

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
All Wards (Corporate Issue)

Social Services and Personal Health Scrutiny
Cabinet

1st May 2002
20th May 2002

THE MODERNISATION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY RESOURCES

Report of the Director of Social Services

1. Purpose of Report

To inform Members about proposals for the modernisation of Children and Family Resources, and to seek agreement for the resulting proposed strategic direction for the City Council's family support services in Leicester.

2. Summary

This report provides information about the findings of a review held during the past year and identifies that the Council is faced with three strategic issues in relation to the provision of family support services in order to deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable children. These are:

- (i) To provide a balance of preventative services at a universal, intensive or targeted level;
- (ii) To equalise family support resources to both younger and older children
- (iii) To provide directly managed in-house resources, or to develop a mixed economy by commissioning some services from external providers, entering into strategic alliances or by developing strategic partnerships.

The report proposes the development of a community family support partnership. This would address the needs of vulnerable children for preventive and supportive services by co-ordinating universal services and local community and voluntary organisations. It suggests that this approach would release some of the Department's resources to concentrate more effectively on those children in greatest need and to broaden the scope of the services provided to a wider age range of children.

The report proposes that through a reconfiguration of services, improved outcomes will be achieved. It is intended to use this strategy begin "shifting the balance" from

intensive, high cost provision towards more preventative efficient provision. By reducing the number of looked after children, the number of disruptions in placement, achieving reductions in length of time on the Child Protection Register and reducing Child Protection Registrations, it will be possible to incrementally shift the balance towards improved preventative service. This will in turn further reduce the level of commitment the department current invests in intensive services.

3. Recommendations

a. Social Services and Personal Health Scrutiny Committee:-

That the Scrutiny Committee comment on the proposed strategic direction and ask for further reports in due course regarding implementation;

b. Cabinet:

- (1) That the proposed strategic direction, as described in paragraph 7 in the Supporting Information, is accepted for further detailed development and consultation; and
- (2) That the specific recommendation regarding service design (paragraph 9 in the Supporting Information) is accepted for implementation.

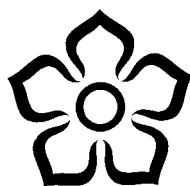
4. Headline Financial and legal Implications

The implementation of the proposals would imply the realignment of existing resources. Members will also be aware that savings of £120,000 are required from the section in the current financial year, rising to £495,000 in 2002 –3. The proposals outlined here would allow the ongoing provision of services for vulnerable children and Children In Need whilst achieving those savings.

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

5. Report Author/Officer to contact:

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Members will be aware that an internal review of the Children and Family Resources section has been under way since January 2001. The review entailed gathering considerable information and conducting a wide consultation and information gathering process. This included questionnaires for staff and service users as well as presentations to, and discussions with voluntary organisations. The results of this consultation are also reported as part of the Best Value Review of services for vulnerable children.
- 1.2 This report suggests that we need to move forward now to modernise the service by developing an agreed vision and direction for the service, and puts forward proposals about what this should be, together with specific proposals in relation to the reconfiguration of family support services.

2.0 Demand and supply in the existing services

- 2.1 The Children and Family Resources Section currently provides a range of family support services, which are commissioned by social workers on the basis of an assessment of need. Referral statistics showed that the section received 1121 requests for a service in 2000, and in 1064 cases was able to respond to the request. 45% of referrals came from the Duty and Assessment team and a further 15% from hostels for homeless families. Only 40% were from child care teams, suggesting that the largest proportion of the section's work is with children and families at the earliest stages of their involvement with the Department.
- 2.2 In addition 130 Placement Panels were requested (these are used as a gatekeeping mechanism for the Looked After Children service), 78% of which concerned parent –

child conflict. 9% (99) of the service requests were for the Intensive Support Team, and 85 of these received a response. The service with the most difficulty in responding to requests was the special childminding service, which was only able to meet 75% of the 207 requests. These figures might suggest that supply and demand are well matched. However, because the priority categories and eligibility criteria are very clear, commissioners in general only make referrals for services that they think they have a good chance of receiving. (They tend to be accurate in their assessment: 84% of referrals in 2000 received the service requested.) This does not necessarily mean that they would not use more if they were available. These referral statistics have, therefore, resulted in a service-led configuration rather than a needs-led configuration of services.

- 2.3 In canvassing their views, it became clear that social workers were by and large satisfied with the services to which they were able to gain access. They did, however, express some dissatisfaction with the level and scope of service available, particularly for older children, and identified the need for new services such as supervised contact, crisis response services at an early stage for families experiencing difficulties with teenagers and increased direct work with individual children and their families. It was also highlighted how requests for children aged 10-15 to be accommodated are being avoided a number of times by the Department, before the family's request can no longer be ignored. An earlier and more responsive input by family support services could possibly stop the case coming to Placement Panel and resulting in a child or young person being looked after.
- 2.4 This dissatisfaction might appear strange, given that the Department prides itself on its preventive services to children, which have for many years formed a plank of our children's services strategy and which received praise from the Joint Review for their effective work towards clear objectives. However, it must be recognised that the context has changed: the Children in Need Assessment Framework (CINAF) demands an earlier and more coordinated response from the Department, and Government expectations are that that this response will be more geared towards the provision of family support services. New Government initiatives, such as Sure Start and the Children's Fund demand that Departmental services change in the way they are provided and "bend" towards a more preventive style in partnership with a range of agencies. In attempting to respond in this style, social workers are looking to Children and Family Resources to provide them with appropriate preventive services which complement the development of new initiatives such as Sure Start within the City.
- 2.5 At the same time, however, the greater number of children becoming "looked after" has resulted in greater pressure on those services that are designed to support families in greatest crisis, prevent children entering accommodation or assist their rehabilitation. There has thus been an increase in demand for services at both the early intervention stage and also at the more complex end of the children in need continuum.

3.0 Current service spread

- 3.1 It was clear from the responses to the consultation that the current family support is not able to meet the demand for the most intensive services, especially those for teenagers. The current services were developed without taking into account the development of other 0 – 4 year old services such as Sure Start and, therefore,

duplicate effort or do not target prevention. Workers are on the whole satisfied with the quantity of preventive services for younger children (mainly provided through family centres) but they did not feel that these were sufficiently flexible to meet the range and complexity of need. In addition, it was felt that there was a need to provide improved access to services across universal and targeted needs. This is particularly relevant given the increasing numbers of younger children entering the care system or being excluded from school. They were also of the opinion that there was insufficient provision for older children across the continuum. This is perhaps not surprising when the spread of services is examined in more detail.

3.2 The services provided by the Section, and their allocated budgets for 2000-2001 are described in the following table:

Service	Annual budget (00/01)	% of section budget	Staffing Component	
Family centres	2,592,100	77	2,309,700	*Now fully transferred to OFSTED
IST	218,800	7	201,900	
Family Aides	181,200	5	166,400	
Childminding and Playgroup Advisors*	150,700	4	121,900	
Section management team	219,100	7	214,400	

Family Centres

Currently 75% of the section's resources (over £2.5m) are dedicated to the provision of the Council's 9 family centres. These serve children under five and their families. While children in greatest need (those on the child protection register and in danger of becoming looked after) get priority for places, there is still sufficient capacity to offer a service to most children in the lowest priority group. The service that is most often provided in family centres consists of day care, usually on a sessional basis but sometimes full days. This service is not necessarily targeted to preventative work or reconciliation. This is an extremely popular service with parents and with our own staff as well as other agencies. However, it must be recognised that it is a service which is provided by many other organisations, such as playgroups, nursery schools, voluntary and community organisations, Sure Start programmes, etc. In fact the provision of day care can be described as somewhat of a growth area. This proposal is, therefore, linked to the proposals for the development of the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative. There is a need to continue to stimulate the development of high quality nursery provision across a range of providers.

3.3 An examination of referral statistics showed that 100% of children referred to the centres following an assessment were offered a place, even those in the lowest priority group. Services to support children in other settings (such as their own homes) are, however, more limited, and this is particularly true of children over ten. The Department invests 7% of its family support budget in the IST, which is the one team dedicated to work with teenagers experiencing family breakdown. Unlike the family centres, this team can only ever accept work that falls into its top priority category. Numerous

requests are made for the involvement of the team in early prevention, e.g. walk – in behaviour management advice sessions, or mobilisation of extended family resources to prevent a possible admission to accommodation, as well as intensive interventions with families to rehabilitate children from care. It is, however, currently only possible to allocate cases of children whose family situations are at the point of breakdown. Similarly the special childminding schemes for older children and disabled children are seriously oversubscribed. This position necessitates the need to provide a coordinated approach to the provision of family support services.

4.0 Modernisation

- 4.1 The national context has changed in other ways in addition to the expectations of earlier intervention. An increased emphasis on developing neighbourhood services, community capacity building and involving local people in the management of services presents additional challenges to Social Services. Its services are currently operated on a centralised basis, which has not only allowed city - wide consistency of approach but also economies of scale. The review group consulted staff on a range of possible structural options for the future. Staff within the section were reluctant to lose the advantages of the current arrangement, but recognised that the service needs to develop a more local focus in order to be able to respond appropriately to local needs by forming closer links to communities and to local initiatives. This will enable a collaborative approach to providing local services to develop and also provides the opportunity to develop multi-disciplinary teams and responses.
- 4.2 It is increasingly obvious that direct provision is not always effective or appropriate. Research has shown, for example, that many black and ethnic minority service users find community and voluntary organisations more welcoming or more responsive to their needs. The Best Value Review recognises that it has not always involved service users in planning services, and they may find services provided by the Council distant, stigmatising or hard to trust. Certainly it is a matter for concern that in a city where the non-white child population is estimated to be nearing 50%, only 39% of users of the department's family support services are from an ethnic minority background. This inequality must be further addressed through the implementation plan and detailed development of services.
- 4.3 Another relevant factor is the Government's growing emphasis on multi-agency partnerships as a vehicle for delivering services to families. Government funding streams are designed so that finance is more easily acquired by partnerships or by voluntary organisations than by Local Authorities. It is therefore increasingly important to be clear about whether the Council intend to continue to provide services directly or whether this is the right time to work with external partners to provide some or all of the Council's family support services. This will significantly increase capacity, reduce stigma and avoid duplication within the services provided by all organisations.
- 4.4 The review group undertook an exercise to identify the level of interest from the voluntary sector in providing family support services of various types. It became evident that in addition to the large national voluntary organisations that there is potential within small community and voluntary organisations to take on the delivery of some parts of services that are currently provided on an in-house basis. Most interest was expressed in developing childcare and parents' groups, i.e. early prevention services. It is

considered that it would be more cost-effective to commission services such as these than to provide them on an in-house basis; however unless resources can be freed up from our current services the Council will be committed to direct provision as this is where the budgets are tied into non-preventative services even in circumstances where this is not cost effective or delivering performance improvements.

5.0 Strategic Purpose

5.1 The Family Support services provided by the Department were established in order to prevent children becoming looked after, so it may be considered that it has not been wholly effective given the steady increase in children entering accommodation since 1997. On the other hand, it may be that without the level of family support services in place the problem would be even worse. It could be argued that the Section is becoming less effective because it is less able to focus on its core business due to the additional demands and expectations made upon it. This report is suggesting that it is time to re-state the purpose of Family Support and be clear where it fits into the continuum of children's services.

It is suggested that the Council is faced with three strategic issues which provide the framework for providing family support services. These are:

- Improving the balance between early prevention and intensive interventions
- Equalising the balance between maintaining a high level of investment in early years and being able to provide adequately for the needs of older children
- Utilising the opportunities of a balance between directly managed in-house resources, services commissioned from external providers and the development of strategic alliances with other organisations.

6.0 Stakeholder Views

6.1 Service Users

Parents were consulted with regard to their views by means of a structured interview, designed around the three issues. Because family centre users constitute the majority of service users, the majority of our sample were family centre users, so it is not surprising that they tended to stress the importance of early years. Many respondents did, however, also acknowledge that there were insufficient resources for older children, and most felt that both early intervention and crisis response were necessary. The most frequently voiced comment, predictably, was that all the services were necessary and there should be more of everything instead of considering service reductions. It was interesting to note that about one third of respondents were of the opinion that community or voluntary provision had advantages over statutory services. We know that a third of our respondents were from ethnic minority backgrounds, but because of anonymity we do not know whether these were the respondents who were most positive about externalising the service. Given the points made in paragraph 4.2, this is a significant point.

6.2 Commissioning social workers

Social workers were asked to identify whether they considered that there were too many, not enough, or the right level or scope of services. The only two areas where an over-supply was generally acknowledged were in the provision of day care and play provision. They felt the need for new services to be developed, such as assessment support, preventative services and intensive intervention. Social workers in general doubted that community and voluntary provision would be able to meet the needs that they identified, and seemed to have a greater degree of faith in the Department's internal resources to provide a service at the required level. This shows the importance, if out-sourcing or strategic alliances are to be considered, of robust procurement and contract-compliance systems.

7.0 Proposed model for strategic positioning

7.1 The choices that are made will depend upon decisions as to the agreed role of family support within children's services. The new Children in Need Assessment Framework is based on a model of different levels of need, and it is proposed that a similar model is adopted by the Council to describe the point at which the Department should intervene directly. These different levels are illustrated diagrammatically at Appendix A.

7.2 Members will be familiar with the concept of "vulnerable" children, which has been used to develop the scope for the Best Value review of children's services. The Department of Health describes a group of children, approximately one third of the total child population, who are "vulnerable" to social exclusion and need targeted services in addition to the universal services available to all children. Examples of these targeted services are speech and language therapy, Home Start, Child Behaviour Intervention Initiative, play schemes, and Sure Start programmes. The service provided by Family Centres to many children (particularly the day care component) can also be described as a targeted service to vulnerable children. The Best Value review of services for vulnerable children actively considered the issues relating to services to this group in order to improve life chances, promote independence and revitalise neighbourhoods. It is therefore critical that the review of Children and Family Resources is integrated into the Best Value outcomes and recommendations. This concluded that there was a need to integrate services for vulnerable children and children in need, respond more effectively to community accessibility and provide a broader range of services.

It is also important to develop services that integrate with other universal services, such as schools, to ensure improved engagement and reductions in non-attendance and exclusion. The Education Department is a key partner in creating integrated family support services to socially excluded families

7.3 Within the vulnerable group, there is a smaller group of children who are "In Need". This includes children who are in need of protection. The Department of Health considers that approximately 3% of the total population falls into this category (in Leicester, this would mean around 2,500 children). Children In Need require more specialist services under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989. These include current Social Services provision such as the Family Aides, Intensive Support Team and the parenting training, assessments and monitoring work conducted in Family Centres. It would also include the type of services our social workers are requesting, but which cannot currently be

provided. This also requires a reconfiguration of services other than Family Centres to ensure the necessary integration. A very small sub-set of children in need are children whose health and developmental outcomes are so poor while they remain at home that they have to become “looked after”. This group is less than 1% of the total child population.

- 7.4 It is suggested that the majority of the Department’s services should concentrate on Children In Need, working to address their needs so that they can function adequately with only the ongoing support of targeted local services. At the same time we should work with children who are looked after so that they can safely and appropriately be returned home with the help of our specialist services. If Members agree this position statement, it will then be necessary to start to re-align our resources in order to develop the services required to achieve it.

8.0 The Community Family Support Partnership: a vision for family support

- 8.1 The Council has committed itself in the Community Plan to increasing investment in services for Children in Need. However, the reality is that the Department cannot increase the proportion of its resources expended on this group unless we reconfigure our expenditure on services for vulnerable children. This would mean reducing the amount of day care provided in Family Centres in order to free up resources to provide more services for children in greatest need and to enable more appropriate services to be provided to vulnerable children using Sure Start models and Neighbourhood Nurseries. It would also mean redressing the balance between under fives and older children, thus developing some resource centres that really do help the whole family.

- 8.2 However, it would not wish to reduce the overall service for vulnerable children. It is important to recognise that if vulnerable children do not receive the targeted services that they require, they will become children in need. Nevertheless, they do not have to receive these services in full from the Social Services Department. In fact, it is often better if they receive them from local community organisations, voluntary projects and multi-agency initiatives. It is argued, therefore, that the role of the Department in relation to vulnerable children should be to enable and to support a community family support partnership rather than to directly provide all services. This is envisaged as a network of family support services provided across the city by a range of partners, with a neighbourhood focus and an emphasis on the involvement of local people in planning, managing and delivering the services. The Department’s contribution to this partnership would be a significant one, and could include passing some services to local neighbourhood management, procuring services on a contractual basis, seconding staff, pooling budgets or contributing to a “mixed economy”. This model has an important role to play in local regeneration and to revitalising neighbourhoods. The partnership should be underpinned through co-ordinating City Council Services, currently delivered by the Social Services, Education and Housing Departments to ensure integration, common purpose and agreed outcomes.

- 8.3 Under the development of the “Citywide Sure Start” initiative, existing family centre buildings could become local **community family resource centres**: one stop shops in which would be based a variety of preventive services, similar to a Sure Start centre but catering for a wider age range. These centres could well continue to provide some day care if this was a local requirement, or staff could act on an outreach basis to help to

develop more local playgroups. The centres would provide groups and activities, advice, practical support etc. It is considered that there is potential for attracting external funding to support developments of this kind. These centres could develop in partnership with multi-agency Teams (see 9.1).

- 8.4 Detailed negotiations with statutory and voluntary partners would need to take place to gauge their willingness to commit their staff and resources to working in this way. Resources committed in this way have provided the opportunity to lever in additional funding from various sources, many of which could not be accessed by the Department working in isolation. Opportunities may also be available via the Children's Fund, Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative and Neighbourhood Renewal to fund new services. Locally provided services would also be more cost-effective; for example, day care in a pre-school playgroup costs less than transporting a child several miles to an expensively staffed and equipped centre. Thus it is considered that vulnerable children could be better served within their own communities, and that this would release resources that could be invested services targeted towards Children In Need.
- 8.5 It is considered that working with Children In Need is the Social Services Department's core business. While this too should be carried out in partnership with other agencies and with the communities in which they live. The service does need to change and it may be that other providers could deliver better quality more efficiently. It is recommended that Children and Family Resources should provide focussed work with children in need and that additional resources should be invested, as they are freed up from providing day care. The section must also develop further provision for older children and develop an integrated service for vulnerable children. In order to increase responsiveness towards the needs of families in particular areas it is proposed to develop a more locally focused service in each of the three child care "cluster" areas. Again, this could be based in three appropriately sited family centres and could consist of an ***intensive children and family resource service***, working with children in need of all ages.
- 8.6 The third aspect of the proposed Family Support partnership would consist of the **very specialist services that are needed for children with very complex needs**. Examples of these services are a **contact service**, a **disabled children's resource service**, a **young peoples centre**, or a **residential assessment centre for parents and young children**. The Department spends large amounts of money on providing services such as these and it is considered that specialist in-house resources could not only save money but would provide better outcomes for children and young people. The opportunities created by reducing direct provision such as day care for vulnerable children would allow us to develop or commission such specialist resources. The development of specialist services would take time and would only be taken forward after a comprehensive exercise to quantify the needs of, and required outcomes for, Leicester's children. It is considered that there is likely to be considerable interest from the voluntary sector in providing these specialist services and that a market-testing exercise will be required in due course.

9.0 Service Design

9.1 It is proposed that an outline service design for providing a comprehensive and integrated family support service is approved by Members. Detailed implementation plans will be developed to ensure effective delivery.

9.2 “City-wide Sure Start” centres

As indicated in section 8.0 the City has been successful in obtaining City-wide Sure Start funding. This funding is available to broaden the coverage of Sure Start methodologies and practice and to facilitate the development of new services. This project will receive £190k from the Sure Start Unit in 2002 / 03 and £199k in 2003 / 04, to assist in its development.

It is proposed that three of the City Council’s Family Centres develop to become resource centres based on the Sure Start model. These will offer a range of targeted services such as speech and language therapy. The centres will develop a multi-disciplinary model of delivery and will work alongside colleagues in Health and Education.

These centres will link with the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative to stimulate the development of high quality day care provision across the City. An application for Neighbourhood Nurseries funding has been placed to assist in this capacity building initiative.

Finally, enhanced community involvement is critical to the effectiveness of this development and, as a result, it is expected that these centres will be developed alongside the “Revitalising Neighbourhoods” initiative and will explore partners or strategic alliances for delivery.

9.3 “Children in Need” Centres

It is proposed that three Family Centres are reconfigured into “Children in Need” Centres. These Centres will link directly to the current three Child Care Team clusters. These will, generally, only respond to direct referrals from professionals and in particular Child Care Teams.

However, although some targeted day care may be provided it is envisaged that these Centres will respond more appropriately to the Children in Need Assessment Framework, provide targeted preventative interventions with individual and groups of children and work with the family.

In responding to this development, it will be necessary to reconfigure a range of family support services such as specialist childminding, family aides, domiciliary care and the Intensive Support Team to provide an integrated response to referrals and enhance the impact of time limited family support packages. This would involve providing some services to an extended age range, for example 0 – 13 years.

9.4 “Specialist Services”

As described in paragraph 8.6, it is proposed that three Centres are targeted to provide specialist services where appropriate, in particular with other agencies.

It is proposed that one Centre becomes the base for a **comprehensive contact service**. This would respond to the high demand for contact but would develop a high quality assessment service alongside this provision in order to respond to care proceedings. In addition, the service would coordinate transport arrangements, organise venues and offer supervising officers. This service will be developed to contribute to complex packages of care or prevention.

It is proposed that **one Centre is developed to respond to the particular needs of disabled children**. This will not result in all disabled children attending this Centre but that it will act as a resource and workbase for specialist workers working in the community. In addition it will work to provide a venue for group work and some direct work with children and parents. The Centre will also provide advice and support to providers across the Centre but will work towards a one-stop shop approach.

It is proposed that **one Centre is specifically developed to respond to children aged 13+**. Using the Resource Centre model it will act as a workbase for the development of multi-disciplinary teams and work to support young people in the community and, where appropriate, their own homes. This Centre will coordinate and provide targeted and intensive responses to young people at risk of being looked after or to support them in the community post care.

9.5 Additional developments

The reconfiguration of services allows for the development of integrated multi-disciplinary teams, providing a range of services such as family therapy, speech and language therapy, special needs pre-school teaching and targeted community development. This broadens the scope of current services and allows for integrated assessment and delivery to take place.

10.0 The way forward

10.1 If Members agree to the proposed strategic positioning and the vision for the future, the next step will be to consult widely on the detailed proposals. This will include service users, staff, Trades Unions and other agencies, both statutory and voluntary. Particular attention will be paid to the need to make the consultation process understandable and accessible to Black and Ethnic Minority service users and a range of methods will be used to ensure full participation.

10.2 An implementation plan will be developed to ensure effective management of this reconfiguration. This will include update reports for Members. This implementation plan will also distinguish between the steps that can be taken immediately and detail milestones for action.

11.0 Consultation

Initial consultation with service users and staff has been undertaken as outlined in paragraph 6. Preliminary discussions have taken place with voluntary agencies and with partner agencies through the Leicester Children's Planning Partnership.

12.0 Conclusion

These proposals aim to provide a coordinated response to modernising the provision of support to families in crisis, children in need and vulnerable children. In addition, it aims to provide services which will strengthen families and prevent children from entering the care system by ultimately providing support to families which is focused on helping them to solve their problems.

The service must begin to respond to achieving social inclusion for the City's most excluded and isolated children and families and be re-designed to minimise barriers to participation.

This reconfiguration positions the service to make a contribution to the planning and delivery of a community wide range of services and aims to underpin a partnership approach to the provision of service which involves children, young people and their parents and carers.

Ultimately, this reconfiguration aims to improve outcomes for children. Key measures for this will be:

- proportion of looked after children with three or more placement moves;
- reduction in numbers of looked after children;
- reduction of children re-registered on the Child Protection Register
- reduction in length of time on the Child Protection Register

13.0 Financial, Legal and Other Implications

The implementation of the proposals would imply the realignment of existing resources. Members will also be aware that savings of £120,000 were required from the section in 2001 / 02, rising to £495,000 in 2002 / 03. The proposals outlined here would allow the improvement in provision of services for vulnerable children and children in need whilst achieving those savings.

14.0 Other Implications

		Paragraph refers
Equal Opportunities	yes	4.2, 6.1
Policy	yes	total report
Sustainability and Regeneration	yes	8.2
Crime and Disorder	no	
Human Rights Act	no direct implications	
Eldery/people on low income	no	

15.0 Background Papers

None specifically

16.0 Consultations

The review itself involved wide consultation with staff and service users.

17.0 Report Author / Officer to Contact:

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