

Non-Executive Template

REPORT TO:	Corporate Parenting Panel 10 th December 2020
SUBJECT:	Update on the South London Commissioning Programme
LEAD OFFICER:	Paul Williamson, Strategic Programme Lead South London Commissioning Programme
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Alisa Flemming Cabinet Member for Children, Young People & Learning
WARDS:	All
PUBLIC/EXEMPT:	

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

Corporate Parenting Panel requested an update on the progress of the South London Commissioning Programme.

The report provides an update on the work of the programme in tackling issues for children in care on behalf of seven South London boroughs with particular reference to the London Borough of Croydon.

It also contains a summary of the strategic priorities of the programme for the period 2021-24.

POLICY CONTEXT/AMBITIOUS FOR CROYDON:

The commissioning and provision of effective, safe and efficient services for children and young people who are looked after supports the following corporate objectives:

- Children and young people thrive and reach their full potential
- Children and young people are safe, healthy and happy, and aspire to be the best they can be
- Safeguarding children and young people and improve their outcomes
- Good, decent homes ensuring that all people including children have the opportunity to access a suitable home

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

N/A – Report is for information only.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to note the progress of the South London Commissioning Programme and the strategic priorities of the programme for 2021-24.

1. Background and Context

- 1.1 The South London Commissioning Programme (SLCP) is a collaboration of the 12 South London boroughs. The aim of the Partnership is to develop regional commissioning models which operate at sufficient size to provide economies of scale and a varied range of placement options.
- 1.2 SLCP was established in 2013 to support the commissioning of quality placements in the NMI special school and FE College sectors.
- 1.3 In 2017, SLCP was awarded a Department for Education Innovation Fund grant £1 million to establish a light touch framework Approved Provider Panel Agreement (APPA). The framework is part of a commissioning approach that is designed to secure long-term high quality placements for children in care within a stable pricing structure. Through the use of the APPA, the programme seeks to achieve the following outcomes;
- Increased placement stability;
 - Children matched to the right placements to meet their needs;
 - Opportunities to shape the market to deliver outcomes;
 - Positive interventions for LAC through innovative joint projects, and;
 - Value for money for local authorities.
- 1.4 The London Borough of Croydon is the lead local authority for the SLCP. A further six South London boroughs form part of the children looked-after programme, comprising of Lambeth, Sutton, Greenwich, Lewisham, Merton, and Bexley. Each borough contributes £15,000 per annum for membership of the children looked-after work stream and access to the APPA framework.
- 1.5 Member boroughs of the SLCP are currently deciding on the level of their financial contributions to the programme in 2021-22. The level of funding agreed by member boroughs of each work stream will determine the future capacity of the SLCP to further develop the projects outlines in this report.

2. APPA Light Touch Framework for IFA Residential and Residential Care

- 2.1 The APPA tender was published by the South London Commissioning Programme on October 11 2019 and closed on November 11 2019. The tender was evaluated and moderated in November and December 2019.

The tender was divided into 2 lots as follows;

Non-Executive Template

Lot	Service Area	Sub-Lot
Lot 1	Residential Care	1a: Standard Placements. 1b: Specialist Placements.
Lot 2	Independent Fostering Agency	2a: Standard Placements. 2b: Specialist Placements. 2c: Emergency Placements.

- 2.2 The tender is limited to providers with a 'good' or 'outstanding' OFSTED judgement overall. This is to give assurance to local authorities and children in care that all placements are with providers with a minimum of good quality services.
- 2.3 A total of 92 providers bid to join the APPA with many providers bidding for multiple lots. Due to the rigorous approach to the assessment of quality method statements and compliance requirements the total number of providers that were admitted to the various sub-lots was as follows;

LOT 1 – Residential Care

	Total Bids	Total Passed Quality	Total Passed SQ Compliance and Quality	Total for Admission to APPA
Sub-Lot: Standard	36	17	17	17
Sub-Lot: Specialist	21	13	11	11

LOT 2 – Independent Fostering Agency

	Total Bids	Total Passed Quality	Total Passed SQ Compliance	Total for Admission to APPA
Sub-Lot: Standard	60	37	37	37
Sub-Lot: Specialist	60	38	38	38
Sub-Lot Emergency	46	29	29	29

Non-Executive Template

- 2.4 Whilst this number of providers represented a useful start for the framework, it was hoped that a larger number of providers would have been admitted. The characteristics of the market for these services means that some providers do not wish to join multiple frameworks. This may be due to the cost constraints of being on a framework or the administrative requirements of joining multiple procurement platforms.
- 2.5 The SLCP Children Looked After Project Board had agreed a set of mandatory discounts for siblings, placement stability, and bulk purchases at 5% per discount area. In retrospect, this approach resulted in bidders inflating fee levels to take into account likely discounts. This has had a negative impact on price and led to some potential bidders to not participate in this tender.
- 2.6 A secondary impact on price levels is the perception of bidders that they are unlikely to be able to increase fee levels during the lifetime of the APPA, which is up to 8 years. This is based on experience of other sub-regional frameworks which have been very proactive in rejecting fee increases.
- 2.7 SLCP has worked closely with member boroughs, providers, and national bodies to review the pricing model and fee uplift requirements. This has resulted in a streamlined discount model and potential annual fee uplifts for providers. These prices have been advertised in a refreshed tender process which closed on November 12 2021.
- 2.8 A further 43 providers have bid to join the APPA in the tender refresh. The additional providers will increase the choice for member boroughs considerably, resulting in better improved matching of children to placement provider and in a reduction in the use of spot purchasing. The following table contains the breakdown of the new bids for the framework. These bids are currently being evaluated by the SLCP and member boroughs.

Total Number of Bids on the APPA Refresh

	Total Bids
Residential Care	15
Independent Fostering Agency	30

- 2.9 Existing APPA providers have also submitted revised prices as part of the tender refresh process. The prices for the tender refresh are being analysed and are currently reflecting a reduction on the prices secured in the first tender.
- 2.9 It is anticipated that the new tender refresh will provide member boroughs with a long-term stable framework for placements, providing a good choice of high quality placements to meet the needs of children for children in care.

Joint work with Croydon

2.10 SLCP is working very closely with commissioners and placement teams in Croydon. This has included the following pieces of work;

- Development of the quality framework model for children-looked after providers.
- Ensuring that the pricing model for the tender refresh meets the needs of member boroughs.
- Detailed analysis of placement costs.
- Providing situational reporting from providers on business continuity, vacancies, and challenges in the Covid-19 response.
- Negotiating with providers to secure discounts.
- Implementation of the SLCP's 'All About Me' profile to ensure the child's voice is at the heart of decision-making.
- Membership of Croydon's Accommodation Strategy Group.

3. Strategic Priorities of the South London Commissioning Programme

3.1 An overview of the benefits of the SLCP programme for children-looked after is attached in Appendix 1. The strategic priorities of the programme can be summarised as follows;

- **Managing Cost**
- **Increased sufficiency for placements**
- **Shared resources**
- **Quality Assurance**
- **Best Practice**
- **Innovation**
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3.2 **Managing Costs;** will be reflected in the prices secure through the APPA and through future management of the market. The sufficiency of placements is very

Non-Executive Template

challenging and this situation is made more difficult by the Covid-19 pandemic. The APPA will secure stable prices that reflect the state of the market at this point in time.

- 3.3 **Increased Sufficiency;** SLCP is developing a business case for the development of in-house fostering in South London. The project is focusing on the following objectives;
- The marketing approach used by Local Authorities for recruitment, retention and professional development of foster carers.
 - Creation of a closely aligned 'Benefits and Incentives' model which would attract new foster carers and reduce competition among SLCP member boroughs.
 - Identify training and development opportunities that would encourage foster carers to choose to foster within for the South London boroughs, and to provide them with the skills required to meet the needs of all children in care.
- 3.4 All South London boroughs have a target of increasing the number of in-house foster carers. This is key to more children being able to access a suitable family-based placement, reducing the reliance on high cost residential placements. SLCP is developing a multi-borough in-house fostering project which is summarised in Section 3.12.
- 3.5 The programme is also working with member boroughs and providers on gaps in provision. The APPA providers will be used to develop practice and increase capacity to meet demand for services.
- 3.6 **Shared Resources;** All member boroughs are committed to using a common Individual Child Agreement as part of the placement process. This ensures consistency between our boroughs and is used to ensure that the provider meets the needs of the child.
- 3.7 The member boroughs in the children looked-after programme regularly share best practice, information about providers, and seek support for the challenges that they face. They regularly support each other to secure appropriate placements for children with complex needs.
- 3.8 **Quality Assurance;** SLCP have developed a quality framework for non-maintained and independent special schools for the SEND programme. Visits to the 40 most commonly used schools will be carried out on a bi-annual basis from January 2021. This will provide quality assurance to the member boroughs and will focus on raising the quality of the providers.
- 3.9 There are plans to instigate a similar quality framework for APPA providers in 2021. This enables all member boroughs to share information on the quality and practice of key providers. A more positive relationship will be developed with the providers and they will be encouraged to respond to the needs of our children and young people and to develop their offer, where appropriate.

Non-Executive Template

- 3.10 All providers on the APPA are required to be OFSTED 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. This ensures that children placed through the framework are placed with a minimum standard of provider. Regular events will be held with APPA providers to further improve their practice and to develop solutions to the challenges that we are all facing.
- 3.11 **Best Practice;** the professional network which underpins the consortium approach allows for the sharing of best practice between member boroughs. This is facilitated by the SLCP and produces benefits for all concerned. SLCP is leading on a number of best practice initiatives, including the following;
- 3.12 **Covid-19 Response:** The SLCP Covid-19 response is summarised in Appendix 2. SLCP contacted all providers during the pandemic to ensure support business continuity planning, effective risk assessments, and return to school for all pupils. Regular situational reports were circulated with information on vacancies and challenges faced by providers. All of this information was shared weekly with member boroughs.
- 3.13 SLCP set up and coordinated weekly meetings of London sub-regional organisations and national representative bodies, Independent Children's Homes Association (ICHA) and the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP). These meetings shared information on the response of the market, business continuity, market pressures, and access to PPE.
- 3.14 **Innovation Projects:** SLCP is constantly seeking to improve practice and enhance services for children in care. We are engaged in a number of innovative projects to advance these aims.
- 3.15 **In-House Fostering Recruitment and Retention:** The SLCP are leading an in-house fostering project on behalf of the South London boroughs. The aims of the project are as follows;
- Create a closely aligned Benefits and Incentives model which would reduce competition among SLCP member boroughs and improve recruitment and retention of foster carers.
 - Support the development of the marketing approach used by Local Authorities when trying recruit new in-house Foster Carers and consider multi-borough solutions to increase recruitment.
 - Design innovative recruitment campaigns to attract foster carers from diverse communities that may be under-represented at present.
 - Identify training and other support mechanisms that would encourage more foster carers to foster within for the South London boroughs.
 - Upskill in-house foster carers to enable them to care for, and meet the needs of, children and young people with specific needs.
- 3.16 This project will seek to align good practice in South London boroughs. Where appropriate, we will coordinate recruitment to increase the number and expertise of the in-house fostering community.

- 3.17 **All About Me Profile:** This profile has been developed with children in care. It is completed by the child with support from professionals. The profile will enable each child to keep a record of their characteristics, preferences, aspirations, and cultural needs. The profile has attracted the attention of the Department for Education and the Children's Commissioner and there is considerable potential for 'All About Me' to be developed as a model of regional and national good practice.
- 3.18 The Children's Social Care services in the London Boroughs of Croydon and Sutton are both adopting the profile as part of core social work practice. These pilots will be evaluated and, if successful, funding will be sought to extend this project on a regional and national level.
- 3.19 SLCP are presenting 'All About Me' and related equality and diversity priorities to the ALDCS PAN London Placement Panel on November 27 2020. This will highlight this best practice to a wider group of London local authorities.
- 3.20 All providers appointed to the Approved Provider List will be encouraged to partake in innovative projects with SLCP partners in the future. The aim is for the partner boroughs to initiate a number of joint projects to tackle;
- The development of specialist fostering services, including support for in-house fostering.
 - Equalities and diversity for young people, including adoption of the 'All About Me' profile for children and young people.
 - Health and well-being challenges faced by looked after children.
 - Educational and employment opportunities.
 - Children in custody and the youth justice system.
 - Gaps in the market for residential placements and foster care.
 - Key themes identified across the sub-region, including child sexual exploitation, gangs, County Lines and mental health.
- 3.21 The SLCP Strategic Commissioning Priorities 2020-24 have been agreed by the Children Looked-After Project Board. These are set out in Appendix 3 to this report.

4. PAN London Commissioning Solutions

- 4.1 SLCP is working closely with other sub-regional organisations in London and with the Association of London Directors of Children's Services on the PAN London Placements Panel. The Panel is focused on tackling sufficiency for particular groups of children in care. There are a number of projects being undertaken, including;
- Resettlement and alternative to youth custody.
 - Complex adolescents.

Non-Executive Template

- Provision for ASD/SEMH.
 - Mother and baby residential.
 - Secure provision.
- 4.2 The resettlement and alternatives to youth custody project has attracted funding from the Youth Justice Board. An agreement with an established provider will result in the provision of 20 residential placements for young people who have been or are due to go into custody. Once suitable premises are secured there will be accommodation for 5 young people in North, South, East and West London.
- 4.3 SLCP is involved in all of these projects and leads on the ASD/SEMH project. The aim is to increase the availability of appropriate good quality placements for children in care that are in the groups set out above. Each project will make recommendations to the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance by March 2021.
- 4.4 **ASD SEMH Project:** SLCP is leading an ALDCS PAN London Placement Panel project to tackle issues relating to ASD/SEMH. Funding has been secured from the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance.
- 4.5 This project has particular emphasis on young people with significant social emotional and mental health needs. Research will be carried out into the criteria for access to specific services, residential educational provision, key worker preventative services, and diagnostic pathways.
- 4.6 The project has the opportunity to improve good practice by determining the most effective community, family-based and residential services. Following the research stage of the project, SLCP will present a set of recommendations to the London Innovation and Improvement Alliance in March 2021.
- 4.7 The ALDCS PAN London Placements Panel is taking the initiative to develop regional solutions to the challenges of finding high quality services for children in care in London. SLCP will continue to seek solutions for our member boroughs through the work of the Panel.

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 SLCP holds regular meetings and events with providers and national representative bodies. This work has contributed to the development of the framework model, in terms of focus, quality, and price.
- 5.2 The SLCP Engagement Manager works closely with groups of children and young people on many aspects of the programme. This has included development of the All About Me profiles, the expectations contained within the tender specification, and feedback on the performance of providers.

Non-Executive Template

- 5.3 Consultation with service users, foster carers, and service providers if being undertaken for the in-house fostering, equalities and diversity, and ASD/SEMH projects.
- 5.4 As part of the development of the quality frameworks for SEND and children-looked-after providers consultation takes place with the providers of these services.

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APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT

[Appendices to be attached to this report must be listed in number order below]

Appendix 1: Summary of Progress – SLCP

Appendix 2:

Appendix 3:

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: *[Complete for Part A reports only - list documents that have not been published previously]*