

Title of Report	Children and Families Service Full and Mid Year Update Report to Members 2021-22 (updated September 2022)
Key Decision No	Non Key Decision
For Consideration By	Cabinet
Meeting Date	23 January 2023
Cabinet Member	Councillor Anntoinette Bramble, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Education, Young People and Children's Social Care
Classification	Open
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Key Decision & Reason	No
Implementation Date if Not Called In	N/A
Group Director	Jacque Burke, Group Director of Children and Education

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 another challenging year as we have continued our recovery from both the pandemic and the cyber attack in 2022. We have hit a key milestone in our recovery from the cyber attack with the successful reintroduction of our case recording system Mosaic in April 2022, and I know that this has come as a very welcome return for our practitioners. We still have lots of work to do with the development of our system and our reporting capability, so this marks the beginning of that development, and I do not underestimate the significant efforts that colleagues across the Service have made to get us to this position.

- 1.3. Our entire community was shocked to learn of the experiences of Child Q. This has led us to redouble our focus on anti-racism. I was very proud to be part of our first Anti Racist Praxis Conference in May 2022, focusing on the process of unmasking, repairing and preventing the hidden wounds of racial trauma, in attempts to address racialised trauma experienced within services by our Black and Global Majority children and families. The conference was followed by a week of learning for our staff with a series of keynote speakers and several workshops across four days, aiming to equip staff with vital knowledge and skills to begin to understand and unpick the trauma of racial oppression.
- 1.4. Our improvement progress was recognised during a positive focused visit by Ofsted in September 2022, who came to look at the experiences of arrangements for 'front door' services, including decision-making and thresholds for referrals about children, child protection enquiries, decisions to step up or down from early help, and emergency action out of hours. I am delighted with the recognition of our strong practice in this area and will be working with leaders to drive our improvement actions even further to address the recommendations made during the visit. These recommendations included the need to strengthen our supervision arrangements, and to ensure caseloads are manageable so that cases can be transferred in a timely way to the correct team. 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. **Recommendations**

- 3.1. **Cabinet is recommended to note the content of the Children and Families Annual Report 2021/2022 (Appendix 1), endorse the report and recommend it to Full Council.**

4. **Reason(s) for decision**

- 4.1. The report is for information and endorsement only

5. **Details of alternative options considered and rejected**

- 5.1. Not applicable

6. **Background**

Policy Context

- 6.1. This report summarises progress against key areas for the service.

Equality impact assessment

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

Sustainability and climate change

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

Consultations

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

Risk assessment

- 6.5. 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 2021-22. The outturn for 2021/22 for the Children and Families Service on a net budget of £61.6m was an overspend of £2.4m after use of grants and reserves of £11.8m including a drawdown on the commissioning reserve of £3.97m 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. There has been a requirement to draw down from the commissioning reserve since 2012/13 due to the increase in complexity and the number of children in care.

- 7.2. The financial position for 2022/23 is a net budget of £64.2m for the Children and Families Service, and the service is forecasting to overspend by £1.6m (as at October 2022) after use of reserves and drawdown of grants totalling £13.1m (including full use of the commissioning activity reserve of £4.6m and £8.5m of Social Care Grant funding). Within the current forecast, cost reduction proposals have been agreed by the service to reduce the overspend within the year, and these are tracked on a monthly basis.
- 7.3. The Children and Families Service has continued to make contributions to the efficiency agenda of the Council. Over the previous nine years the service has delivered £11.9m savings with a further £650k targeted to be delivered in 2022/23. The increase in commissioning costs has been driven by an increase in complexity and 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 placement is significantly greater than that of an in-house placement. The service continues to be proactive in recruiting in-house foster carers to meet demands across the service.
- 7.4. Hackney has also seen an increase in residential placements since 2015 adding considerable budget pressures with an average annual unit cost of £263k. There have been some improvements more recently in the number of residential placements, and the service is working proactively to reduce the level of placements. We are also seeing a rise in the number of under 18s in high-cost semi-independent placements. Where young people in their late teens are deemed to be vulnerable, and in many cases are transitioning from residential to semi-independent placements, they may 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 £11.2m in total included in the budget across a number of financial years.

8. **VAT implications on land and property transactions**

- 8.1. There are no VAT implications in this report.

9. **Comments of the Director of Legal, Democratic and Electoral 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.

9.2. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - The Children and Families Service 2021/22 Full Year Report to Members.

Background documents

None.

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