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| <i>item:</i> | |
| <i>report:</i> | |

OUT OF AUTHORITY PLACEMENTS PLAN

by Bill Alexander

Summary

This report updates members about the situation regarding out of authority placements, and makes initial proposals with regard to the projected budget overspend.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Joint Committee has been aware of the continuing budget pressure in out of authority placements. This was addressed in 2004/05 because of a significant budget increase from the Highland Council. However, the pressure arose again in 2005/06, and looks likely to be repeated in 2006/07.
- 1.2 In 2003, the Committee agreed an Action Plan to contain this pressure, and this report provides an update on that Plan, and also indicates that a more detailed report should be presented to the August Committee with regard to the pattern of current placements and further necessary measures.

2. Current situation

- 2.1 There are presently 40 children in out of authority placements; 37 of these are looked after children. This compares with the last peak in these numbers in August 2003, when there were 50 children, including 40 looked after children.
- 2.2 There has been a steady rise in placements since early 2006. However, there is a noticeable difference in the placements being made this year, as opposed to just three years ago in 2003. Because of the success of various initiatives, there are far fewer young people now being placed in residential schools in relation to youth offending and anti-social behaviour, but far more with complex disabilities and associated challenging or risk behaviours. A fuller analysis of this picture will be presented to the August meeting of the Committee.

3. Action Plan

- 3.1 Officers continue to work to the action plan agreed by the Committee in 2003.

| ACTION | STATUS |
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| 1. No further placements will take place, unless as part of a Children's Hearing order or placing request, or by the agreement of the Directors of Education, Culture & Sport and Social Work. | This has been fully implemented |
| 2. & 3. There will be rigorous scrutiny of all care and education plans for children looked after away from home, to identify and address drift. Consideration will be given to accelerating the return of young people to Highland wherever possible. | This exercise has been repeated on a number of occasions, and is about to be repeated again. |
| 4. As developments of provision at The Bridge and of other specialist services are cost effective, and have enhanced the Council's provision, similar further initiatives should be considered. | New services have been opened in Fort William and Wick, and the Intensive Support Service has diverted a number of young offenders for residential school placements. |
| 5. There will be increased commitment to preventative social work services that can support looked after children at home, rather than away from home in care placements. This will be linked to further concentration on the importance of permanence planning. | Evidence suggests that these services are proving successful. |
| 6. There will be a review of intervention and placement thresholds, taking close account of the assessment of risk, which could lead to greater clarity about placement decisions. | This is ongoing, and closely linked to implementation of 'Getting it Right for Every Child' |
| 7. Service Management Teams will reaffirm to staff at every level, and to partner agencies, the importance of supporting children wherever possible within their own families and communities. | This is also ongoing. |
| 8. The Joint Committee should consider ever-closer alignment between Council and Health services, to better co-ordinate provision to those children and young people at greatest risk. | This has been a strategic priority, and is evidenced in implementation of For Highland's Children 2. |
| 9. Directors will review their existing budget commitments to identify possible areas of budget virement to address a potential overspend. | This was again necessary in 2005/06. |

3.2 It is proposed that there should be consideration of any further necessary actions at the August Joint Committee.

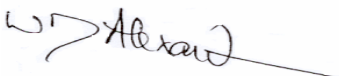
4. Further initiatives to prevent placements

- 4.1 As stated above, there have been reduced placements of young people with offending or anti-social behaviour because of the development of specialist local services in these areas of activity. This has proved to be a cost effective investment.
- 4.2 It is still intended that there should be further investment in new services, through the development of a Children's Unit in Fort William, and an update on this will be provided at the Joint Committee.
- 4.3 In addition, there are sometimes opportunities to provide enhanced local services to specific children, at times as requested by the Children's Panel, to enable these children to continue to be supported in their local communities. At the present time, there are certain identified children who could be supported within Highland, to prevent further out of authority placements, by:
- the creation of a temporary post of Children's Services Worker at the Black Isle Education Centre, at a cost of £24,000
 - the organisation of time-limited additional support for learning at a dedicated facility, involving a combination of Teachers and Children's Services Workers, at a cost of around £120,000.
- 4.4 While it may be possible to realise a level of funding for these services through the deployment of existing resources, some support will be required from the out of authority placements budget.

Recommendation

The Joint Committee is asked to:

- i. agree that a more detailed report should be presented to the August Committee with regard to the pattern of current placements and any further necessary actions;
- ii. agree the additional temporary measures set out in paragraph 4.3, to provide local services and prevent out of authority placements for certain identified children.



Bill Alexander

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