

Overview and Scrutiny – 30 March 2011

Action 234.1 - Re. Q5 – The Committee requested a more expansive briefing note on why more children being placed in care needed re-placements and more specific detail about legal costs with reference to Action 98.1 from the meeting held on 1st November 2010, Page 114 of agenda pack, (and Action 159 from Budget Scrutiny 17th January 2011). It was noted that some of the re-placements were due to bringing together children as a family group when they had been separated as emergency interim measures. Such re-placements did not require additional court action as court orders had already been obtained for the children.

In November 2010 meetings were held with the Deputy Director, Children and Families and managers in the Children in Care Service to review circumstances where there had been two or more moves for children in care. The intention of the review was to quantify numbers affected by this, to look for themes and to ensure that recommendations for future practice were made.

There were a number of key reasons for changing foster placements and sometimes changing foster placements to residential placements. In certain circumstances when children are looked after it is not clear how long the child may need to be looked after and only after assessments are long term plans made.

Placements may end for a number of reasons. There was evidence of situations arising where the placement could no longer meet the needs of the child. Were possible children are placed with brothers and sisters, but if the children have experienced very traumatic early lives the needs of the children can be such that they need to be placed separately, this may necessitate more than one move..

Difficulties emerging with either newly accommodated adolescents or young people who have been in relatively stable longer term placements account for a significant number of the placement moves. The need for robust placements for adolescents is certainly a strong theme in this review.

One of the key aims of the review was to inform planning for the sufficiency agenda, this is a new statutory responsibility for local authorities to ensure that they have a range of placements that can meet the assessed needs of looked after children.. Whilst there is strong recruitment to improve our choice of in-house provision we are also working alongside a number of preferred providers in order to enhance choices.

Identification of problems in placements at an early stage with allocated social workers working in partnership with placements and drawing on the expertise of other professionals is also an essential part of supporting children and carers is also key to maintaining long term care for children and young people.