

Report to: Governance Committee

Date of meeting: 26 September 2024

By: Chief Executive

Title: Appointment of Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation post, Children's Services

Purpose: To seek the Governance Committee's agreement to the appointment to a new Assistant Director post within Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

The Governance Committee is recommended to agree to the appointment to a new post of Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation, Children's Services.

1 Background

1.1 The Governance Committee are aware of the significant financial challenges facing the Council. As detailed in the reports to Cabinet on 26 September covering quarter one performance and Reconciling Policy Performance and Resources outlook for 2025/26, one of the most pressured areas of spend is children with the most complex needs. In particular there is ongoing growth and complexity of demand and increased costs in children's social care, special educational needs and disability (SEND) and home to school transport. A key area of focus is management of the care market and strengthened commissioning of places. Care placements for looked after children where increased complexity of need, coupled with significant limitations in the availability of suitable placements and dysfunction in the care market, have led to a substantial escalation in the cost of residential placements over the last 18 months – two years with the average weekly cost rising from circa £870 to £1411, resulting in an overall cost increase of £25.6m per year. In total the authority is forecasting to spend a net £114.8m per year on Children's social care in 2024/25.

1.2 The Council has taken significant action to manage the growing spend and demand but more work and focus is needed, particularly working with a wide range of partners and the care market. This proposal will create the additional senior management expertise and capacity needed. Without it the improvements in outcomes needed for children and young people in East Sussex and the management of the budget and effective system working will not be achieved effectively.

2 Supporting information

2.1 In response to these challenges, as regularly reported to Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee, the Council has put in place programmes of work and investment to address the issues including the embedding of Valuing Care principles and processes to ensure children receive the right care, in the right place, for the right amount of time, and the introduction of family safeguarding to support families to stay together wherever possible, and to enable reunification of children with their family where appropriate. However, in order to manage resources more effectively across the East Sussex system and deliver a sustainable reduction in cost per placement in this area, there is a need to look at how we can shape and deliver integrated commissioning activities across Early Help Children's Social Care (EHSC), Education, Health and external providers for Children's Services.

2.2 In addition, we are entering a period of fundamental change as we make sure we can support families as early as possible to prevent escalation of need. There is a need to have senior strategic capacity and expertise to lead these change initiatives across the Children's system,

responding to national policy change to help drive improvements in outcomes and ensure that families receive the right help at the right time.

2.3 To that end and following due consideration of our existing senior capacity within Children's Services, we have determined the need for an additional Assistant Director post with responsibility for helping the department become financially sustainable by overseeing the work to develop a robust placement sufficiency strategy that delivers high quality placements, supports strong outcomes for children and delivers best value for money. The post will have management accountability for Looked After Children (LAC) directly provided services, be the East Sussex strategic lead for the Regional Care Collaborative programme of work in the South East, support the development of the right provision for children with SEND and lead on system transformation to manage down demand.

2.4 The post will be a significant role and key tasks and responsibilities, including responsibility for a budget of circa £225M across all areas of commissioning and resources in Children's Services. The post has been considered under the Council's job grading arrangements and graded as LMG 8, with a salary range of £98,117 - £107,046 per annum.

2.5 The funding for the new post is realigned existing resources after a review and not additional funding. The additional capacity is essential to manage the resources we have as effectively as possible at the same time as achieving the system changes needed.

2.6 The Localism Act 2011 requires local authorities to prepare a pay policy statement setting out their policies in relation to the pay of its workforce, including for senior staff. In preparing the Statement the Council must have regard to the guidance approved by the Secretary of State. The guidance sets out that full Council (or a meeting of members) should be offered the opportunity to vote before packages of more than £100,000 are offered in respect of a new appointment. The ESCC Pay Policy Statement which was approved by Full Council on 6th February 2024 provides for this approval to be undertaken by the Governance Committee.

2.7 The overall management capacity of the County Council is kept under close review to ensure it is at the appropriate level and regularly benchmarked against other councils. Our current arrangements across the top three tiers demonstrate good value for money in terms of breadth of budget and management responsibility. It will continue to be kept under close review.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Given the scale of the challenges, this post is essential to provide the right alignment of senior leadership capacity and expertise in Children's Services to respond to the range of issues faced. The Governance Committee is therefore recommended to agree to the appointment to a new post of Assistant Director, Commissioning and Transformation, Children's Services, and if agreed would be appointed to by the Member Recruitment Panel.

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