

<p>Children and Families Service Full and Mid Year Update Report to Members 2020-21 (updated September 2021)</p> <p>Key Decision No: CE S038</p>	
<p>CABINET MEETING DATE (2021/22)</p> <p>24 January 2022</p>	<p>CLASSIFICATION:</p> <p>Open</p>
<p>WARD(S) AFFECTED</p> <p>All Wards</p>	
<p>CABINET MEMBER</p> <p>Councillor Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children’s Social Care</p>	
<p>KEY DECISION</p> <p>No</p>	
<p>REASON</p>	
<p>GROUP DIRECTOR</p> <p>Jacque Burke, Group Director of Children and Education</p>	

1. CABINET MEMBER’S INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. I have requested this report from the Group Director for Children and Education. My role as Lead Member for Children’s Services requires me to ensure that the Local Authority fulfils its legal responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and young people in Hackney. As such, I wish to ensure that services with the important mandate of protecting Hackney’s children and young people from risk of harm are understood across all areas of the Council.

- 1.2. This has been a challenging year marked by the Covid 19 pandemic, the impact of the criminal cyber attack in October 2020 and significant changes in leadership. The Hackney Children and Families workforce has shown great resilience, making a difference to the lives of vulnerable children whilst constantly focusing on learning and improving practice.
- 1.3. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted how we worked with children and their families over the last eighteen months. I have seen our staff work tirelessly to maintain meaningful and effective relationships with children and families, to provide additional support to domestic abuse victims, to ensure children continued to receive free school meals and that those in need were provided with internet access or devices to continue their education remotely.
- 1.4. Hackney Council was the victim of a serious cyberattack in October 2020. For the Children and Families Service, the attack meant that the social care management system (Mosaic) and document management systems (Comino and eDOCS) were unavailable. We took immediate steps to safeguard and support children and families including working closely with partner agencies to gather essential information. We also took immediate action so that practitioners could continue to record their work from the first day of the cyberattack and we have built an interim social care recording system. Our aim is for all case recording to be completed on a new Mosaic system from April 2022.
- 1.5. We continue to recognise that racism and oppression remains prevalent in Britain today and is systemic and endemic across society. Our Anti-Racist Position Statement makes clear the journey we need to take as a service to improve the experience of the children and families of Hackney who are disproportionately affected by racism, as well as the experience and progression of staff.
- 1.6. In July 2021, Ofsted undertook a two-day focused visit in Hackney on the theme of arrangements for children in need or subject to a child protection plan. They found evidence of dedicated scrutiny by senior leaders and strengthened management oversight, that risk to children is understood and responded to appropriately, and clear planning and decision-making provide direction and clarity to our work. Most importantly, inspectors found that children are safe. We welcome this feedback, the advice on where to strengthen our practice and the recognition that we are on a positive journey of improvement. We know that we have further work to do to achieve consistently good practice to meet our aspiration to provide good and outstanding services for our children and families in Hackney.

2. GROUP DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

- 2.1. Children's services in Hackney work in partnership to protect children and keep them safe from harm and help them thrive. The Children and Families' Service is the key service designed to protect children by working with

families to support safe and effective parenting where children are at risk of significant harm. Where it is not possible for children to be safely cared for within their family network, the local authority will look after those children. This report provides Members with oversight of activities within the Children and Families' Service including performance updates and information about key service developments and information about vulnerable adolescents and adoption. The report also includes information on Young Hackney, the Council's early help, prevention and diversion service for children and young people aged 6-19 years old and up to 25 years if the young person has a special education need or disability. Information on the Service's work with children and young people through Hackney of Tomorrow (Hackney's Children in Care Council) is included in the report.

3. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Cabinet is recommended to note the content of the Children and Families Annual Report 2020/202 (appendix 1), endorse the report and recommend it to Full Council.

4. REASONS FOR DECISION

The report is for information and endorsement only

5. DETAILS OF ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Not applicable

6. BACKGROUND

This report summarises progress against key areas for the service.

6.1. Policy Context

This report summarises progress against key areas for the service.

6.2. Equality Impact Assessment

There are no new decisions within the report that require an Equality Impact Assessment.

6.3. Sustainability

There are no issues within the report that impact on the physical and social environment

6.4. Consultations

The report does not contain any issues or decisions that require consultation.

6.5. Risk Assessment

There are no proposals for action that require a risk assessment.

7. COMMENTS OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE RESOURCES

- 7.1. This annual report covers the period 2020-21. The outturn for 2020/21 for the Children and Families Service on a net budget of £61.5m was an overspend of £3.2m after use of grants and reserves of £10.5m including a drawdown on the Commissioning Reserve of £3.9m and £4.7m of Social Care Grant funding. The overspend of £3.2m including £2m of Covid-19 related expenditure incurred by the service. There has been a requirement to draw down from the Commissioning Reserve since 2012/13 due to the increased number of children in care and a shortage of in-house foster carers.
- 7.2. The financial position for 2021/22 is a net budget of £61m for the Children and Families Service, and the service is forecasting to overspend by £2.4m (as at October 2021) after use of reserves and drawdown of grants totalling £13.2m (including full use of the commissioning activity reserve of £3.7m and £6.3m of Social Care Grant funding). The overspend of £2.4m includes £1.2m of Covid-19 related expenditure incurred by the service. Within the current forecast, cost reduction proposals have been agreed by the service to reduce the overspend.
- 7.3. The Children and Families Service has continued to make contributions to the efficiency agenda of the Council. Over the previous eight years the service has delivered £11.6m savings with a further £280k being delivered in 2021/22. The increase in commissioning costs has been driven by an increase in the number of looked after children since 2011/12. There is a continuation of a large proportion of children being placed with independent fostering agencies (IFAs) due to a lack of suitable in-house foster carers. The cost of an IFA care arrangement is significantly greater than that of an in-house care arrangement.
- 7.4. Hackney has also seen an increase in residential care arrangements since 2015 adding considerable budget pressures with an average annual unit cost of £250k. We are also seeing a rise in the number of under 18s in high-cost semi-independent care arrangements. Where young people in their late teens are deemed to be vulnerable, and in many cases are transitioning from residential to semi-independent care arrangements, where they still require a high level of support and in extreme circumstances bespoke crisis packages. These pressures have been recognised by the Group Director of Finance & Corporate Resources with a growth of £10.1m in total included in the budget.

8. VAT IMPLICATIONS ON LAND & PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS

There are no VAT implications in this report.

9. COMMENTS OF THE DIRECTOR OF LEGAL & GOVERNANCE SERVICES

- 9.1. In line with Article 5.2 of the Council's Constitution, Cabinet will carry out all of the Council's Local Authority functions which are not the responsibility of any other part of the Council. The Elected Mayor may choose to delegate functions to be carried out by the Cabinet collectively that set priorities that contribute to the life and development of the Borough and those that improve the economic, social and environmental well being of Hackney and its inhabitants. As outlined in section 3 of this report, Cabinet is recommended to note the report and recommend it to Full Council which has the authority to agree the strategic direction of the Council. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - The Children and Families Service 2020/21 Full Year Report to Members.

EXEMPT

Open

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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