

#### **S4. SOCIAL WORK CHILDREN & FAMILIES UPDATED BUDGET POSITION**

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an updated budget position for Children and Families Social Work. The report included information on budget expenditure, contextual information, actions commenced in 2015/16 to manage the budget, and actions planned for 2016/17 to manage the budget. Robert Naylor provided an overview of the report.

Members asked which actions the Service had taken to reduce the number of children and young people in residential care. Robert Naylor stated that a number of young people had left their residential placements having turned 18, while the Service had identified alternative placements for some younger children. In multi-agency meetings the Service was arguing strongly that there could be greater use of internal provision rather than external residential placements. Sara Lacey stated that there were focussed exit plans to get young people home with support packages rather than having them stay in residential placements.

Robert Naylor stated that he had previously met with the Reporter on the types of decisions being made by children's hearings. In particular he had focussed on instances where decisions did not match the recommendations from the Service. He advised the Reporter that Falkirk had appropriate alternative provision available to residential placement. He also attended a panel members training session. Panel members had commented that it was difficult to reach a decision when the child was not present and they had been advised as to why this was not always appropriate.

Members then discussed kinship care and payments to kinship carers. Sara Lacey stated that more information on payments would be publicised once the national guidance was clarified. She confirmed that the possibility of kinship care for a young person was made available to children's hearings. Further she stated that there were over 50 young people in kinship care. Robert Naylor stated that extra funding in this area would help with overall costs as it was another option of provision that avoided the use of external providers.

The committee asked about the typical length of stay in a secure unit. Sara Lacey stated that it would not be years, just for the required period of time to keep the young person safe if they posed a significant risk to themselves and/or others. The Service desired to have young people return to a community or alternative setting.

Members discussed a number of points including the appropriateness of the budget, whether the reduction in the number of children accommodated was sustainable, and the rates paid to foster carers compared to other areas. Sara Lacey stated that there was some variance to the costs in this area but that they were flattening out. Additional financial stability had been achieved through the contract negotiated with Care Visions and Focus Towards Successful Care. These contracted beds were similar to those available internally. In terms of the drop in the number of children accommodated, she

stated that the figure was open to variance but should be relatively stable. Robert Naylor stated that the Service had sought to identify why in Falkirk there was a higher proportion of looked after children in residential school placements. Team Managers had been challenged to provide alternatives in their recommendations to children's hearings.

The committee asked about the number of looked after children who had mental health issues or other additional support needs. Sara Lacey commented that looked after young people had often been through very traumatic early life experiences which could lead to significant mental health issues. The Looked After Children Psychologist made referrals to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). She stated that there were good links with Adult Services Social Work to enable a smooth transition process.

The committee asked about the pilot of Self-Directed Support (SDS). Sara Lacey stated that this was an innovative way to provide support and that the developments nationally had been slower in relation to children and young people than with adult care. The Service would emphasise the opportunities of SDS, which included using resources creatively. In response to a question on kinship carers access to SDS, Sara Lacey confirmed that, as SDS related to the child, a kinship carer could use this approach.

Members asked why there would be an average 2.6% increase in the costs of secure placements in 2016/17. Sara Lacey stated that Scotland Excel operated a 3-4 year national contract within which suppliers could renegotiate in line with reasonable increases.

The committee asked for information on local population demographics and if they would affect social work spending. Robert Naylor stated that locally there had been a higher birth rate than that at a national level. The bulge resulting from this was about to pass through the high schools. More children were presenting with need, for example with autistic spectrum disorders.

The committee asked why £230,000 of £354,000 additional funding received for implementation of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 was not utilised. Robert Naylor advised that the need for guidance on kinship carer payments and delayed uptake in early years provision to two year olds had caused this underspend.

Members sought further information on the integration of the Education Family Support Service and the Social Work Intensive Family Support Service. Robert Naylor stated that each team had between 8 and 10 FTE posts and performed slightly different functions. The Education team had been more focussed on outreach to young people at risk of needing intervention from social work services. The Social Work team had been more involved with families who were involved in child protection or looked after child systems. He noted that external organisations also provided family support services. The funding to external organisations had been reviewed to identify best

practice; efficiencies were anticipated in this area. He advised that additional spending in family support services should lead to a reduction in spending on looked after children but that this was not an exact science.

### **Decision**

#### **The committee:-**

- (1) noted the progress in achieving a significant reduction in the overspend outturn for 2015/16;**
- (2) noted the proposals for ongoing strategies for managing the 2016/17 budget, and**
- (3) requested a further update report to a future meeting of the committee.**