

<b>CYP SELECT COMMITTEE</b>		
<b>Report Title</b>	Realignment of Meliot Road Family Assessment Provision	
<b>Key Decision</b>	No	Item No. 7
<b>Ward</b>	All	
<b>Contributors</b>	Stephen Kitchman, Director of Children's Social Care	
<b>Class</b>	Open	Date: 10 <sup>th</sup> November 2016

## 1. Summary of the report

- 1.1 Further to the Select Committee of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and Mayor & Cabinet Meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> September 2016, this report provides a progress update on the development of proposals for the redesign of the Meliot Road Family Assessment Centre and consequent budget savings.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note and comment on the contents of the report and to agree to review the full savings report to Mayor and Cabinet at the January 2017 Select Committee.

## 3. Policy Context

- 3.1 The proposals within this report are consistent with 'Shaping Our Future: Lewisham's Sustainable Community Strategy' and the Council's corporate priorities. In particular, they relate to the Council's priorities regarding young people's achievement and involvement, including inspiring and supporting young people to achieve their potential, the protection of children and young people and ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the delivery of excellent services to meet the needs of the community.
- 3.2 It supports the delivery of Lewisham's Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP), which sets out the Council's vision for improving outcomes for all children and young people, and in so doing ensuring children Stay safe by
- a) identifying and protect children and young people at risk of harm and ensure they feel safe, especially from:
    - Domestic violence and abuse
    - Child sexual exploitation
    - Serious youth violence

- Child abuse and neglect
- Deliberate and accidental injury
- b) Reducing anti-social behaviour and youth offending.
- c) Ensuring that our Looked After Children are safe.

3.3 The National Family Justice Review 2011 recommended that criteria for using expert evidence in family proceedings should be strengthened to avoid the lengthy delays which commissioning and unnecessary or superfluous reports can create. Provisions in the Children and Families Act 2014 and changes to the Family Procedure Rules 2010 mean that expert evidence can now only be ordered where the judge deems it to be necessary to resolve the case justly, and where the information sought cannot be obtained from one of the parties. This has significantly reduced the requirement for expert witnesses and Independent Social Worker use by the Court.

#### 4. Details

4.1 At Select Committee of 14<sup>th</sup> September 2014 a referral was made that:

*“The Committee was concerned regarding the potential effects of changing staffing structures and requested that should this proposal be agreed by Mayor and Cabinet, the full report for Mayor and Cabinet on the proposed service change be provided to the Children and Young People Select Committee for scrutiny prior to it going to Mayor and Cabinet.”*

4.2 This report represents a progress update on proposed changes to the Meliot Road Family Assessment Centre. It is intended that the final full report regarding detailed proposed changes will be provided to Select Committee at the meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> January 2017. The changes proposed are complex and require thorough analysis of financial spend, patterns of contact, demand for assessment as well as analysis of capacity and consultation/feedback from staff affected. This will be completed prior to the January Committee.

4.3 The Meliot Road Family Assessment Centre currently provides:

- Assessment of parenting capacity for children within Care Proceedings, where it has been deemed by the Court to be unsafe for a parent to care for their child at that point in time.
- Assistance with assessment of parental care when a child is subject to a child protection plan.
- Assistance with rehabilitation plans of children in Local Authority care to their parents

4.4 Within care proceedings, in most circumstances, when children are removed from their parents care, the court will order contact with parents, which often requires supervision. It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to organise and facilitate this supervision. Currently supervised contact is arranged via spot purchase of contact via 3 main providers. The current arrangements have been reviewed and officers assess them as not representing best value for money nor is this provision benchmarked by the Local Authority against quality standards.

4.5 In line with the above changes have been proposed to:

- Help meet the savings requirements applied to Children's Social Care in line with the impact of the Government's austerity measures.
- Maximise the skills, development and learning for front line practitioners.
- Deliver a service in line with arrangements used in most other local authorities.
- Improve the service for parent-child contact by developing an in house contact service, allowing quality assured, flexible and appropriate provision to our most vulnerable children.
- Ensure that services are provided are value for money and delivered within the most effective and efficient arrangements.

4.6 To facilitate the above change programme as well as impact assessment the following activity has been completed to date:

- Management arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the change process works smoothly and to ensure that the full proposal to elected members addresses all of members' concerns and the needs of service users.
- The manager responsible has met with HR to begin the formal consultation process in relation to staff, as necessary.
- Informal consultation has been held with the responsible team manager of the Meliot Centre; this was undertaken and helped shape the original proposal.
- The Director of Children's Social Care has met with the affected staff team at the Meliot Road Centre. The Team had already been seeking some changes to current arrangements as they felt that the current arrangements were not always maximising the use of skills within the team. This proposal seeks to address this concern.
- Proposals on changes to the Meliot Centre have also been shared at the Children's Social Care Managers meeting, a forum for all managers within the service and at the recently developed All Staff Forum, a meeting for all staff within the service.
- Initial analysis has been undertaken by the Looked after Children Commissioner on contact demand, quality and savings in conjunction with our Finance team.
- Discussion has been held with our Principal Solicitor as well as informal discussion with our link Judge within the Central Family Court.

#### Next steps

4.7 The output of this initial consultation process will inform the next iteration of the proposals. These will be written up and will form the basis for discussion with managers and front line staff across the service. The resulting report will come to CYP Select Committee in January 2017 followed by Mayor and Cabinet in February 2017.

## 5. Financial implications

5.1 There are no specific financial implications from this report as it updates members on the work that is progressing to deliver proposed budget savings which have already been subject to a wider report. When the final report on the specifics of this proposal is complete it will have financial implications and these will be detailed at that time.

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 The statutory requirement to provide child protection and child in need services obviously rest with the Local Authority, which also has the responsibility of issuing and conducting care proceedings, should the need arise in order to protect the children in any family. As part of that process, parenting and family functioning assessments are undertaken, and, if the children are removed from the parents care on an interim basis, the Local Authority has a duty to promote contact between the children and parents, unless it is not in the children's interests to do so. Ongoing contact maintains family relationships, so that if it is possible for the children to return home, the relationships have been maintained. Contact can reassure children as to the welfare of their parent/s, particularly if there have been health issues or other matters which impair the parents functioning and about which the children have anxiety. Contact arranged during the currency of the care proceedings themselves can also be observed and if necessary supervised, to ensure that the children's emotional and physical safety is not endangered, and such observation/ supervision may also provide valuable material upon which professional judgement may be based as to the ongoing care planning.

## **7. Crime and disorder implications**

- 7.1 There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

## **8. Equalities implications**

- 8.1 There will be an equalities impact assessment as part of the final report on this proposal.

## **9. Environmental implications**

- 9.1 There are no environmental implications arising from this report.

## **10. Background documents and originator**

If there are any queries on this report please contact Stephen Kitchman on 020 8314 8140.