

Decision Pathway – Report



PURPOSE: Key decision

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 05 September 2023

TITLE	Department for Education (DfE) Newton Europe Enhanced Diagnostic Grant		
Ward(s)	All wards		
Author: Fiona Tudge	Job title: Director Children and Families and Safer Communities		
Cabinet lead: Cllr Asher Craig Deputy Mayor with responsibility for Children’s Services, Education and Equalities	Executive Director lead: Abi Gbago, Executive Director Children and Education (DCS)		
Proposal origin: Other			
Decision maker: Cabinet Member Decision forum: Cabinet			
Purpose of Report: To seek approval to accept and spend DfE Newton Europe Enhanced Diagnostic grant of approximately £500k.			
Evidence Base: 1. Background <p>The Ofsted ILACS inspection of children services in January 2023 judged services to children as Require Improvement to be Good. This was the second inspection that graded Bristol as Requires Improvement under the ILACS Framework. In order for improvement work to be accelerated, improve outcomes for children and increase financial sustainability, Bristol was invited to be part of a pilot programme of work with Newton Europe as part of the DfE-brokered Enhanced Diagnostic Programme.</p> <p>The key areas of improvement highlighted in our recent inspection were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The timeliness and consistency with which initial decisions about thresholds for access to services are matched to children’s levels of risk and need, to help ensure that they routinely receive timely and proportionate support.• The timeliness and consistency with which child protection strategy meetings are held, primarily, within the First Assessment Service (FAS) when children may be at risk of significant harm.• The timeliness of initial health assessments for children coming into care.• The reliability and effectiveness of performance management and quality assurance arrangements.• The consistency and effectiveness of assessments and support to children living in private fostering arrangements.• The effectiveness of some aspects of joint working with partner agencies, in particular health and the police <p>Newton Europe deliver an enhance programme which is a diagnostic piece of work set up to identify the highest impact areas for a local authority to help improve the outcomes for their Children and Young People. The main focus of the diagnostic is better outcomes for children with a clear link to the Ofsted reports and LA spend in Children Social Services. The diagnostic programme involved review of performance data, financial data and reviews of outcomes for children through review groups with practitioners.</p> 2. Diagnostic			

The Diagnostic concluded there were three key priority areas that would have the most impact for our children and at the same time deliver financial efficiencies.

- Workforce and recruitment is fundamental to the quality of practice and impacts on all work across the areas of opportunities. The opportunities described to improve recruitment and retention will make the largest impact and have a good evidence base regarding being successful.
- Improving our internal provision will enable us to keep our children local and better connected to family and friends and continuing attendance at their known education provision. Alongside this, internal provision is more cost effective. The opportunities described to improve internal provision are evidenced based and have proven good successful outcomes.
- Research tells us that for some children who come into care when they are older their outcomes do not always improve and we know this is a financial pressure for the service. The opportunities described will support us to ensure there is the right provision and we work with children to support them remaining at home within their families and communities.

1. Workforce sufficiency challenges are impacting the services' ability to improve consistency

The Enhance Diagnostic looked to understand some of the underlying reasons that we are unable to provide a consistent service. The diagnostic first looked to understand where pressure is currently held within the system and found a trend of reducing CIN starts linked to an increase in work with our Early help teams. Further work with our social work teams explored their perceptions of this challenge. Each of our Service teams were surveyed on this issue with 42% of teams recognising that they do not provide a consistent service for Children and young People in Bristol. The survey response highlighted some key challenges around the service capacity impacting on the available time to work with Children and also time for staff to train. This appears to be impacting the application of thresholds culturally across the survey with Early Help holding increasingly complex work as social work team prioritise those children at highest risk of harm. Staff Survey – "There is limited time for training / reflection across teams & the areas."

Increasing vacancy rates and inexperience in children's social work teams is a significant and growing risk for the Local Authority. As of the 31st March 2023 there were 169 Social Workers permanently employed in frontline statutory services. This reflects a vacancy rate of 18.3% (against the latest national social worker vacancy rate of 19.8%). Whilst this benchmarks against national vacancy rates Bristol is experiencing a much steeper trajectory in workforce sufficiency challenges as in September 2021 we had a vacancy rate of 1.3% and the average vacancy rate as reported in statutory workforce census between 2018 and 2021 was 3.2%. The vacancy rate is particularly acute within our Area Social Work teams (25.3%) and Disabled Children and Specialist Services (20.8%) in March 2023, both of which undertake child protection and legal proceedings for the local authority and is worsening with one area of children's social work (South Bristol) holding current vacancy rates of 46%. In the last twelve months 46 qualified social workers have left the Local Authority.

2. Lack of internal provision is driving up our spend on external placements

The Enhance diagnostic focussed on how the demand in our service has changed over time and subsequently how we are changing to meet that need. One of the key findings looked at our increase in CIC numbers over time.

The diagnostic identified significant operational and financial challenges around the recruitment of foster carers.

- 15% reduction (58 fewer children) in house fostering caseloads since 2018 despite the overall number of children in care rising 12% in the same period
- 49% fewer enquiries to be foster carers in 2021-22 than in 2015-16
- There is currently a lack of detail on why prospective applicants drop out of the application process. Currently, 77% of enquirers between 2019 and 2023 dropped out at 'Stage 1 Complete'. There is a significant recruitment opportunity in identifying the precise point at which applicants leave, and embedding an improvement cycle process to target these areas.

The retention of foster carers was also noted in the diagnostic findings

- There were 51 terminations of carers in the last financial year, compared to 11 approvals

- BFCA chair commented that ‘retention is worse now than its ever been’
- The duration people are spending as foster carers has fallen
- 17 foster carers were approved after enquiring in Q2 2020 (during the pandemic). 5 of these have already ceased to become foster carers. The need to understand why exactly these carers left fostering was highlighted.

3. There is an opportunity to reduce spend on External Supported Accommodation and support older adolescents find a more suitable pathway.

Our Ofsted inspection noted that young people presenting as homeless receive an inconsistent service and that joint assessments do not always take place. Through the Enhance Diagnostic work it was also highlighted that the number of 16/17 Year olds entering care has increased 90% since 2019. Through Case Reviews undertaken within the diagnostic, it was found that 75% of those children entering care could have avoided entering if we had worked differently with them or had additional housing support available.

We had 87 young people present at the Housing front-door ‘MAPS’ between April 22 and March 23 and that 25 entered care (22 going into an ESA), while 1 was offered accommodation through Part 7 of the Housing Act. Others were judged not homeless and 1 was returned home. The process for assessment of young people has been agreed through a joint protocol agreed in April 2023, but initial decisions that bring young people into care still seem to be resource-led (ie lack of assessment provision) rather than needs led.

Young people who come into care where this is not their request and where they are not judged to require care through assessment, are almost always placed in External Supported Accommodation (ESA), often spot purchased because the current framework lacks the quantity of provision required through additional demand over the last 12 months. ESA accommodation average costs are £1,755 per week or c£91,000 per year and annual costs have increased by 12% in this largely unmanaged market. On top of this, there are infrastructure costs for social workers, IROs and a duty to children as Care Leavers until at least the age of 21. Through the Enhance Diagnostic we have reviewed our trend in this area with a large increase in starts in ESA accommodation over the last 2 years.

3. Opportunities

Opportunity 1: Increasing staff Capability, Recruitment and Retention to support consistent delivery of practice.

- Remodelling our Recruitment Processes – Working to understand more around our current recruitment process and how to ensure a more consistent approach across our CSC teams
- Systemic Social Work Model – Increasing our ability to undertake therapeutic training to enable future systemic supervision, increasing support and future retention of our staff
- International Social Worker Recruitment – supporting ongoing recruitment of International Social workers to increase team capacity and capability to support a wider range of CYP in Bristol

Opportunity 2: Increasing Internal Provision to improve our offering and reducing spending on External Placements

- Implementing the Mockingbird Foster Care Model – implementing a pilot constellation to improve the support available for our foster carers both increasing retention and improving the offer for prospective carers
- Increasing our internal Residential provision – transforming accommodation units both new and de-commissioned to provide improved internal offerings for UASC CYP, those with complex needs and improving our available accommodation for care leavers
- Challenging External Costs – Transitioning to new Commissioning model combined with adults service, focussing in the short term on capacity to engage with the market to reduce cost.
- Increasing our Internal Foster Caring Recruitment – Modelling our end to end fostering process, implementing a new toolset to increase the use of data to support further marketing/recruitment activities to increase the recruitment and quality of new Foster Carers.

Opportunity 3 – Working to reduce the numbers of 16/17 Year Olds entering care to support independence and reduce External Supported Accommodation Spending

- Remodelling our housing Pathway – Ensuring we understand the effectiveness of our current

commissioned services and understanding the cultural challenges facing our teams on a day to day basis.

- Re Designing our Adolescence service – Working to understand what models could be adapted to support the increased needs of adolescence in Bristol as early as possible, with an aim to rolling out a future operating model change.

4. Grant Bid.

On completion of the diagnostic, Bristol had the opportunity to bid to the DfE for grant funding. All the requests for funding were required to identify sustainability or be one off pieces of funding.

We have been granted funding to address the issues outlined in the diagnostic. The savings are forecasted into 2023/24 budget.

See Appendix A for full details of bids and how the funding is sustainable or one off.

Appendix A details other requests for funding that were not successful. Without the funding the work will not be progressed with the exception of:

- Recruitment of digital analyst for fostering. This will be funded from the digital workstream of the Our Families Programme.
- Market Efficiency Pilot. A Marketing Efficiency Team has been established within the current staffing structure.

Increasing Staffing Recruitment and Retention and Training to improve Consistency

Sub Activity	23/24 Funding	24/25 Funding	Describe the exact benefit of this funding
Recruitment & Retention – specialist HR programme lead	27,388	27,388	Employment of an HR Specialist for 12 months (BG12) Funding will support employment of HR specialist to undertake end to end review of all recruitment and marketing for social work job roles and led on creation of new pathway and resources
Recruitment & Retention – Programme Development lead for International social work recruitment	31,384	62,769	Funding will support employment of Programme Development lead for International Social Work for 18months (BG14 Grade) to design and deliver programme for inducting and onboarding internationally recruited social workers in their pre-employment and first year in practice in Bristol
Recruitment & Retention – Funding Systemic training for 3 Clinical Systemic Social Work Leads. Course starting in September 2024	-	69,000	Funding for course fees for Level 2 and MSc years for Systemic therapy training. Funding for clinical supervision required through the systemic therapy course. This will enable us to have trained individuals in Systemic Practise to support our workers with Clinical Supervision

Increasing Internal Foster Care Provision

Sub Activity	23/24 Funding	24/25 Funding	Describe the exact benefit of this funding
Mockingbird - Fostering Network fees/licence	£64,000	£32,000	These are the set amounts that a LA has to pay to the fostering network to join the Mockingbird Programme. It is based on the numbers of approved carers that you have
Mockingbird - Staffing	£26,000	£53,000	This is the senior practitioner who will over see and manages the programme
Mockingbird - Activities	£7,000	£15,000	To fund activities for children in the cluster

Preventing 16/17 Year olds Entering Care

Sub Activity	23/24	24/25	Describe the exact benefit of this funding
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	Funding	Funding	
Adolescence Specialist	£34,000	£34,000	This funding will employ an experienced Service Manager (BG14) for a 12 month period to develop an Adolescence service model informed by national research and evidence of what works well and in line with agreed principles to achieve agreed outcomes. This individual would work collaboratively with all stake holders including staff
Housing Pathway Consultant	£18,750		There is approximately 6 months to impact the specification for the Youth Homelessness pathway and all the services that sit around it. Focused and time limited expertise in this area will review and contextualise the resources, processes and systems that we have in place through Children's Services and Housing Options which would be supportive of the re-commissioning. The benefit outcomes will be that young people at risk of or homeless will receive the support they need rather than the support that is available. This will reduce numbers of 16 and 17 year olds entering care through s20 where their primary issue is homelessness.

Opportunity – 1. Staffing Recruitment and Retention

Activity	Deliverable/Success Metric
1.1 – Recruitment Process Modelling	Increased Applications for SW Roles Increased Recruitment
1.2 - Marketing budget	
1.4 – International SW Programme	Increase retention rates of ISW (comparative to other LAs in region)
1.6 – Systemic SW Training	Increase percentage of statutory social work service learning reviews graded Good or Outstanding Reduce percentage of repeat child protection plans Reduce percentage of repeat referrals

Opportunity – 2. Increasing Internal Provision

Activity	Deliverable/Success Metric
2.1 – Mockingbird	Constalation setup (Deliverable) Increased carer Satisfaction Decreased Carer Terminations
2.2 – Recruitment process	Increased Enquiries Increased Conversion at each stage

Opportunity – 3. Reducing Adolescent CYP Starting in Care/Reducing External Supported Accommodation Spend

Activity	Deliverable/Success Metric
3.1 - Adolescence Service Design	Full plan for new service focus areas (Deliverable) Plan for new service team shapes (Deliverable) Plan for new service transition (Deliverable)
3.2 - Housing Pathway Redesign	Model for housing collaboration (new pathway deliverable) Increased number of joint assessments Decreased time for young people waiting for assessments Decreased 16/17 YO Starts Decreased ESA starts Decrease in forecast costs in ESA

5. Governance and monitoring

The opportunities will sit within the wider Our Families programme governance.

A robust governance is key to the delivery of the programme and associated improvements and opportunities linked to ILACs improvement plan and enhance diagnostic. This board includes oversight of quality assurance and performance, Governance will be split into two areas:

- Our Families Programme Board
- Working Groups (each workstream has a workstream lead with project resource to deliver the day-to-day deliverables)

The Programme Board has a key role in supporting the Executive Director Sponsor (Executive Director of Children and Education) in setting the direction for the programme, decision-making and providing both challenge and approval on issues affecting the progress of the programme. The Programme Board will not only have Cabinet Member for Children’s Services, Education & Equalities, Children and Education Director representatives and corporate business partners such as Finance, HR, ICT, Change Services but will also include key stakeholder representatives from Internal Assurance, Housing, Adult Social Care and Public Health. The Board will report to Corporate Leadership Board (CLB) in accordance with CLB governance and terms of reference.

The board meets six-weekly, and reports to CLB every five-weeks as part of the council's wider transformation programme portfolio governance.

For each of the planned activities there has been identified individuals to own each workstream and the below plans demonstrate the timescales of key activities and the desired actions in that timeframe.

6. Progress

Progress will be monitored as above.

Cabinet Member / Officer Recommendations:

That Cabinet:

- 1) Note the submission of the Newton Europe Enhanced Diagnostic grant funding bid on 15/6/23.
- 2) Authorise the Executive Director Children and Education in consultation with the Cabinet Member Children’s Services, Education and Equalities to accept and spend the grant as outlined in this report.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

The work aligns with delivering corporate strategy commitments under the theme for Children and young people: A city where every child belongs and every child gets the best start in life, whatever circumstances they were born into.

City Benefits:

The work funded through the grant will drive improvement in services and outcomes for children and families in Bristol and contribute to financial sustainability.

Consultation Details:

The content has been discussed with Lead Member and relevant service areas.

Background Documents:

[Ofsted Inspection of Bristol local authority children's services published 10 March 2023](#)

Revenue Cost	£N/A	Source of Revenue Funding	Department for Education Grant
Capital Cost	£N/A	Source of Capital Funding	N/A
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>	Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	Income generation proposal <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Required information to be completed by Financial/Legal/ICT/ HR partners:		
1. Finance Advice: The report seeks approval to accept and spend the DfE grant as set out in the report and appendix. The report sets out opportunities that aim to improve the outcomes and contribute to the service's financial improvement journey. These programmes will run as part of the Our Families Transformation and support the delivery of MTFP targets in the service.		
Finance Business Partner: Andrew Osei, Finance Business Partner 9 August 2023		
2. Legal Advice: The submission of the bid for grant funding raises no particular legal issues. Legal services will advise and assist officers with regard to the reviewing the grant agreement.		
Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Manager/Solicitor 7 August 2023		
3. Implications on IT: I.T. are supportive and can be engaged through the existing work request process.		
IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Lead Enterprise Architect 9 August 2023		
4. HR Advice: The report is seeking retrospective permission to accept and spend DfE grant of approximately £500k. The proposal outlines how the funding will be divided into three opportunities, with Opportunity one focussing on increasing staff capability, recruitment and retention. The funding will support two temporary roles, one will lead on the recruitment and support of International Social Workers to increase capacity in teams and one post will undertake a review of our recruitment processes to establish how we can improve our social worker recruitment. These opportunities will be advertised in line with our Recruitment and Selection policy. The funding will also provide Systemic training for 3 Clinical Systemic Social Work Leads, creating new opportunities for the workforce.		
HR Partner: Lorna Laing, HR Business Partner 7 August 2023		
EDM Sign-off	Abi Gbago, Executive Director Children's and Education	9 July 2023
Cabinet Member sign-off	Cllr Asher Craig Deputy Mayor with responsibility for Children's Services, Education and Equalities	24 July 2023
For Key Decisions - Mayor's Office sign-off	Mayor's Office	7 August 2023

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal A.1 Bid to DfE	YES
Appendix B – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix C – Summary of any engagement with scrutiny	NO
Appendix D – Risk assessment	NO
Appendix E – Equalities screening / impact assessment of proposal	YES
Appendix F – Eco-impact screening/ impact assessment of proposal	NO
Appendix G – Financial Advice	NO
Appendix H – Legal Advice	NO
Appendix I – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix J – HR advice	NO
Appendix K – ICT	NO

