

Decision maker:	Cabinet member children and families
Decision date:	Friday, 20 December 2019
Title of report:	Mobilisation of new Edge of Care approach for children and young people
Report by:	Childrens joint commissioning manager

Classification

Open

Decision type

Non-key

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose and summary

To approve initial investment in a new approach to support children and young people that are on the edge of care (EOC), whether that be at risk of becoming a looked after child, or with the potential to safely cease being looked after and return home with the appropriate support.

Families that might need some help and support will often say that they don't want to be taken into safeguarding or care services. They would rather be able to cope better with the challenges they face with support from their extended family, friends, and community. While improvements have been made to Herefordshire's safeguarding system in recent years, the County's numbers of looked after children (LAC) has continued to be higher than comparator areas, which causes significant financial pressure for the council. Cabinet has recognised that the council can do more to support families to safely take care of their children. This is in conjunction with work that the council has already done to improve social care practice and expand the early help and family support services.

It is therefore intended to make an initial investment of up to £184k in 2019-2020 for the establishment of a new Edge of Care / Home (ECHO) service. Alongside existing approaches,

ECHo will be a five to ten-year initiative. Further investment from 2020 onwards to be made through the council's medium-term financial strategy.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- (a) The use of earmarked reserves of up to £184k for the mobilisation of a new ECHo service during be approved for the initial spending plan for 2019-2020 as set out paragraphs 24 and Appendix 1 of this report**
- (b) Within the approved funding envelope (above), operational management of the initial spending plan for 2019-2020 is delegated to the Assistant Director for Safeguarding and Family Support**

Alternative options

1. Do nothing. The council has already invested in additional family support resources, in-house fostering capacity and social care practice improvements, including more timely consideration of reunification opportunities for individual LAC. Each of these initiatives is expected to have a positive impact on reducing the number of LAC in Herefordshire, for example there has been a reduction in the number of new LAC over the five-years to March 2019 from 130 to 95 children per year. However, further improvements will be needed if Herefordshire's LAC rate and spend per capita is to be reduced to expected levels in the medium rather than longer term.
2. To not use the earmarked reserves. This would delay the implementation of the new approach approved by cabinet.

Key considerations

3. Cabinet has been supporting the children and families directorate to halt and reverse the historic trend of increasing demand for LAC services through a range of measures including increasing workforce capacity and improving skills and practice.
4. Herefordshire's number of LAC has continued to be above both the national and statistical neighbour average. At the end of March 2019, the national average LAC rate was 65 per 10,000 while Herefordshire stood at 92. The average rate of other West Midlands authorities was 89 per 10,000 and the average rate of Herefordshire's statistical neighbours was lower at 54 per 10,000. There are two key aspects to consider when seeking to manage demand for LAC services. These are the rate at new children enter the LAC system and the rate at which children cease to be looked after, including those that could safely return home.
5. There has been a gradual reduction since a high point of 130 new entrants to care in 2014-15. During the three years 2016-2019, Herefordshire took in an average of 102 new LAC per year. Despite the improving local trend, the new entrant rate remains higher than the statistical neighbour average. Around 20 fewer new entrants could be expected per year if Herefordshire were in-line with the comparator average. Since analysis work was undertaken however, there has been a mid-year spike in the number of new entrants during 2019-2020.

6. Herefordshire’s annual rate of children that cease to be looked after has been lower than statistical neighbours since 2014:

- In the year to 31 March 2018, 32% of Herefordshire’s LAC ceased to be looked after, while the average rate was 40% among statistical neighbours.
- In the three years 2016-2019, an average of 83 Herefordshire children ceased to be LAC each year. However, in 2018/19 the local ceased LAC rate deteriorated to 77 children (23% of the LAC population).
- Based on the current number of LAC (347 on 21 October 2019), an additional 50-60 children could theoretically be expected cease to be LAC if Herefordshire were in line with the neighbour average.

7. Work is already underway to improve the rates of reunification and special guardianship orders, and cabinet approved measures to overcome barriers which had been identified in the work in 2018/19. This is expected to contribute to more children ceasing to be looked after each year

8. The factors that can lead to a child being looked after can include:

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|---|---|
| ▪ Behavioural problems | ▪ Risks of child exploitation |
| ▪ Housing issues | ▪ Domestic abuse |
| ▪ Substance/alcohol misuse of the child and or parents/carers | ▪ Social Isolation |
| ▪ Reduced attendance at education | ▪ Financial hardship |
| ▪ Emotional/mental health issues of the child and or parents/carers | ▪ Risk of abuse: neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse |

9. Where areas have services that are rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, spend per capita is significantly lower than Herefordshire’s current position. Such areas are likely to have invested in effective Early Help and Edge of Care arrangements that prevent the need for children to become looked after and avoid high spend on placement costs.

10. Within the local safeguarding system (Appendix 2), the council and its partners operate a suite of services that can provide Early Help to families with the aim of preventing them from entering care or other statutory systems. When a child’s needs do escalate further through the MASH, the council provides a range of statutory and non-statutory services with the aim of stabilising the issues and, where possible, reducing the need so that they can step down to less intensive support. This includes a level of family support to children in need or in child protection arrangements.

11. It is proposed to invest in a new Edge of Care/Home (ECHO) model (Appendix 1). This will be part of a long-term approach to reducing Herefordshire’s LAC population over the next five-ten years. Initially, this will be a distinct service to establish the approach, but there may be some benefit to integrating a range of functions in future. The new service will provide evidence based intensive family support through two main approaches):

<p>PREVENTION (Edge of Care)</p> <p>For children on the approaching or on the immediate edge of entering care</p>	<p>REUNIFICATION (Return Home)</p> <p>For children that could step-down from long-term care to return to live with their immediate or extended family</p>
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12. The proposed service has been based on a set of cautious planning assumptions for annual delivery of a fully established service:
 - i. An annual case load of c.45 families, 25 prevention cases and 20 more cases identified for reunification (this being 20 more than currently normally identified each year)
 - ii. A step-down success rate of at least 50% of cases
13. It is expected that by year four/five:
 - i. c.20 fewer children should be looked after each year (c.77 by the end of year five and c.188 by year ten), in addition to those that cease to be LAC as a result of other initiatives and/or ageing-out at 18 as care leavers
 - ii. resulting in potential costs associated with fostering or residential care being avoided for those supported by ECHo of c.£.250k per year (cumulatively c. £430k by the end of year five and £1.6m by year ten)
14. In order to help mobilise the new approach, it is proposed that a corporate project manager is aligned to the ECHo project and that progress and impact is reported within the corporate framework as that is developed.

Community impact

15. The potential to prevent entry into care and support children to safely return home reinforces the corporate plan's objective of keeping children and young people safe and giving them a great start in life.
16. The multidisciplinary approach of ECHo would also support Herefordshire's Children and Young People's Plan 2019-2024 objective to enable children and young people to be safe from harm by providing the targeted and specialist capacity to work with children, young people and families and potentially lessen the need for children to be supported through child protection plans or become looked after.
17. ECHo will also contribute to the council's corporate parenting strategy by providing additional support to, where it is appropriate, enable more children to cease being looked after through safe reunification with their families or stepping down to other permanent family arrangements.

Equality duty

18. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:

A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
19. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Commissioned providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.

Resource implications

20. Appendix 1 sets out the business case for investment into the ECHo approach.
21. The ECHo service will be formed of a core family-support team working in an integrated model with specialist mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse workers. Where necessary, these specialisms may be procured from external providers, subject to the relevant council governance.
22. It is planned that the ECHo resources will provide:
- 1xFTE 09HC ECHo Team manager
 - 6xFTE 06HC ECHo Family Support Workers
 - Staff mileage
 - Staff training
 - Family resources budget -to purchase essential items a family may need to remain stable
 - Translation costs
 - Clinical Psychologist
 - Professional placement of BSC psychology student
 - Specialist support for Substance Misuse and Domestic Violence issues
23. An earmarked reserve of £550k was approved by cabinet on 24 October 2019. It was established, subject to governance, to enable the directorate to start to establish an edge of care service within the financial year 2019/20. It also contained provision to recruit to a separate service.
24. In order to mobilise the new ECHo service as soon as possible, it is proposed to allocate £184k of the earmarked reserve within 2019-2020, as follows:

	£s
Team Manager	14,571
Support workers	56,778
Running costs (Mileage, translation, training)	10,000
ICT equipment	18,000
Clinical Psychology	25,000
Clinical Supervision	3,333
Psychology placement expenses	-
Domestic abuse support	25,000
Substance misuse support	25,000
Project Management	6,000
Total	183,683

25. Once established, the annual cost of the ECHo service is expected to be c. £600k. Resources for 2020-2021 onwards will be included in the council's medium-term financial strategy, subject to a future budget decision.
26. When fully operational, the ECHo service is expected to lead to avoided costs in the region of £870k per year as a result of reduced need for fostering and residential placements. Therefore, a saving of c.£250k per year can be anticipated once established. This will be in addition to the savings achieved by other initiatives aimed at managing the LAC population, which should also lead to reduced workforce costs in the long-term.
27. The proposal will also contribute to further efficiencies as the number of looked after children reduces over time, alleviating workload pressures across social care and back-office teams as well as partner agencies.

Legal implications

28. Section 17 Children Act 1989 provides the statutory duty of every council to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need: and so far as it is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families. The recommendations in the report ensure the council complies with this statutory duty.
29. HR implications are employment status of the person(s) employed for the ECHo service should the funding not continue. If less than 2 years, they will not have met the qualifying period to claim unfair dismissal. However there are exceptions such as discrimination, protected disclosure, and trade union membership. Similarly, redundancy costs should be considered if the person(s) has continued service. A further legal / HR consideration is the employment basis / status of the person(s) recruited, will it be an employee, a worker, self-employed, a contractor, fixed term contract, the type of contract offered e.g. fixed term contract may impact on the calibre of persons recruited. Legal services can provide further advice on employment issues in this regard.

Risk management

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
<p>30. Not implementing effective early help and edge of care arrangements is likely to mean that Herefordshire continues to have higher than expected numbers of LAC into the long-term, and therefore considerable ongoing financial pressures. Children's services spend per capita (0-17 year olds) is lower in those areas that have been rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted. Assuming that, in time, Herefordshire did achieve the average per capita spend of comparator Good and Outstanding areas,</p>	<p>Alongside existing initiatives, implementation of the ECHo approach over the next five-ten years is intended to achieve cost savings resulting from fewer LAC needing fostering or residential accommodation, as well as reducing central costs as the social care and back-office workforce is adapted to meet the reducing LAC population.</p>

	overall spend could be expected to reduce by £6-8m per year.	
31.	Implementing a new model within an early help and social care system that is already under pressure will be a significant challenge. There could be a risk of delay and/or mission creep as additional priorities arise.	A dedicated team manager will be recruited under the responsibility of a Head of Service. The mobilisation phase (24-36 months) of implementation will be supported by the corporate project management team. Day to day progress and performance will be reported to the Children & Families Directorate Leadership Team. Strategic impact will be reported within the corporate project management framework.
32.	The ECHO manager and support workers will require a level of skills and experience to deliver the intensive support to children on the edge of care, and their families. There is a risk that appointing from the general marketplace or from the existing family support workforce may be challenging. In-house transfers could also put workforce pressures onto other parts of the safeguarding.	Corporate Human Resources and Organisation Development services will provide support for recruitment and reorganisation issues during the mobilisation phase.
33.	There is a risk that funding will not be provided as part of the 2020/21 budget.	This is being considered and is part of the additional investment being proposed to improve children's social services as part of the budget consultation. If funding was not provided money would have to be found by cutting services elsewhere in the council, including potentially children and family services.

Consultees

34. Herefordshire's children's mental health partnership and local specialist providers of substance misuse and domestic violence have been asked about the ECHO proposals and are broadly supportive. Feedback included the following, which has helped to inform the ECHO business model (Appendix 1) and will be considered during the implementation phase of the new service:
- Working together to build relationships and trust with families will be key
 - Intensity of support and outreach into the community and family home is positive
 - Need to ensure clinical governance of mental health roles
 - Will need strong and clear management arrangements for multidisciplinary roles that form the integrated ECHO service in order to maintain clear roles and responsibilities and manage risks in individual cases
 - Having an initial model is helpful, but there will need to be a degree of organic development over the first few years of implementation to establish the most effective ways of working

Appendices

Appendix 1: ECHo Business Case & outline operating model

Appendix 2: Herefordshire safeguarding children system

Background papers

None

Glossary

ECHo Edge of Care / Home

EOC Edge of Care

LAC Looked After Child/ren

MASH Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub