

Cabinet



Date of meeting:	08 March 2022
Title of Report:	Commissioned Placement Sufficiency Plan 2022/23
Lead Member:	Councillor David Downie (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills, Children and Young People)
Lead Strategic Director:	Alison Botham (Director for Childrens Services)
Author:	Emma Crowther, Strategic Commissioning Manager
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Your Reference:	
Key Decision:	Yes
Confidentiality:	Part I - Official

Purpose of Report

Plymouth City Council has a legal duty under section 22G of the Children Act 1989 to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient local accommodation which meets the needs of children in the care of the Council. The Council commissions and provides a range of different types of placements in order to meet the sufficiency duty, and this paper describes the proposed activity for 2022/23 to continue to increase the quantity and quality of local placements which are commissioned.

This is in the context of significant local, regional and national challenges with the number of available placements for children in care, and the need to have a clear local plan for tackling these challenges in order to be able to support vulnerable children and young people.

Recommendations and Reasons

This paper describes the actions being taken in relation to placement sufficiency and specifically covers proposals for three areas of placement activity. For all three areas it is recommended to approve the business case containing the proposals to carry out procurement activity, with contract award decisions for each project delegated to the Director of Children's Services. Updates on key milestones will be provided to CMT during each project to ensure that there continues to be senior corporate oversight and challenge on the risks, benefits and opportunities of each approach. The Director of Children's Services will provide an update to Cabinet at a future date on progress and the approaches taken to the provider market.

I: Foster placements commissioned from independent fostering agencies (IFA's)

Recommendations:

- Proceed with a tender in partnership with Devon County Council, Torbay Council and Somerset County Council, to replace the current Peninsula Fostering Framework Contract. This will include fostering, parent and child and staying put placements.

- Proceed with a tender either in partnership with the local authorities listed above or as a standalone project for Plymouth, to develop a closer partnership with one or more IFA's to deliver local foster placements for adolescents and/or children with more complex needs

2: Residential children's homes

Recommendations:

- Proceed with a standalone tender for Plymouth to replace the current Caring in Partnership residential block contract
- Proceed with a tender in partnership with Devon County Council, Torbay Council and Somerset County Council, to replace the current Peninsula residential Framework Contract.

3: Supplementary health and care agency support for children and young people

Recommendation:

Proceed with a tender, either in partnership with Devon County Council, Torbay Council and Somerset County Council, or as a standalone project for Plymouth, to develop a new Framework contract.

Alternative options considered and rejected

Not having contracts in place for commissioned placements:

- If suitable contractual arrangements are not in place for these three areas there is a risk that placement and agency staff providers will not be clear on what is expected of them in delivering care and support to vulnerable children. This would be a failure of the Council's duty as a corporate parent and is likely to impact on the quality of the provision.
- Not having contracts in place also fails to provide placement providers with a clear picture of our strategic and operational needs, to enable them to develop their own business plans, including for recruitment and retention of staff and investment in new homes. It also enables the development of more sophisticated ways of working together which move beyond transactional to relational, with the needs of children and young people at the centre.
- Without suitable contracts placements would need to be spot purchased, with the risk of the Council needing to pay higher weekly fees. This would also require more Brokerage capacity to negotiate each placement on an individual basis.

Relevance to the Corporate Plan and/or the Plymouth Plan

This proposal is relevant to the Corporate Plan - Caring for People and their Communities:

- People feel safe in Plymouth - the provision of suitable local placements and support for children and young people in care will help us to keep children safe, with suitable people to support and care for them in the city.
- Keep children, young people and adults protected – the provision of suitable local placements enables our children and young people to remain living in the city, and able to maintain links with their education, health support and friends and family where appropriate, as part of a wider response to ensuring that children are protected from harm and able to thrive.

The proposal also links to A Bright Future 2021-2026, the children and young people's partnership plan for Plymouth. A Bright Future seeks to make sure that all of the city's children and young people have the best possible start to life. The plan makes specific reference to placement sufficiency as a priority action.

Implications for the Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:

Although this report relates to commissioning activity, led by Strategic Commissioning, the budget for the service is within Children's Services (Children, Young People and Families), and decisions about placements for individual children are made in this service area. The budget for placements represents a significant proportion (68%) of the spend for Children, Young People and Families.

This is an area of high spend for the Council, with increases in the number of residential, fostering and provision where additional staffing has been required over recent years. The procurements will achieve transparency of pricing through the breakdown of weekly placement fees, clarity of costs for future contract years and enable a comparison across providers and agencies to support future Value for Money judgements. A focus on achieving a higher number of placements based in or near to Plymouth will also reduce the costs associated with out of area placements, including travel for professionals and for the child in returning to the city for family time or key appointments and meetings.

The following figures show the forecasted spend for 2021/22 for the areas covered by this paper:

- Foster placements commissioned from independent fostering agencies (IFA's): £8,037,149
- Residential children's homes in Plymouth – block contract spend: £3,749,853
- Residential children's homes – framework and spot purchase: £12,518,019
- Supplementary health and care agency support for children and young people: £2,200,000

Financial Risks

Spend on commissioned placements has continued to rise year on year, driven partly by an increase in the number of children requiring a placement, and for some their individual complexity requiring higher levels of staffing. Providers have also seen their costs rise, including those related to the cost of living but also those associated with recruitment and retention of staff. Children's Social Care, like Adult Social Care and Health, are seeing significant challenges in being able to pay salaries which encourage staff to remain working in care.

There is a risk that the cost of provision will continue to rise, particularly in order to be competitive in retaining and supporting staff able to care for vulnerable children. Robust contract arrangements which support collaborative and well planned placements for children and young people will help to mitigate this risk.

Carbon Footprint (Environmental) Implications:

The sufficiency duty requires local authorities to ensure that as far as possible there are local placements available for their children in care. The more successful this is, the less likely it is that children and young people will need to be placed out of area, requiring less travel for contact with family members and social workers and visits from other professionals.

Other Implications: e.g. Health and Safety, Risk Management, Child Poverty:

** When considering these proposals members have a responsibility to ensure they give due regard to the Council's duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and promote good relations between people who share protected characteristics under the Equalities Act and those who do not.*

All commissioned placements should be of a good quality, offering children and young people the chance to thrive in all areas of their lives. This should help to mitigate the impact of child poverty which they may (but not necessarily the case) have experienced prior to coming into care.

Appendices

**Add rows as required to box below*

Ref.	Title of Appendix	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A	Business Case: Commissioned placement sufficiency							
B	Equalities Impact Assessment							

Background papers:

*Add rows as required to box below

Please list all unpublished, background papers relevant to the decision in the table below. Background papers are unpublished works, relied on to a material extent in preparing the report, which disclose facts or matters on which the report or an important part of the work is based.

Title of any background paper(s)	Exemption Paragraph Number (if applicable) <i>If some/all of the information is confidential, you must indicate why it is not for publication by virtue of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by ticking the relevant box.</i>						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
N/A							

Sign off:

Fin	djn.21 .22.29 I	Leg	MS/3 8198	Mon Off		HR	N/A	Assets	N/A	Strat Proc	PB/SC/011 /CAB/BC/ 0222
Originating Senior Leadership Team member: Anna Coles (Service Director of Integrated Commissioning)											
Please confirm the Strategic Director(s) has agreed the report? Yes Date agreed: 16/02/2022											
Cabinet Member approval: Councillor David Downie (Cabinet Member for Education, Skills, Children and Young People) Date approved: 23/02/2022											