

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

REPORT AND DECISION NOTICE OF OFFICER KEY DECISION TAKEN ON 9 SEPTEMBER 2024

NOTICE OF KEY DECISIONS PUBLISHED ON 2 SEPTEMBER 2024

CHILDREN'S SERVICES: IMPOWER CHANGE PROGRAMME

This Key Decision was taken by Jo Britton (Executive Director: Children Services and Public Health, being the appropriate Officer under Delegated Powers in compliance with the Council's Constitution.

The **Key Decision** related to the following identified item contained within the Council's **Notice of Key Decisions** as published on 2nd September 2024.

INFORMATION

- 1.1 Placements for Looked After Children: Looked After Children are the responsibility of the local authority where they ordinarily reside. That local authority has the legal responsibility for placing their Looked After Children in either registered (with Ofsted) foster placements or registered children's homes.
- 1.2 Like all local authorities, Telford and Wrekin uses a mixture of internal placements; those run by the Council, and external placements run by private organisations. Currently, the local authority has no residential beds.
- 1.3 Since October 2021, it has become increasingly difficult to find placements for looked after children, particularly for children aged 12 plus with complex needs. Identifying suitable and sufficient placements for children with complex high needs is extremely challenging in a very restricted market and can result in disproportionately high costs being incurred.
- 1.4 As such, we are continually developing our Placement Sufficiency Strategy to ensure that it accurately reflects the current position and clearly articulates plans to increase the availability of provision for children and young people that meet their needs and provides them with a safe place to live and thrive.
- 1.5 Telford's ability to absorb placement requests within its own cohort of Foster Carers has remained consistent – this is in part due to strong recruitment and retention efforts. Telford & Wrekin have increased their total Foster Carer base in recent years with the LA's Fostering Service consistently demonstrating the ability to convert enquiries into approval at a rate which is approximately tenfold the current national average.
- 1.6 However, there continue to be budgetary pressures and therefore, whilst focusing on our ongoing improvement and ambitions to achieve the best outcomes for children in our care and deliver outstanding services in the most cost effective way possible, we

have commissioned iMPower to work with us to deliver a collaborative Children's Services Change Programme.

- 1.7 The Council's Children's Services was adjudged by Ofsted in 2020 as being outstanding and the Council retained this outstanding judgment at its Ofsted inspection in 2024. However, the Council does not see this as an opportunity to be complacent in the way in which it works to support children and young people but, instead, continues to seek ways to deliver even further improvements. As part of this continuous improvement approach, the Council has been seeking ways in which to manage a very challenging children's placement market. iMPower has been working with Telford and Wrekin Council since December 2023 to drive a focused approach to increasing placement sufficiency leading to better outcomes for children and young people through the ability to ensure stability in placements. This, in turn, has led to an ancillary cost saving for the Council.
- 1.8 The work programme has included working with the Fostering Service to improve foster carer utilisation and placement stability, and the introduction and trial of a tool called 'Valuing Care,' to better understand the needs and strengths of Telford's children and young people and deliver a needs-led approach to care, support and commissioning.
- 1.9 iMPower's Valuing Care programme improves the life chances of children in care by strengthening the links between children's needs, outcomes pursued, and the resources available. By better capturing and reviewing the needs of looked after children, councils can make better decisions on support, placements, and commissioning. Following assessment by social workers and other professionals, it enables the placement cost of every child in a council's care to be mapped against individual needs.
- 1.10 The Valuing Care approach brings greater value, transparency and fairness to the way resources are allocated by our services, improving the life chances of children in care and ensuring that every pound spent makes a positive difference.
- 1.11 During the initial phase of support in Telford and Wrekin (from December 2023) iMPower have:
 - Delivered training to children's social workers on the Valuing Care approach and use of the assessment tool;
 - Undertaking a number of Valuing Care children's profiles and foster carer profiles;
 - Supported the review of commissioned services and changes in care and support (step-down to fostering, semi-supported living or reunification);
 - Through the work that has been carried out, reduced placement costs with the potential for further savings already being identified;
 - Established, and facilitated, a Valuing Care Panel to drive forward and support plans to progress the identified opportunities from cohorts one and two.

- 1.12 The next phase of work proposes to build on the above deliverables and impact to drive forward and realise opportunities, further rollout Valuing Care and embed new ways of working.
- 1.13 Telford & Wrekin Council requires a further period of support from IMPOWER to deliver this defined set of activity and interventions to realise further opportunities to improve outcomes identified in phase one which, in turn, will also deliver some cost reduction.
- 1.14 This will include working with the service to plan and facilitate the handover of embedding and sustaining the approach. Based on discussions and the scope and activities outlined above, we anticipate that phase 2 will take the Council to the end of 2024.
- 1.15 This work will also support with the delivery of a number of significant national policy changes and changes to the way in which the Service operates, in line with national policy direction and is based on ensuring that children receive a consistent, purposeful and child centred approach wherever they are on their journey of need from early help through to being in care.
- 1.16 Whilst IMPOWER's work with Telford and Wrekin to date has identified several opportunities to improve outcomes for children and young people, it has also demonstrated an opportunity for financial savings over the next three years.
- 1.17 The ongoing work is required to maintain the momentum gained as part of the delivery of phase one to improve outcomes for children already profiled through this innovative methodology and to ensure continuation of the embedding of the Valuing Care approach for all the children and young people in the care of Telford and Wrekin Council.

Legal Implications

- 2.1 The Council's statutory obligations in respect of Children are set out within the body of the report above. At the same time, the Council has an obligation to ensure that it demonstrates it is achieving best value and the workstreams IMPOWER will impact demonstrate the Council is actively managing expenditure to ensure best value is achieved, whilst also meeting its statutory obligations.
- 2.2 This report seeks to make a direct award to Impower to undertake a further phase of work with the Council to build on the work carried out today, utilising the existing structures developed through the first phase. It is open to the Council to make a direct award in respect of work where the circumstances are such that it would not be possible to procure the same work with another provider or where to seek to procure an alternative provider would lead to significant difficulties in operational matters.
- 2.3 The Executive Director: Children's Services and Public Health has delegated authority under the Council's Constitution to take this decision. All legal requirements, including notification of the relevant scrutiny Chair, have been undertaken prior to the decision being taken. This decision is a case of special urgency. Given the date by which this key decision must be made, to benefit from the current pre-existing arrangements with Impower, compliance with Regulation 10 of the Local Authorities (Executive

Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 is impractical.

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The costs associated with this proposal are set out in the exempt **Appendix 1** to this report. The contents of that appendix are exempt by virtue of paragraph 3, Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972 as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).
- 3.2 The costs identified in Appendix 1 will be funded by a combination of savings delivered through the IMPOWER change programme, capital receipts through the use of capitalisation directives and one-off reserves.

Alternative Options considered

- 4.1 The Council could decide not to progress the second phase of this work. This is not recommended given that the initial phase of work has delivered positive outcomes both in terms of placement sufficiency for children and young people in care and the reduction in costs associated with that.
- 4.2 Another alternative option would be to undertake the second phase of this work internally without any external support. Again, this is not recommended. The capacity and expertise available within the Council to undertake a review of practice of this scale is limited and, without the innovative approach developed by Impower, it will be difficult to deliver the scale of change anticipated by this piece of work.
- 4.3 Whilst not recommended, the Council could consider utilising the services of an alternative provider to Impower. To do so would mean that the Council would need to delay the commencement of this second phase of work in order that procurement of an alternative provider could be undertaken which, in turn, would delay outcome improvements for children and young people. Additionally, there would be 'duplicative costs' by taking this approach as Impower have been working for the Council for eight months and have developed significant understanding of the Council's practices and developed the relationships needed to maximise the benefits delivered by this piece of work. The outcomes achieved to date have been delivered as a result of the innovative approach developed and implemented by Impower and the Council are seeking to maximise on this approach. It is therefore considered appropriate to direct award for this work as an extension to the existing services as taking an alternative course of action would lead to a disproportionate level of disruption in the operational ability to deliver the work referred to in this report.

Report from:-

Darren Knibbs

Director: Children's Safeguarding & Family Support

DECISION – The Executive Director: Children’s Services and Public Health approves the Direct Award to IMPOWER for a further period ending in December 2024.

Further Information/Contact –

This decision is a case of special urgency. Given the date by which this key decision must be made, compliance with Regulation 10 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 is impractical as there is a need to ensure that momentum continues at pace with children’s outcomes at the forefront of this proposal. Having obtained the agreement of Councillor Janice Jones, the Chair of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee, in accordance with Regulation 11, the decision will take effect on 9 September 2024. In light of the circumstances described above, the Chair also agreed to waive call-in in respect of this decision.

Signed: Jo Britton

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Britton', is positioned above the printed name.

Executive Director: Children’s Services and Public Health

Dated: 9 September 2024

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- 1.1 This Appendix is intended to be read in conjunction with the main report in respect of this matter.
- 1.2 The information contained in this report is exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3, Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).