

**DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**27 November 2012**

**Report of the Strategic Director for Children & Younger Adults**

**CONTACT PILOT – (Young People)**

**1. Purpose of Report**

To seek approval to commission a pilot Social Care Contact Service for an initial period of 12 months with an option to extend on an annual basis for a further period of up to three years at an annual cost not exceeding £200,000 in the Bolsover and North East Derbyshire Districts. The two pilot district council areas form a single social care geographical area led by one “Safeguarding and Specialist” social care manager. The contract’s anticipated start date would be 1 June 2013. The contact pilot proposal is one of several initiatives in Derbyshire aimed at reducing the Children in Care population. The pilot will reduce the time that frontline social work staff are engaged in contact supervision, enabling them to focus on skilled family support work.

**2. Information and Analysis**

Eight Social Care Family Support Centres operate across Derbyshire. They provide the following services:-

- Parenting assessments when professionals have concern.
- Intervention to improve parenting skills.
- Court assessments to enable family courts to make decisions about plans for children who are the subject of care proceedings.
- Supervised contact between Children in Care and their birth families.

The staff groups are highly skilled and knowledgeable and external evaluation shows they provide a high quality service.

The Children in Care population has grown from 600 to over 700 in the last three years resulting in a significant increase in court ordered supervised contact between children and their birth families.

This increase in demand has had a direct impact on the capacity of the Family Support Centres and has reduced their ability to undertake preventative work aimed at enabling children to remain with their families or to be safely returned to their families from care.

A large percentage of the contact provided by Social Care Family Support Centres does not require their specialist skills. In some, social worker time is also spent undertaking low level contact.

The proposal is to commission a provider on a pilot basis to provide up to 3,600 low level contacts. The pilot area proposed is Bolsover and North East Derbyshire Districts. The average internal unit cost of one contact episode ranges from £81.11 to £110.62, the majority occurring at the lower end of the cost spectrum. A 'testing the market' process suggests that an external provider could deliver contact for somewhere in the region of two thirds of this unit cost.

The provider will be selected using criteria that assess the organisational experience of working with similar families and situations, and the ability to meet the specified outcome of a timely and effective cost efficient contact service. It is envisaged that any successful provider would be able to demonstrate full compliance with the CRB regime.

Commissioning an external provider will release 5.8 FTE Family Support Workers and 2.4 FTE social workers, which equates to £313,000 of skilled staff resources.

The impact of the pilot provision will be evaluated throughout with a focus on:

- 1) Cost effectiveness.
- 2) Quality, consistency and flexibility.

During the period of the pilot, the time released to the Family Support Centres will be focused on intervention to enable children on the edge of care proceedings to remain in their birth families by improving their parents' ability to safely care for them. Where this cannot be achieved the Local Authority will be in a strong position to use the evidence provided by the Family Support Centre to plan quickly for permanent alternative care for the children, thus reducing the delays often associated with care proceedings. This is in support of the overall strategy to safely reduce the numbers of Children in Care in Derbyshire and be consistent with national guidance.

During the period of the pilot the target for Bolsover and North East Derbyshire Family Support Centre is to enable 10 children to remain within their birth families, avoiding costs of between £156,000 and £416,000 from the placement budget for children in care. Numbers of children in care, including admissions and discharges, are monitored and reported on a weekly basis across all districts. The impact of the new contact arrangements on children in care numbers will be assessed through these monitoring processes already in place and through comparing trends and numbers of the pilot areas to baseline data and to other areas within Derbyshire. Feedback will also be sought from practitioners to gather their views on the impact of the new arrangements on the numbers of children in care and some case studies will be identified where

the additional time for preventative work has enabled the child or young person to remain with their family rather than being taken into care.

If the target of a reduction of children in care by 10 is achieved, and subject to positive evaluation, the pilot will be considered for roll-out across the County with a proposal that the anticipated cost avoidance be reinvested in a countywide commissioned service for provision of supervised contact.

### 3. **Financial Considerations**

The contract for the contact pilot will cost up to £200,000 for the 2013-14 financial year and be met from the 2011/12 unallocated underspend. Any option to extend on the contract for a further period of up to three years on an annual basis would be subject to further authorisation from cabinet for funding.

### 4. **Legal Considerations**

The proposals detailed support the aims of the Council as detailed in the Council Plan, in terms of providing coordinated services which safeguard children and young people at risk of harm and providing the best possible start in life for Children and Young People.

The contract will be for an initial period of one year with an option to extend on an annual basis for a further period of up to three years.

The contract will be procured in accordance with the EU payment regulations and will also be advertised on Source Derbyshire.

### 5. **Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime & disorder, equality of opportunity; and environmental, health, human resources, property and transport considerations.

### 6. **Key Decision**

No.

### 7. **Strategic Director's Recommendations**

1. To pilot a Contact Service for one year at an annual cost of not more than £200,000 in the Bolsover and North East Districts of Derbyshire to reduce the Children in Care population.

**Ian Thomas**  
**Strategic Director for Children and Younger Adults**