



## Committee report

Committee	<b>POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND SKILLS</b>
Date	<b>28 NOVEMBER 2019</b>
Title	<b>CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE BUDGET POSITION 2019/2020</b>
Report of	<b>DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES</b>

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### SUMMARY

1. This report provides an overview of the current budget position for the Children and Families branch of Children's Services. It details the projected overspends, the rationale for the budget position and actions currently being taken.

### BACKGROUND

2. The Children and Families budget for 2019-20 is **£18,432,999**
3. As at the end of September 2019 the Children and Families branch of Children's Services is showing a pressure (projected overspend) of **£1,477,000**.
4. All of the budget savings that were identified as part of the budget savings strategy at the start of the financial year have been achieved across the Children and Families branch, totalling **£367,500**, these included; a management restructure, fostering team efficiencies, Family Centre contract review and restructure of early intervention teams.
5. Additional budget strategy funding of **£250,000** (related to demographic changes), together with **£700,000** social care grant funding from central government has been factored into Children's Services budget this year, however the budget pressure remains.

### BUDGET POSITION

6. 86 per cent of the current projected overspend relates to placements for looked after children. The Children and Families Branch started the year with an underlying, roll forward Children Looked After budget pressure of £360,000. There has been continued growth of the looked after cohort since March 2019

(currently 7 per cent increase at this stage of the year, above the national average of 4 per cent for the last reported year). The Isle of Wight has a higher rate of Looked After Children than the England average, in part due to the failure of services pre 2013. In addition, there is an increase in the price of placements nationally.

7. Whilst 46 per cent of placements are with in-house foster carers, the need to use external foster care and residential remains with 18 per cent of placements with external foster care and 7 per cent residential. The remaining placements are made up of a mixture of children placed with 'connected carers' and children placed with parents-where the local authority shares parental responsibility.
8. The budget for external foster care was set at the beginning of the year based on 49 placements. The average across the year to date has been 51 placements, and currently eight of these are high cost placements, which relate to the complexity of the child's needs. All high cost placements are reviewed monthly at the 'High Cost Placements Panel' and, where appropriate, plans are implemented to move children to alternative placements or where safe to do so to reunify the children with their parents.
9. The budget for residential and secure placements was set based on 18 residential placements, reducing to 16 over the year. There are currently 19 active placements.
10. Beaulieu House, the Isle of Wight Council's Children's Home and short breaks unit is currently projecting a £83,000 overspend, the majority relates to staffing (bank and use of agency staff). The main reasons for this are staff sickness, vacancies and additional support that was required to meet the needs of a child. In addition, costs for general provisions and catering have increased.
11. There is an emerging pressure in the leaving care team £108,000 through use of a supporting lodgings provider. There has been a lack of capacity in the local market in relation to supported lodgings and this is being addressed through the commissioning of a range of providers to deliver 'Pathways to Independence' supported accommodation for young people. The providers have started to accept referrals from October 2019.
12. In addition, there is currently a projected overspend of £192,000 in the operational social care teams.
13. This overspend relates to use of agency workers (an average of seven agency social workers in place since start of the financial year) and five Graduate Entry Trainee Social Workers (GETS). The GETS posts were not fully funded from the budget as it was reasonably assumed that vacancy savings across the department would balance this budget, however at this stage of the year these have had to be fully utilised for agency social workers. The GETS programme is an essential part of Children's Services recruitment and retention strategy and the island has a good track record of 'growing our own' with newly qualified staff staying within the service.

## **ACTIONS BEING TAKEN TO ADDRESS BUDGET POSITION**

14. The Isle of Wight Council has invested £483,000 over the next two years into a Children's Services Transformation programme. Workforce development on the Hampshire and Isle of Wight approach is being rolled out between September-December 2019, together with new assessments, processes and tools for practice. This strength-based approach, already being delivered in Hampshire, aims to support families to enable more children to live at home safely, thus reducing the number of children entering care. This approach will be further enhanced through an increase in multi-disciplinary working through the Resilience Around Families Team (RAFT), which has expanded to include substance misuse workers, an adult mental health worker and recruitment is underway for two child mental health practitioners.
15. Children's Services continue to support reunification of children with their families where it is appropriate and safe to do so. Social Workers across Children's Services have received training in an evidence-based NSPCC reunification framework, and this has been implemented across the service over the last year. Since March 2019 there have been three reunifications through this programme, with all three children leaving foster care to be reunified with parents. Two young people have left placement and returned home in an unplanned way and this is being managed under the framework to prevent entry back in to care. A further six children are anticipated to be reunified home by the end of the financial year.
16. An active fostering campaign is underway, supported by a dedicated marketing officer within the fostering team. The current number of potential foster carers in assessment is six.
17. The Isle of Wight Council are in the second year of a regional framework to procure independent foster carers and a separate framework regarding residential provision. The establishment of these regional frameworks has improved the management of the markets, through reducing pricing competition between local authorities. Individual placement agreements are now in place for every child and an improved monitoring process has been established between the Children's Commissioning Team and social care teams to ensure value for money and progression towards achieving positive outcomes for the children (which includes step downs from residential provision foster care in a number of cases).
18. The manager of Beaulieu House is meeting more regularly with finance to monitor spend. When Beaulieu House has placements vacancies that cannot be utilised by Isle of Wight Children's Services filled by placing an Isle of Wight Looked After Child, then we are notifying other Local Authorities to ensure the placement is used and therefore ensuring income maintained.
19. Some budget has been transferred from the use of a historic surplus post from Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Team (CAST) restructure. A sixth GETS post has been frozen for the time being. There are a number of non-social work vacancies in the structure currently that have been frozen to support the budget position.

## CONCLUSION

20. It is recognised that the Children and Families Branch is projecting an overspend for the 2019-20 financial year. This relates in the main to an increase in placements for Looked After Children, and the price of the of these placements.
21. The branch, in partnership with other agencies, take a proactive approach to delivering interventions to support more children to remain safely at home, and this will be further enhanced by the investment in the transformation programme currently being rolled out.
22. In addition, through the regional framework and robust monitoring of placement agreements, the branch is ensuring that children's needs are being met in the most appropriate placements for their needs.
23. An active fostering recruitment campaign is underway to increase the number of in house foster carers.
24. To provide some additional context, new analysis from the Local Government Association has shown that Councils budgeted for an additional £522 million in 2018/19 for children's social care, despite this, Councils spent £770 million more than planned. Significant government funding cuts, rising demand for child protection services and increasing costs means that budgets cannot keep up.
25. The national report highlights that there are up to 1,796 referrals made to council's children's social care departments each day and that pressure on upper tier authorities from children's and adults' social care growth are two of the highest profile issues (along with Special Education Needs funding) on which many authorities, including the Isle of Wight, have been consistently lobbying the Government on for some time.

## RECOMMENDATION

26. That the committee note the report, the projected overspend and the actions being taken to enable more children to live safely at home and robustly manage the commissioning of placements.

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