

BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HEREFORDSHIRE ADOPTION AND FOSTERING SERVICES - UPDATE

Report By: Director of Social Care and Strategic Housing

Wards Affected

County-wide

Purpose

1. To note progress on the consultation process and development of the Action Plan for the Best Value Review.

Background

2. The Stage One report and consultation plan were reported to this Scrutiny Committee in September 2003. In October 2003 the Council was informed that its Fostering Service would be inspected by the National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) in March 2004. The inspection measures the service against the requirements of Regulations and National Standards. Part of the preparation for the Inspection involves issuing questionnaires to all social workers of children placed by Herefordshire Fostering Service, all children and all foster carers. Following the Inspection, an Action Plan is required to address issues identified by the inspectors.
3. Preparing for the Inspection has demanded considerable extra work by staff. There is a need to avoid duplication of effort, and ensure best use can be made of information gleaned from the Inspection and its associated consultation process. As a result, the timescale for the Best Value Review of Adoption and Fostering has been brought into line with the requirement to produce an action plan in response to the Inspection of the Fostering Service. Initial verbal feedback from NCSC will be forthcoming at the end March, with a written report expected in April. This will then be used to complete the Action Plan for discussion with the Best Value Review team. A new Foster Carers' Handbook has been issued and a Statement of Purpose for the Herefordshire Fostering Service, a copy of which is appended, was agreed by Cabinet on 18th December 2003.
4. The Annual Report of the Herefordshire Adoption Service, considered by this Scrutiny Committee in November 2003, indicated the upsurge in demand for adoptive placements for children, coupled with the increasing level of need of these children, new requirements to provide adoption support services and difficulties recruiting experienced social work staff. Adoption matters will also feature strongly in the Best Value Review Action Plan.

Matters for Consideration

5. Consultation with children in foster care about the service provided for them was a key feature of the Best Value Review and our target of direct consultation with 10% of our looked after children has been achieved. A consultation and involvement day held at the Courtyard Theatre on 18 February was attended by 18 young people in

Further information on the subject of this report is available from Jon Dudley, Children's Services Manager
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foster care. A rich variety of material was produced as a result. Some of the young attendees were interviewed on BBC Radio Hereford and Worcester during the event, which coincided with the BBC "Taking Care" season.

6. The Best Value Review team will be meeting in April to consider the results of consultation and Inspection. An Action Plan will be compiled thereafter, within the timescale prescribed by the NCSC.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the contents of the update report be noted.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Statement of Purpose for the Herefordshire Fostering Service.