

## Children's Social Care Visits Report – progress on recommendations

### Report of the Director of Children and Young People's Futures

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Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

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#### **1) Recommendation**

1.1 That the Committee be asked to:

(a) note the contents of this report

#### **2) Background / Introduction**

2.1 Members of Scrutiny undertook several visits to Children's Social Care Services during 2023. Arising out of those visits were a series of recommendations that were reported to Cabinet in November 2023. This report provides an update on the response of the service in relation to those recommendations.

#### **3) Progress on recommendations**

3.1 The need to continue to recruit permanent staff across services.

3.1.1 The Recruitment & Retention strategy for Children's Services is final and signed off. We have appointed a Recruitment and Retention Manager to drive forward the priorities within the strategy which are in progress and moving forward. Six of the 2023 cohort of international Children's Social Workers have commenced employment with a further colleague joining in April 2024. The planning for the 2024 international cohort is about to commence. There is an active targeted and focussed "temp to perm" conversion project currently in progress where meetings with agency workers are proceeding to offer them permanent roles with three colleagues agreeing terms and start dates of March/April 2024. Seventeen meetings have taken place to date with a further 24 currently scheduled along with four second stage calls where agency colleagues have requested an additional meeting to further discuss employment opportunities. We are working in collaboration with the regional Southwest Councils to implement a pay cap for the Children's agency workforce. The regional pay cap will be implemented by the summer of 2024.

3.1.2 We are benchmarking current salaries and terms and conditions against those of other Local Authorities and external providers for Children & Adults Social Care. We are collaborating with our advertising agency to develop an Employer Value Proposition and launch a fresh look and feel Employer Brand. The recruitment brand

for social work is also being delivered as part of this project. We are reviewing our local offer for care experienced leavers and how we can develop this into a guarantee into employment. Planning has commenced for a Health & Social Care recruitment event at Devon County Show. We have set up a Google Ad account to improve our presence on YouTube. This contributes to sharing what it is like to work for Devon and the impact this can have on your community and environment around us. An internal audit has commenced on attraction, safer recruitment, and retention of registered professionals across the Children's & Adult's Service.

3.1.3 From December 2023 to January 2024 there was an increase in the number of permanent social work employees by 7.5%.

3.2 Support from staff for increasing the Council's in house provision of accommodation for children in our care.

3.2.1 There are several developments currently in progress:

- Barnes – Develop the building to accommodate 2-4 children, currently funded for two children. Construction works were completed in mid-February 2024 with a preliminary visit from Ofsted on the 28th February to confirm that they are satisfied with the redesign. One young person has been identified to move into the new building in March 2024.
- Welland House – The building is being developed to accommodate two children. The construction work is under way with a current delay of around 11 weeks and should be finished mid-June 2024. We will then need an Ofsted visit to sign off the new developments. During April / May we will start to match children coming into the new section of the building.
- Robins – This children's home was insourced on the 1st November 2023 at short notice. We are currently recruiting new staff who are starting to join us during March, with more recruitment currently under way. Significant construction work required to make the building compliant and also homely going forward. Subject to Cabinet approval in March 2024, it is planned that we continue to provide this service. We aim to register with Ofsted in March 2024 when the new manager starts with us.
- Lyric House – Opened three weeks ago as an unregulated provision as a step down from secure accommodation for one young person. If the building is made permanently available to Children's Services, then it would be registered with Ofsted.
- Link Centre – The plan is to open a three bedroom children's home; this is behind schedule due to a delay identifying suitable move on accommodation for the existing resident. Until the building is vacated, we are unable to commence the refurbishment of the building which is expected to take up to a year.

- 3.2.2 Business cases are being developed with a view to utilising other, existing council premises to provide more children's home places of accommodation for care experienced people.
- 3.3 Support from staff in their feedback to work with District Councils and make care leavers exempt from council tax across Devon.
  - 3.3.1 All of the District Councils have agreed in principle to exempt care experienced people from council tax. Details of the care experienced people living in each area has been shared with the District Councils. All but one council has now implemented the council tax exemption with the final District Council expected to do so from April 2024.
- 3.4 Support from staff in their feedback to work with District Councils and Devon Home Choice to ensure care leavers are automatically placed in B and B for priority of accommodation.
  - 3.4.1 The staff in the care leavers team have highlighted the challenges around this issue to the leadership team and this is part of a significant workstream of the corporate parenting sub-group, Care for Me, along with the monthly meeting with District Chief Executives, Housing for Care Leavers. There is further work to be undertaken so that we have an agreed approach across the districts, however, there is the commitment to work in collaboration to achieve automatic B and B award once the care leaver is tenancy ready.
  - 3.4.2 The sub-group are focussing on ensuring that care leavers are receiving the right support to help them become tenancy ready, this work is through a partnership approach with children, mental health, adult facing services and housing.
  - 3.4.3 Further work is being undertaken to review rent affordability for young adults, so that there is choice and incentivisation to be able to work and afford to rent/purchase their own property.
  - 3.4.4 A joint training event took place in January 2024 with Children Social Care and District Housing Officers to develop cohesive practice that is trauma informed and to support the relational practice between the services which focus on improving outcomes for our care experienced young people.
- 3.5 Support from staff to the provision of in-house mental health services due to rise in need and to ensure timely access to mental health professionals for children and young people.
  - 3.5.1 The Therapeutic Well-Being Service has been a successful development within Children's Services. Through a renegotiation of the existing funding agreement with ICB, it is planned to extend and develop that service in 2024.
- 3.6 Support amongst staff for Councillor Rob Hannaford's motion to treat care experienced young people as a protected characteristic.

- 3.6.1 It was agreed at a meeting of the full council in the autumn of 2023 that care experience would be treated as a protected characteristic in Devon.
- 3.7 Recognising the important work of Bridges, Cabinet's continued support for the service and consideration of expanding the service to support more families.
- 3.7.1 Bridges continues to be well resourced in relation to other parts of the social care system. Rather than expand its resource base as a 'specialist' service, the Early Help and Partnerships management team are now working far more as a unit, meaning that the approach and resources of Bridges are being shared out more widely into families where they may not currently be at 'edge of care' but would likely take that trajectory without earlier intervention. In line with this, the monthly Continuing Professional Development sessions within Bridges are now open to all Children Social Care staff, not just qualified social workers.
- 3.7.2 More widely within Early Help Services, the transfer of 29 staff from Action for Children to the Council in January 2024 has significantly increased the resources available for targeted early help services. Onboarding has been successfully completed, with a good and positive culture building. There is an issue over children and families these workers brought over with them, in terms of whether a FIT response is required; all these families are being managerially reviewed to ensure appropriate service where necessary, which may be within the wider partnership or community.
- 3.7.3 Action for Children will continue to provide early help services in Devon during the course of 2024/25 with a revised service specification that will be part of the transition to the establishment of Family Hubs.

#### **4) Options / Alternatives**

- 4.1 Not applicable.

#### **5) Consultations / Representations / Technical Data**

- 5.1 This report is providing an update on the actions undertaken by Children's Services following various visits undertaken by members of the Scrutiny Committee to staff in Children's Services.

#### **6) Strategic Plan**

- 6.1 The actions described in the report support the Council's objective of being ambitious for children and young people, as set out in the strategic plan.

#### **7) Financial Considerations**

- 7.1 There are no specific financial implications arising out of this report. All of the initiatives referred to above are funded from within existing budgets.

## **8) Legal Considerations**

8.1 There are no specific legal considerations arising out of this report.

## **9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)**

9.1 There are no environmental issues arising out of this report.

## **10) Equality Considerations**

10.1 There are no equality issues arising out of this report.

## **11) Risk Management Considerations**

11.1 There are no risks identified in this report.

## **12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations**

12.1 This report provides an update for members of the Scrutiny Committee on the actions taken following their meetings with staff in Children's Services.

### **Name**

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### **Electoral Divisions: All**

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools

Councillor Andrew Leadbetter (Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools)

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