

Overall Performance Improvement Plan 23rd April 2007: exceptions report to the Chief Executive and Leader of the Council

EXCEPTIONS

Children and Young People Programme (Status Amber)

Previous reports have drawn attention to the substantial increase in referrals of children in need, ahead of target, and the consequent challenge this success has created in respect of workloads and the timeliness of the much greater number of assessments.

These trends continue. The key end of March 2007 performance figures are as follows (March 2007 targets shown in brackets):

Referrals of children in need per 10,000 under 18 - 266 (220)

% of referrals of children in need leading to initial assessments – 66 (60)

% of initial assessments within 7 working days of referral – 58.7 (75)

No. of core assessments of children in need per 10,000 under 18 – 51.6 (45)

% of core assessments completed within 35 working days of their commencement – 60.9 (80)

Despite the additional appointments already made to strengthen the teams, further qualified social worker resources are required. This has been reflected in the three-year spend-to-save and spend-to-mitigate programme that Cabinet has approved.

At 31st March 50.32 wte posts were filled (an increase of 3.62 against the previous report). Of these, 5 are agency staff. This marginally exceeds the March 2007 target of 50. The target is to reach, by March 2009, an establishment of 15.3 qualified social workers per 10,000 (57 wte posts). (The milestone for March 08 is 53).

Budgetary constraints within 2006-07 did not prevent the timely recruitment of qualified social workers. This is against the background of the continuing challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified social workers. Nationally, it is estimated that the available workforce of qualified social workers represents approximately 80% of the numbers needed. A targeted recruitment campaign during March included national and local advertising and discussions with Gloucestershire University students. As a result 18 applications have been received, 4 candidates have been offered social work posts and a further 5 candidates are scheduled to be interviewed on 5th May.

A review of the Social Worker Recruitment and Retention Strategy has now been carried out and a number of key themes have been identified for further action, as follows:

Recruitment

- need for improved links with local universities
- need to make better use of final year placements
- need for more targeted recruitment aimed at experienced Social Workers in other Authorities

'Growing Our Own'

- need to separate out current process from Adult Services so we have an independent and reliable flow of staff progressing through the qualification route and becoming Social Workers in Herefordshire
- need to extend 'loyalty period' to three years

Induction

- need for more consistent application of Common Induction Standards by managers
- need for a buddy/mentoring system
- need to explore 'rotation' of newly qualified staff

Ongoing Professional Development

- variable experience of Staff Review and Development (SRD) process

Retention

- need for a more defined career development pathway
- need for improved system of recognition and reward
- need for increased visibility of senior management, especially at Leominster office

An interim Performance and Improvement Manager is in post, pending the permanent post-holder taking up the role in June 2007.

GOWM has agreed that the Council has successfully implemented the great majority of the actions and met most of the success criteria in the agreed improvement plan. It has, however, expressed concern about what it sees as inconsistency in the management of key projects and, in particular, graded as "red" in March the draft strategy for children and young people with learning disabilities.

Also in March, GOWM confirmed that the Minister had decided that the GOWM-led improvement board would continue to oversee progress in

Herefordshire for at least another six months (the position to be reviewed in September 2007). Officers are in discussion with GOWM to clarify the nature and extent of this further oversight, and to agree fresh success criteria.

Adult and Community Services Programme (Status Amber)

Cabinet has approved substantial additional investment for the radical improvement over the coming years of adult social care and related services for older people and adults with learning disabilities.

The February exceptions report highlighted delays in the appointment of the three-year Change Team to drive these programmes, which meant that it was not in place by 1st April, as had been planned.

Since then an interim appointment has been made of the Change Manager to lead the team, as well as arrangements made to fill the other posts.

A job description has been agreed with the Alliance to drive the development of community-based preventative measures and maximise external funding. The post will be advertised shortly.

Because it is directly relevant to the Herefordshire Connects programme, the intended Business Process Re-engineer post has been put on temporary hold on the advice of corporate ICT. How to take this forward as an urgent corporate priority will be played into the early work programme with the preferred Connects partner.

The development of employment opportunities for adults with learning disabilities will be achieved by creating a Community Interest Company.

Bringing together all these elements under the leadership of the interim Change Manager, the Change Team is scheduled to meet for the first time at the end of April to begin the detailed design and delivery of the agreed improvements.

This work will continue to be directed and overseen by the Adult and Community Services Improvement Board, as part of the overall Business Transformation Programme.