

S32. Social Work Children & Families Budget Update

The committee considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on the social work children & families budget position. For 2016/17 the Service projected an overspend of £0.835m. The projected overspend related to increased numbers of children who required to be looked after away from home. It was not always possible to use the least expensive placements and any placement was made on the basis of a robust multi-agency assessment. The report provided information on the impact of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 which extended continuing care to 21 years old and aftercare support to 26 years old, as well as increasing responsibilities to kinship carers. A number of actions had been taken, or were planned, to manage the budget position. These included increased local provision of contract beds, foster carer recruitment drives and an integrated family support service. Kathy McCarroll provided an overview of the report.

The committee sought an update in relation to unaccompanied asylum seeking children. Kathy McCarroll stated that there were three different groups of children involved. Children affected by the closure of the Calais camp, children the Home Office were looking to place currently resident in Kent, and children trying to trace relatives already resident in the UK. Although Falkirk Council had agreed to place one unaccompanied asylum seeking child it was not possible to ring fence a placement for this purpose. The Service had received one request to take a child but at that time there had been no suitable placement available. Children from the Calais camp had successfully been placed in both Edinburgh and Glasgow. The Scottish Government was due to meet with the Home Office to discuss the meeting of costs in the voluntary transfer scheme. In Scotland placements could extend to 21 and further support to 26. The Scottish Government's advice was that Councils should not currently sign up to the voluntary transfer scheme.

There was further discussion regarding the availability of placements and recruitment of foster carers specifically for asylum seeking children. Kathy McCarroll stated that external providers tended to have difficulty responding to 'crisis placements' and preferred planned placements. In the case of the unaccompanied asylum seeking child the Service had received a phone call to make a placement the same day. The Service had started to look at recruiting specifically for this circumstance but as there was currently only one placement required for one child the action needed to be proportionate. Glasgow and Edinburgh Councils had advertised specifically for carers to take asylum seeking children and were inundated with enquiries. Locally the Service had approach faith groups to see if any of their members could assist. In terms of wider foster carer recruitment the Service was exploring the use of digital marketing which had proved successful in other areas.

Members asked if there were particular challenges to the Service relating to young people who were transitioning to adult services. David Mackay stated that there could be challenges with young people around 15 and 16 years old. There were a number of alternative programmes in schools including the aspiring learning spaces. He highlighted that referrals to the Mariner Service for behaviour issues had remained fairly steady. Kathy McCarroll advised that

a lot of work had been carried out on transitions into adult services and that the protocol between children's and adult's social work was being refreshed. The Service was working to identify, by age 14, those young people who would likely need continued support in an adult setting.

The committee requested an age breakdown of the 26 young people in long-term external foster placements who the Council currently held parental rights and responsibilities for in order to see the likely future trend of spend. Kathy McCarroll stated that this would be provided after the meeting.

Decision

The committee noted the:-

- (1) progress to date in reducing the Social Work Children & Families overspend, and**
- (2) development of a 3 year strategy to reduce spend further and generate efficiency savings from 2018/19 onwards.**