

Agenda Item	21.
Report No	CLH 58/19

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Care, Learning and Housing

Date: 21 August 2019

Report Title: **Placement Services Change Programme Update**

Report By: Chief Executive

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report summarises progress against the agreed plan for the Placement Services Change Programme (PSCP), which is designed to redirect resources to develop services locally in Highland for Looked After Children and to address their education outcomes.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note and comment on the progress to date;
- ii. Note that a report on the review of Fostering & Adoptions fees/allowances will be presented to The Highland Council in October 2019

3. Implications

3.1 Resource

Considerable effort has been focussed on returning young people to Highland with 34 returned or avoided OOA (Out of Authority) since the extended programme began in June 2018 and total costs avoided estimated at over £5M as compared with the young people remaining in placement out of area for a year. The programme is demonstrating traction against the original plan with forecasted year-end spend on placements £1.8M less than at this time last financial year.

3.2 Legal

In order to meet responsibilities detailed in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, effort is being focussed on acquiring a more varied stock of properties and services to meet the needs of Looked after young people in the Highland area.

3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)**

The ethos driving the Placement Programme is to provide alternative services which enable young people to remain as close to their communities in Highland as possible. Where there are sufficient numbers of children in a rural location to enable a service to be financially viable, this will be pursued.

3.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever**

The proposals for accommodation and services in Highland will marginally increase the Council's overall carbon footprint through increased energy usage and waste disposal. However, these proposals will significantly reduce travel and associated costs relating to transport to and from provisions out-with Highland.

3.5 **Risk**

There is the continued risk (seen across the UK) that the number of children requiring to be looked after continues to increase which has significant cost implications. Spot purchased placements (placements for which there are not already a contract) have an average cost to Highland Council of £230,000 per child per year. The increase of, for example, a family of x5 children into purchased placements can cost over £1.15M extra for that year. If the Council does not develop financially beneficial alternatives that meet the needs of these children within the Highland area, the risk will continue for this budget. These services should be sited in areas of Highland where neglect and breakdowns in family circumstances are greatest.

3.6 **Gaelic**

No issues have been identified.

4. **Programme progress in enabling young people to return to Highland**

4.1 Since the enhanced placement programme began in June 2018, 34 young people have been enabled to return to Highland or circumvented OOA avoiding costs of over £5M as compared with these young people remaining out of area for a year.

4.2 In July 2019, spot purchased placements were at their lowest level in 5 years at 37 in total and the number of children remaining out of area in residential placements was 29 as compared with 42 at July 2018. Of the 34 returned, 22 have been in this financial year with plans to return up to x7 further children from residential placements OOA before Dec 2019.

4.3 The programme has significantly exceeded the number of returns estimated in the original business case, and whilst there continues to be a requirement for new purchased placements due to specific needs of young people, only x2 young people have gone into spot purchased placements since April 1st 2019.

4.4 Members will recall that although the programme only began part way through last financial year, the number of returns, although higher than expectations, sadly equalled the number of new placements last year which meant the financial benefits were not evident. Significant controls continue to be exercised in accommodating young people, in conjunction with opening Àrach, the new service below, to reduce numbers of young people coming into placement.

4.5 The 34 children returned to area or family placements went to the following:

- Residential Units: 13
- Supported flats: 8

- Kinship: 6
- Foster care: 3
- Adult Services: 3
- Out of care system: 1

5. Development of Highland Resources

- 5.1 Members will recall that permission to develop Àrach, the new outreach and respite service in Fodderty, was predicated on the fact that it offered a method of reducing the numbers coming into residential care and purchased placements by providing an outreach service to keep children at home with their families wherever possible. Àrach (meaning nurture in Gaelic) became operational in May 2019 and over the year is intended to reduce new placements into residential care by 20%. A foster carer is also employed and is working with young people to sustain their foster care placements. A Foster Care Social Worker is also currently advertised.
- 5.2 A number of new staff were employed in Caithness last year in advance of securing an Àrach North building and have enabled the return to Caithness of a young person currently out of area and to maintain a further two young people in their home area. The development of an equivalent Àrach outreach service and building is programmed for 2020.
- 5.3 The suite of services to supplement school placements and enable the return of young people is progressing well led by the teacher within the PSCP team, underpinned by the new Scottish Attainment Challenge Funding for Care Experienced Young People. Flexible individualised packages have been developed for each young person returning to Highland using mainstream schools, nurture bases, off-site provisions such as the Bridge, Family Firm and third sector organisations. The third sector services include specialist outdoor learning and support to re-integrate young people into school. Outcomes include increasing numeracy and literacy, developing boundary setting behaviour, increasing confidence and learning rural and horticultural skills which can lead to obtaining SQAs and National qualifications. They also seek to develop coping strategies for preparing the young person for a return to school, work experience placements, attending college or full-time employment.
- 5.4 Final agreement has been reached regarding a dedicated, expanded Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for Looked After young people with staff currently being recruited by NHS Highland. It is hoped the service will be operational by Sept/Oct 2019.
- 5.5 The Programme Plan also included the development of additional residential provision in order to return young people from OOA placements. With the aid of Development and Infrastructure a number of properties have been identified and assessed by the PSCP team with one considered to be suitable for a 5-bed children's unit and another as a smaller unit for younger children much like Killen on the Black Isle. If progressed, further information will be brought to this Committee.
- 5.6 10 properties previously developed by the Alternatives to OOA Programme have had support staff assigned by a contracted third sector organisation to enable the return of 16+ year old young people to Highland. This is enabling a number of young people from the South, North, Mid and West to return to their local area with their needs being met at a much reduced rate to OOA placements.
- 5.7 Discussions are ongoing with Development and Infrastructure regarding the suggestion

made at this Committee that the Council explore the possibility of providing placement accommodation in new housing developments. The Programme already had agreement for properties to be built for Care Experienced Young People as a move-through from residential care and this has been increased to accommodate CEYP moving into their own tenancies.

- 5.8 A business case is being prepared to review fostering and adoption fees/allowances which will be detailed in a report to The Highland Council meeting in October 2019. The Council has already committed to an additional 4fte Fostering and Adoption Social Workers funded by the Council's Change Fund aiming to increase Foster Carers for Highland. The Council is also keen to review fees and allowances as part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

6. Scope of Programme and Communications Plan

- 6.1 The scope of this programme could become extremely wide and encompass a very large number of projects. It is important that the key projects that are required to deliver the optimum results are chosen to be prioritised over the next six months and year rather than have too many projects and only be able to demonstrate minimal progress as a result. This will involve some projects being programmed for delivery in later years.
- 6.2 A comprehensive Communication Plan was devised with actions including area briefings and team presentations to launch the programme and internal communications and meetings with Care and Learning Area and Children's Services Managers ongoing. Increased communication activity is programmed with information planned for schools and social work teams to not only spread the positive performance of the programme in terms of children's outcomes, improved financial performance and the new service Àrach but to further cement the scrutiny over new placement requests.

7. Improved Outcomes for Young People Returning

- 7.1 One of the most compelling outcomes of the Placement Services Change Programme is significantly improved outcomes for Highland's CEYP who have returned to area. There has been overwhelming feedback from Social Workers, parents and the young people themselves about how well young people are doing. These are extremely powerful testimonies that the care given in Highland can improve children's lives immeasurably. These improved outcomes have included:

- Within a short time of returning, a number of young people have been found to be intellectually more able than identified over several years out of area,
- Returned young people accelerating their developmental age as compared with OOA,
- Reduction in one young person's violence and aggression forms by 80%,
- Change from one young person experiencing very little human contact with an external provider to after a year back in Highland going out in the community horse riding, trampolining, out for lunch and the pantomime with support workers and family members,
- Improved educational attendance and enjoyment, "I want to live here until I'm older than I want to work here".

8. Young People Transitioning to Adult Services with NESH

- 8.1 The issue of adults remaining in Children's units in Highland who should transition to

Adult Services at 18 years old continues. There were 6 young adults in children's units during last financial year and significant time and effort was expended by the PSCP team working with NHSH to transition these individuals. The full cost of equivalent OOA beds are not met by NHSH, only the costs of Highland Council unit bed costs.

- 8.2 Work has started to enable Highland Council to purchase contracted adult support for 16+ year old young people with complex needs to enable a move to their 'adult placement' before the age of 18. This should assist with reducing the number of over 18's remaining in Children's units and ensure beds are available to return children.

Designation: Chief Executive

Date: 26 July 2019

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Background Papers: n/a