

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HEREFORDSHIRE ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICES - STAGE ONE

Report By: Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing

(The detailed Review report is enclosed separately for Members of the Committee and is available to the public on request.)

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To inform members of the progress of the Best Value Review and the Stage One report of the Review process: the initial diagnosis and analysis.

Background

2. The Report sets out the current position for the service, the plan for consulting key stakeholders, and an action plan to fill some of the gaps in information and knowledge highlighted by Stage One.
3. A crosscutting Best Value Review of the wide range of services provided to children in public care in Herefordshire (ie, those who are Looked After by the local authority) was reported to Strategic Monitoring Committee in July 2002. The report identified the challenges of addressing the diversity of services offered by a wide range of providers across statutory, voluntary and private sectors to a small but highly significant population. The present report builds on the extensive consultation process of the previous review and focuses on the specific remit of the Council in relation to Adoption and Fostering services.
4. The Children's Resource Team for Herefordshire has a Team Manager for Fostering and one for Adoption. Whilst professional social work staff are allocated to managers for supervisory purposes and are encouraged to develop specialist areas of expertise, many have a mix of responsibilities across both areas of service. Training of prospective Adopters and Foster Carers is undertaken jointly and the Adoption Panel that considers applicants and children being put forward for Adoption also approves permanent Fostering placements. However, the Adoption service and the Fostering service are subject to separate and differing regulatory requirements. This provides a number of complicating factors for the Best Value Review process.

Matters for consideration

5. Performance assessment of social services in Herefordshire, includes the Joint Review by the Social Services Inspectorate and Audit Commission reported to the Council in July 2003. They indicated that both our Adoption and Fostering services compare favourably with those provided by other local authorities. Herefordshire sustains a high proportion of Looked After Children in family settings within foster

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Jon Dudley, Children's Services Manager
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care (over 80%), and has improved the proportion of Looked After Children benefiting from permanent new homes through Adoption.

6. The Council already operates within a "mixed economy of care". The bulk of fostering provision comes from local families recruited, trained and supported by our own staff. Some use is made of placements with independent sector fostering agencies, a number of which are actively recruiting in Herefordshire. The service aim is to use local families to provide good homes to local children and to offer a package of support and remuneration that compares favourably with the independent sector. The Review identifies how we are doing in achieving that aim.
7. Within the last two years, significant changes and requirements have been imposed on the Adoption and Fostering services locally, some predicted and some not. The national and local factors are set out in detail in the Stage One Report.

Financial issues

8. The Review aims to identify how the service can be improved, deliver better outcomes for children and best value overall, within the existing resources allocated.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT (a) the Stage One report be endorsed, with any comments fed back to the Review Team;

and

(b) the Action Plan and Consultation Plan are endorsed as preparatory steps towards a full appraisal of options for the future delivery of service, at Stage Three in the Best Value process.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Appendix One, Stage One Report