**Report to DCS Meeting**

**Friday 23rd March 2018**

**Complex LAC and Edge of Care Efficiencies Project**

A very successful workshop was held on Friday 16th March 2018 to hear about the progress of the project and to discuss a range of possible next steps and participants. The authorities who attended were: Oxfordshire; Kent; West Berkshire; Portsmouth; West Sussex; Bracknell Forest; Brighton and Hove and East Sussex. (Surrey had intended to be present but were unable to, due to Ofsted commitments). The presentation pack for the workshop is circulated with this paper.

In advance of the workshop, all SE authorities were asked to complete a survey asking about numbers and type of cases, costs, initiatives already underway and ideas for future work. 9 authorities responded (either fully or partially), these being the same authorities who then came to the workshop. The questionnaire responses had been collated and the results fed back as part of the presentation on the day.

**Key Points from the Day**

* Although LAs are very clear about the costs of residential and specialist foster placements, they find it much harder to define exactly the needs of the children and young people these placements are supporting;
* There was a common view that there is a particular issue with children and young people who have experienced violence or who exhibit violent behaviour themselves; this creates issues with providers who refuse to take them, or where placements frequently break down (even in secure accommodation); there is evidence that some young people are on their 8th or 9th placement and that each time a new placement is found, the cost escalates;
* As the group discussed their most expensive and complex case with each other, it became apparent that none of those discussed have resulted in good outcomes for the young people;
* There is clearly a problem with the market; there is a perceived shortage of quality residential care placements for an increasing need; it is very difficult to hold providers to account for the quality of their placements; the nature of the work is that often LAs have to take the next available place, under pressure to manage the risk; LAs feel that they are in competition with each other to secure good places which has precluded joint working;
* Joint working with other agencies is also precluded by an overall reduction in resources; and there is evidence of “cost shunting”, for example where the health element of the placement reduces but the overall cost remains the same, LAs are left to pick up the difference;
* There was a feeling that regulatory bodies (Ofsted, DfE) struggle to recognise these pressures and there is a need to provide evidence to support a more productive dialogue with them about the issues faced by LAs.

**Proposals for the Next Phase of the Project**

The discussion generated much enthusiasm to undertake further work to evidence the issues faced by LAs to support more joint working and effective dialogue. All the Authorities present were committed to continuing and participating.

The following next steps of the project are proposed:

* Building on the work already commissioned by and underway in Oxfordshire, to develop a mechanism for categorising and understanding the true extent of need for children and young people aged 10+, who are already looked after, or who are on the edge of care;
* To identify some specific categories, for example those with frequent and costly placement moves, those with a history of violence, adoption breakdown, for further analysis, using case file reviews;
* To undertake a comprehensive mapping of the market including amount, nature and cost of residential and specialist fostering provision available to the authorities in the south east (but not exclusively located in the south east);
* Following analysis of the data, to make recommendations to inform local or joint sufficiency strategies and/or joint commissioning;
* Following analysis of the data to consider ways of engaging with DfE and Ofsted, as well as other agencies;
* Continue to collect and share areas of new innovations and good practice by developing a virtual limited life task group using technology including the shared, secure area (already set up) on the SESLIP website, teleconferences etc.
* The project will be tightly managed according the SESLIP project plan to consider the costs and benefits and review progress at regular intervals

While much of the work will be undertaken by SESLIP consultants, it is envisaged that some time commitment will be required from LAs to support in the collection of data and provision of case information. The project continues to remain open to all SE authorities to participate if they wish.

**Lucy Butler**

**DCS Oxfordshire**

**Mark Evans, Rosemary Perry**

**SESLIP Consultants**

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