

SUBJECT: External Placements in Children's Services

MEETING: CYP Select Committee

DATE: 24th January 2018

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: All

1. PURPOSE:

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information so that members can scrutinise the response and activities undertaken following a review by Internal Audit into the use of external placements for Looked After Children (LAC) and young people by Monmouthshire County Council's Children's Social Services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 It is recommended that members:

- Scrutinise the improvement actions undertaken by Children's Services as set out within the action plan (see appendix 2)

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 The internal audit of external placements was carried out as part of the 2016/2017 Audit Plan agreed by the Head of Finance and by the Audit Committee at their meeting on the 26th May 2016. The field work was subsequently undertaken in October 2016 / March 2017 with a final report being issued in October 2017 (appendix 1).

3.2 The audit was undertaken following concern within Social Care and Health that the absence of commissioning capacity over a number of years meant that this was a high risk area. The objective of the audit was to provide a risk based audit of External Placements within Children's Services, with a view to providing an overall opinion on the internal control environment in place. The audit focused on the commissioning and contract arrangements when LAC and young people are placed in externally provided fostering and residential placements.

3.3 Overall, the External Placements system was assessed as providing a 'LIMITED' level of assurance which reflects that the financial and administrative systems reviewed were found to be poorly controlled, with unacceptable levels of risk. In summary 4 significant risks, 15 moderate risks, 9 minor risks and 9 areas of strength were found.

3.4 In headline terms, overall improvements were needed included:

- The interface operationally between child care teams and commissioning and contracting

- Clearer systems and processes for commissioning and contracting within Children's Services
- Improvement to the interface between regional (4cs) and local systems regarding commissioning arrangements, with increased clarity of respective roles
- A clear process for accreditation of providers
- Improvements in contract monitoring placements.

3.5 The report recognised that there had been an historical lack of commissioning resource within Children's Services.

3.6 Since the audit Children's Services has taken key steps to rectify the problems identified:

- A lead commissioner for Children's Services initially employed on a temporary basis is now permanent. The post is located in Commissioning and the Social Care and Health Commissioning Team now covers children's as well as adult services.
- A review of all high cost placements was undertaken in February 2016 so that any immediate risks regarding contracts / monitoring arrangements could be addressed.
- A senior practitioner from the Placement and Support Team was commissioned to develop the internal processes for Children's Services around the placement process which were in line with the Social Services and Well-Being Act (Wales) 2014 (see appendix 3).
- An independent 'stock-take' was undertaken in October 2017 which cross-referenced with the Internal Audit Report action plan and additionally supported further improvements of internal processes and practice around placement searches.

3.7 Activity in regards to the Internal Audit action plan is on-going and has entailed a joint approach between Commissioning and Children's Services. The current updated action plan is attached at appendix 2.

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

N/A

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

N/A

6. REASONS:

6.1 A review by Internal Audit was issued in October 2017 which gave only limited assurance concerning risks in contract and commissioning arrangements for the use of external placements for LAC. An action plan was put in place to drive the improvement actions necessary to address the risks and issues identified.

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

There are no additional resource implications identified as a consequence of this report. The appointment of the Lead Commissioner has been resourced through realignment of current budgets.

8. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

N/A

9. CONSULTEES:

- Claire Marchant, Chief Officer, Social Care and Health
- Children's Service Leadership Team
- Directorate Management Team (Quality Improvement and Performance Group)

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

- **Appendix 1 Internal Audit Report issued October 2017**



External Placements
Final Issued.pdf

- **Appendix 2 Updated Action Plan**



Internal Audit
(External Placements)

- **Appendix 3 Placement Process**



FLOWCHART
Placement Process N

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