection order application, previously free of charge, now costs £150. However, members were told that court fees are expected to be reduced from April 2011.

Table 2 Legal costs over the past three years (including Legal Service Level Agreement, court fees and expert witnesses)

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50. Members considered that it would be beneficial for a bench marking exercise with other authorities, on processes and costs, to be carried out as a comparison of best value.

51. Although the team work on a ‘No Delay’ principle, members heard that delays in the legal system were adding to increased costs in the safeguarding division.

52. Members learned of the negative impact delays can have on the children, particularly for babies, for those aged 3 – 5 years and critically for those aged 6 – 7 years. Babies become attached to their foster carers, and the older the child is, the harder it is to find an adopter, and there is a greater risk of the adoption breaking down.

53. Members were told that most delays were down to:
   • An increase in cases where immigration status is an issue
   • Police involvement in cases, such as non-accidental injury or home alone, which can complicate and delay court proceedings
   • Almost all cases are contested by parents
   • Poor/ non-attendance of family
   • Late filing and the failure to get necessary documentation, for example, up-to-date medicals and neo-natal records, to the adoption panel on time (3-5 cases a year are adjourned).

54. To help mitigate delays, members heard that there is a need to build in more critical challenge in the process of moving the children through the care process, including greater management accountability around decisions and budgets. A review is currently taking place to look at where the blockages are occurring in the system and how they can be sorted. If these blockages are minimised then there will be less need for out of county placements.

55. Members learned that late filing can be caused by social workers with large caseloads and inexperience of the process and report writing. If one delay occurs, the whole process can be impacted on and lengthy delays result. If the delay is caused by the Council, the Court can threaten a costs order. To prevent delays, it is crucial that parallel planning of the various processes takes place.

56. Having heard of the impact that delays in one area of the chain can potentially have on the entire process, members discussed the benefits of putting in place a system where one person, with sufficient experience and authority, would oversee the legal process for an individual case, prior to going through the courts, to ensure for example that all the links are in place and timelines for each stage in the process are met.
57. Members questioned access to training for social workers on the legal processes, including report writing. Legal Services provide mandatory training for social workers on a six monthly basis, including report writing, Data Protection and the Public Law Outline. Mock hearings are also held in the Magistrates’ Court to give social workers and Family Centre workers an opportunity to practise giving evidence. However, having heard earlier that court delays can be caused by the late filing of reports, it would be useful to review the current training offer for appropriateness, level, take up and impact.

58. Members were keen to hear of the possibility of the parties concerned getting together, prior to proceedings, to air and potentially find solutions to some of the issues that may hold up cases in the courts. Here at the Council, they are looking at how to reduce the costs of independent experts. Members were told of the national move to use independent experts less and instead to use specialist intervention teams. Some of the pre-proceedings work is carried out leading to cost savings and potentially a speedier process. Members were told that this has been implemented in Oxfordshire. However, where this process is implemented, careful checks need to be carried out to ensure that the courts support it and would not throw evidence out at the last minute, leading to further delays.

59. Members have concerns about needs of vulnerable children being identified early enough. Resource intensive as it is, the importance of early intervention cannot be overstated, potentially preventing significant challenges later on. However, members accept that it is difficult to show causal link and therefore make an investment which isn’t statutory.

60. Members learned that currently there are good preventative services in place for children under 5, such as Children’s Centres and family support centres. ‘Team around the Child’ brings together young people, parents and practitioners, regardless of agency boundaries, to intervene early in order to prevent or delay the need to involve Social Care. Appropriate support can be set up which may help to resolve difficulties in the family.

61. Members acknowledged the key role of nursery provision and schools in the identification of vulnerable children, particularly through monitoring of exclusion, absence and attendance. They have learned that much work is being carried out with all
Early Education Funded providers around their roles and responsibilities in terms of identification and support for vulnerable children. This includes safeguarding work, work to support additional educational needs and an annual training programme.

62. However, members were told that there needs to be more provision for families, with children over the age of five, on the edge of care. These could include community-based support packages. Any such package would need to be multi-agency, including representation from Connexions, CAMHS, Youth Services, the Districts and the Voluntary and Community Sector. This type of early intervention could turn things around for a family on the edge of care.

63. One example of an authority using partnerships to intervene early and reduce costs is Swindon Borough Council. Its research found that too much support can lead to people being trapped in deprivation and may not necessarily improve their life chances. Funding was received from the Strategic Health Authority (SHA) for a project which focuses on intervening with ‘high cost’ families and exploring their problems from a behavioural viewpoint. The project is called ‘Family Life’ and involves the use of specially trained teams consisting of key personnel such as police and social workers. It is supported through neighbourhood engagement initiatives with partners and multi-agency teams working at the local level.

64. The Family Life project’s work with three families has so far made savings in excess of the original funding (over £250k). Swindon is of the view that even when the team is removed, costs can be kept at around £20k.

Recommendation 5
The Service continues to explore ways with partners to offer increased support to families on the edge of care, through multi-agency resourced community initiatives and based on best practice examples.

Increase in unaccompanied asylum seekers

65. The Council has a statutory duty to assist asylum seekers until the age of 18 and takes this responsibility very seriously. Members were told that unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Young People have increased from 16 in 2008 to 30 to date. The cases are often complex, costing the authority around £750K per annum total, which may include translation and interpreter services. Members questioned the actual costs for translation services but a breakdown of services for asylum and non asylum seekers cannot be provided.

66. The Council does however receive some reimbursement via the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children’s Grant, for costs incurred in supporting and caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Through the Grant, the Council can be reimbursed up to £750 per week for children under the age of 16 and £340 for 16/17 year olds. This amounted to a reimbursement of 77% of the total costs incurred during 2008/09, resulting in a shortfall for the authority of £145k. This year’s final income figures are expecting a shortfall of approximately £130k.

Future planning

67. The forecast is for fewer children needing to come into care over the next 20 years, given the impact of early intervention through, for example, Children’s Centres. However the children coming in are likely to have more complex needs and mainstream foster parents may not have the skills to support these children. Regional collaboration

6 CLA Summary 2005_10_Q4v1
in the provision of both specialist services, for example, therapeutic or psychological services and residential child care may address the provision of low-volume, highly specialist services.

68. Historically, boarding provision in special schools in Buckinghamshire was set up to meet education not social needs. Members were told that current provision is disjointed and needs to be aligned to better meet forecast need. The Council is part of Boarding Pathfinder which places young people on the edge of care in boarding. This scheme has not however been successful nationally and there are no placements here in Buckinghamshire.

69. This area may benefit from further review. For example, members learned that it may be more cost-effective to have extended day provision. There needs to be a clearer understanding of who needs to be in boarding provision and how social care needs are taken into account.

Conclusion

70. During the course of this review, members learned that the Council is working hard, through a range of methods and joint work, to reduce pressures on both budget and resources in what is a complex, demand-led service area. Members were unable to identify potential cost-cutting initiatives, although their recommendations aim to result in improved practice and in many cases lower costs. It is crucial that the services and staff involved continue to embrace different and imaginative ways of working, including jointly with partnerships and other authorities around commissioning. Finally, members acknowledge the importance of placements offering the greatest value for money whilst meeting the child’s assessed need.
Acknowledgements
Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commissioning Committee would like to thank the following members and officers for their contribution to the review:

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Yvonne Gibson, Principal Solicitor for Childcare, Childcare Legal Team
Louise Goll, Divisional Director, Achievement and Learning
Mike Hart, Business Partners - Children & Young People, Finance Department
Lin Hazell, Cabinet Member for Safeguarding – Children and Young People
David Humphreys, Practice Manager, Business Support, Legal and Democratic Services
Shula Jackson, Children’s Home
Anne Jeffries, Operations Manager, Early Years & Childcare Service
Diana Large, Divisional Manager, Permanency and Placements
Marian Millward, Residential Services Manager, Permanency and Placements
Julie Montigue, Development Manager, Prevention and Children’s Fund Services
Chris Munday, Divisional Director, Commissioning and Business Improvement
Hayley Norman-Thorpe, Acting Group Solicitor - Childcare
Ruth Okezie, Head of Children’s Home

Desktop research
Wiltshire CC
Swindon BC
South Tyneside MBC
Appendix 1 Comparison of expenditure of Out of County Provision with Internal Provision 2007/08 to 2009/10

1. Costs of out of county fostering:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>£1,929k 45</td>
<td>£42,867</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>£2,486k 63</td>
<td>£39,460</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>£2,780k 70</td>
<td>£39,714</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Costs of residential (including disability) out of county placements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>£3,535k 38</td>
<td>£93,026</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>£3,409k 40</td>
<td>£85,225</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>£4,573k 44</td>
<td>£103,931</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Costs of internal fostering:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>£2,443k 103</td>
<td>£23,718</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>£2,700k 105</td>
<td>£25,714</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>£2,153k 97</td>
<td>£22,196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Costs of internal Children’s Homes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>£1,226k 14</td>
<td>£87,571</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>£1,364k 12</td>
<td>£113,667</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>£1,249k 13</td>
<td>£96,077</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*2009/10 figures are provisional pending validation of the end of year return to the DCSF.

5. Costs for unaccompanied asylum seekers:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Avg. no. of children</th>
<th>Avg. cost per child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>£217,126 15</td>
<td>£14,475</td>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>£596,612 33</td>
<td>£18,079</td>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>£651,135 33</td>
<td>£19,731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CLA at 31st Jan 01.02.10v3
## Appendix 2 - Monitoring of placements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Establishment</th>
<th>Regulation/Standard</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Children’s Homes</td>
<td>Regulation 33 visit by LA Manager</td>
<td>Regulation 33 visits are carried out by someone appointed by the provider, who is not directly concerned with the management of the home, take place at least once a month and may be unannounced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private, Voluntary and Independent Children’s Homes</td>
<td>Regulation 33 visit by owner</td>
<td>The LA will monitor these placements when children are placed or through regional contracts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bucks Residential Special Schools</td>
<td>Standard 33 visit by LA</td>
<td>Standard 33 visits are the education equivalent of regulation 33 visits, but are conducted in relation to the residential care arrangements in residential schools. It is not a requirement for the LA to undertake this role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential Special Schools</td>
<td>Standard 33 visit by Governor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Appendix 3 – Membership of the Children’s Cross Regional Arrangement Group (CCRAG) & Pan London / London Care Placements

**Regions:**
East, East Midlands, South East and South West

**Authorities include:**
Bath & NE Somerset, Bedfordshire, Bournemouth, Bracknell Forest, Brighton and Hove, Bristol, Buckinghamshire, Cambridgeshire, Derby City, Derbyshire, Dorset, East Sussex, Essex, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Hertfordshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Leicester City, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Luton, Medway, Milton Keynes, Norfolk, North Somerset, Northamptonshire, Nottingham City, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Peterborough, Portsmouth, Poole, Reading, Rutland, Slough, South Gloucestershire, Southampton, Southend, Suffolk, Surrey, Swindon, Thurrock, West Berkshire, West Sussex, Wiltshire, Windsor, Wokingham