

Member Briefing

Number: 1193

Title: Core Assets commissioned to provide Fostering Better Outcomes project, a new approach to support children to move from, or avoid, residential care.

Summary: The Council has commissioned Core Assets, a nationwide provider of fostering and residential placements, to provide a new service to support children and young people who are in, or on the edge of, residential care to access high-intensity foster care placements. Full Council approved the submission of an application to the Life Chances Fund in March 2017. The project has received social investment funding from Bridges Fund Management through an Social Impact Bond (SIB) to provide this service and it is supported by a £939,000 grant award from the Life Chances Fund.

The Fostering Better Outcomes service will support six to eight children and young people per year who are in, or on the edge of, residential care to access high-intensity foster care placements and support. There is a gap in the intensity of support and supervision between residential care and foster care, making transitions challenging.

These placements are a step in between residential care and mainstream foster care, allowing children with complex needs to thrive in a family setting. Core Assets has been awarded the contract to provide this service, which began accepting referrals on 1 June 2018. The service is based on Core Assets' highly-successful Step Down programme in Birmingham.

Why?

The Council is committed to making sure that all children have the best start in life and to supporting children, if it is in their best interests, to live and flourish in a family setting. Core Assets' Step Down model is delivering the following benefits to children.

- 77 per cent improved educational attendance (or maintained 100 per cent attendance)
- 77 per cent reduction in missing incidents
- No school exclusions
- 88 per cent reduced offending behaviour (or maintained non-offending behaviour)

The service has also generated £1 million savings to the local authority by reducing the number of high-cost residential placements used.

Development process

In 2016, the Government announced the £80 million Life Chances Fund, which is intended to bring on the development of a significant nationwide social investment market.

On average, it offered to fund 20 per cent of the cost of services provided through a SIB. It provides an opportunity to improve outcomes for residents and deliver savings for the Council by avoiding unnecessary high-cost placements.

Full Council approved the submission of a full application to the Life Chances Fund in March 2017 as part of budget setting. This was for 25 per cent of the cost of the SIB intensive fostering service (up to £939,000 based on outcomes achieved). On 31 July 2017, the Council found out that the bid was successful.

Social impact bonds and social investment

A SIB is an outcome-based contract in which social investors pay in whole or part for an intervention to improve an outcome that is of social interest to a government or public sector commissioner.

SIBs transfer the financial risk of outcome-based preventative interventions from commissioners and providers to a social investor. For Fostering Better Outcomes, Core Assets will receive up-front funding from Bridges Fund Management, a market leader in social investment, to provide the service. The Council will pay Core Assets when children achieve outcomes such as long-term placement stability in foster care. The Council is not required to pay where these outcomes are not achieved.

Engagement with children and young people

Children and young people from the Children in Care Council (CICC) have been involved in the development of Fostering Better Outcomes. Focus groups have taken place before the submission of the full application and a group establish the best matching process for young people to get to know prospective foster carers. The CICC will also be advising on the type of information young people value when starting this type of foster care placement.

One of our care leavers helped to shape procurement decisions by sharing their unique experiences as a full voting member of the procurement evaluation panel. A care leaver representative will also sit on the service's management board.

Next steps

The service began supporting children in June 2018. An independent evaluation will be commissioned to see how effective the service has been. A final report will be produced by June 2021.

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