

PD/JB

11<sup>th</sup> February 2013

Councillor Hilary McNamee  
Chair  
Schools, Children & Young Overview & Scrutiny Panel  
Floor 2, Civic Office  
Waterdale  
Doncaster  
DN1 3BU

Dear Councillor McNamee

**Out of Authority Placements of Children in Care Scrutiny Review**

Thank you for your letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> January 2013.

Since the discussions were held, and recommendations made, at the Scrutiny and Overview Committee in November 2012, there has been significant progress in managing the Out of Authority (OoA) placements made by Doncaster MBC.

While it is the current trend for increasing the number of children taken into the care of the local authority, each admission is reviewed by the Assistant Director, and she has deemed each and every admission to have been both appropriate and necessary to safeguard the child concerned from significant harm. In addition, the excellent performance of the Fostering Team in recruiting additional in-house foster care resources continues. Over the course of 2012/13, Doncaster has already assessed and approved an additional 38 foster families, providing a total of 54 placements. Although this is a gross rather than net gain, with other foster carers retiring or being de-registered, due to them failing to evidence the necessary skills and competencies, it looks distinctly possible that a further 12 carers will be approved by April 2013. This performance in itself has reduced some of the pressure on the need for Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements, with all of the inherent additional costs they bring. In addition, the Fostering team is becoming more adept at targeted recruitment such as for older children and children with some degree of learning needs, and they are currently involved in commissioning remand foster care placements, to minimise the chances of remands to custody.



In addition, the in-house residential sector is playing a key role in the managing of this financial risk. Whereas for most of last year they operated at around the 70% capacity, they will, as of next week, be at 100% capacity, with a further two young people waiting to move from OoA residential placements. Together with the work that the fostering team is doing, we are moving towards a position whereby young people are placed out of authority because they have enhanced needs that Doncaster providers cannot meet, as opposed to a lack of supply of appropriate placements.

In addition, the Commissioning and Contracts service has developed strong links with private organisations to provide a wider choice of semi-supported and independent living placements for young people aged 16+. This means that we can abbreviate their time in expensive OoA placements, with a greater degree of confidence that they will be more likely of making the successful transition to independent living, and thus are less likely to face opposition from the Independent Reviewing Officer, or face a legal challenge to such plans.

Further work has been undertaken with the Youth Offending Service to provide an effective alternative to remand to custody schemes. Given that research indicates that up to 75% of young people remanded into custody ultimately do not receive a custodial sentence, we hope to instil in the courts sufficient confidence to support alternative to remand proposals, and thus reduce the financial burden recently delegated to the local authority by central Government.

However, by far the most significant piece of work has been the establishing of the Placement Review Project, which is deemed to be so crucial to addressing the financial pressure that the Director of Children and Young People's Service has taken direct personal oversight of it. This Project is planning the return of up to 131 children to in-house placements, with a total annual expenditure of those placements amounting to £9.6m. The work of the project is split into 7 strands, with a senior manager being allocated to each individual strand to ensure clear accountability :-

- Transition from OoA placement to Adults Services (6 placements)
- OoA to 16+supported Living placements (15 placements)
- OoA to foster care (8 placements)
- Education Transitions (27 placements)
- IFA placements to adoption (24 placements)
- IFA placements to long-term in-house foster care (44 placements)
- IFA placements to Special Guardianship Orders, Residence Orders or rehab home (7 placements).



Not all of these transfers may be achievable, but by "casting the net wide", it is hoped we will make significant inroads into the budget overspend. For example, strands 5 and 6 are dependent on an even more improved recruitment performance within the Fostering and Adoption teams. In addition, where young people are achieving positive outcomes, its proposed moves can face opposition from the IRO and require removal from the list.

However, at the same time, other young people not previously considered for a return to in-house provision have been added to the strand list. A significant amount of awareness-raising work has been undertaken with the social work teams to ensure that they fully commit to the process. As a result, a cultural change has become discernable in the social work teams, whereby they are less likely to view OoA placements as being a remedy for the enhanced needs of our children in care, and have become more likely to propose their young people to become part of this project. There has been a history of "drift" with Doncaster, but this project is already evidencing it is going to be fundamental in improving social work practices as a whole. Thus, out of the 23 placements originally identified to return in-house, 12 were due to move before the end of the financial year, and out of these 12 placements :-

- Six young people have already left.
- Four more are close to transition, and will move within the next 4-6 weeks.
- For the two remaining plans, it is still unclear as to whether they will be completed within the timescale set.
- Over the past 3 months, a further 9 young people who were not in the original 23 have either already left, or are on target to transfer to in-house placements before the end of the financial year, meaning the original target has been exceeded.
- Only one additional OoA residential placement has been made over this period on care grounds, (ie non-educational or Youth Justice placement).

In addition, the Resource Panel, by which applications to place children in OoA Foster or Residential placements are considered has, over the past 3 months, become a much more rigorous gatekeeping process, in which agreement to place externally has become very much the exception rather than the norm. In addition, by virtue of the Panel consisting of Health, Commissioning, CAMHS and CYPS managers, it can and has been quite imaginative in shuffling the resources at our disposal to minimise the number of new placements purchased.

That is not to say that this is all about finances, although admittedly finances are a significant consideration. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel was correct in identifying that OoA placements bring with them their own inherent risks. For example, young people who are placed outside of the Doncaster area, for a significant proportion of their childhood, will have limited family, social, employment and training connections on their return, at or around their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, making that transition to adulthood a much greater risk.



In addition, experience evidences that IFA placements are as likely as in-house placements to disrupt for a young person, leading to a loss of stability, and indeed given the comparative lower allowances they receive, there is an argument that in-house carers are more altruistic in their motivation to foster children from Doncaster.

CYPS would certainly also endorse the Panel's recommendation that where an OoA placement is deemed to be absolutely necessary, that it is as much as practicable located within the "doughnut" of neighbouring authorities. This will enable social workers and placement commissioners to take a much more rigorous oversight challenge approach of these placements. For example, they will be far better placed to ensure that young people with enhanced needs are in fact receiving the therapeutic interventions, or increased staffing support, for which Doncaster is being charged, to maintain that placement.

However, some of the recommendations made by the Panel appear, at this stage, to be less feasible. CYPS would be less in support of the proposal for geographical partnership working, whereby social workers assume supervisory responsibility for Doncaster children placed in their area. Such a move would dilute the management oversight of social work interventions, impede quality assurance processes, and create difficulties in terms of IT case management system compatibility. In addition, where young people experience a number of placement moves, their social worker is often the most consistent thing in their lives, and this would be lost if the social worker had to be changed every time they changed placement.

The issue of private companies developing links with the local community, when they are considering establishing a care home in the Doncaster area, may be a laudable aim, but not one without its own issues. At present, legislation does not require private provider organisations to inform or consult local authorities regarding a proposal to establish a residential unit in their area. As a result, the CYPS is more often than not unaware of how many children are placed in the Doncaster area by other local authorities, and it is often not until the Council's Planning Committee consider an application, that the proposals become more widely known. This lack of transparency brings obvious safeguarding risks, but until the Government act on the review they are currently undertaking in respect of this, then the scope to enforce such an expectation on private providers will be somewhat limited.

Further work can still be undertaken with our health colleagues to ensure that they commit a more equitable share of these placement costs. Doncaster CYPS, for example, still underwrite too great a proportion of the costs for therapeutic interventions where the "front-door" CAMHS service have stated they cannot meet that young person's needs, despite this very clearly being an unmet health rather than social need.



The only existing forum for agreeing funding splits is the Continuing Care Panel, and this remains overly bureaucratic and cumbersome, with an assessment process that automatically excludes many of our young people in terms of the access criteria. Future work could usefully involve working with our Health partners to agree a process that will facilitate a more equitable means of considering funding splits for such enhanced services.

However, having said that, I hope that this update gives the Panel the reassurance that the CYPS has given this matter all the due seriousness that it warrants, and that the work undertaken thus far provides the Panel with the confidence that the OoA budget will be far better managed in the future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Davies', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Peter Davies**  
**Mayor of Doncaster**



