

No Recourse to Public Funding (NRPF) Report

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Corporate Resources O&S Committee
Report of:	Assistant Head Of Services MASH and Citywide Services
Date of Meeting:	19 th January 2016
Subject:	No Recourse to Public Funding (NRPF)

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1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1.	To provide an update for Overview and Scrutiny on the work being carried out in relation to NRPF.

2.0.	Decisions Requested
2.1.	No decisions requested.

3.0.	Background
3.1.	The NRPF function of Birmingham City Council was examined and reported on by the Governance, Resources and Customer Services Overview and Scrutiny Service in December 2013.
3.2.	The report arose in response to evidence that increasing numbers of families, unable to access mainstream benefits because of their immigration status, were applying to the City Council for support.
3.3.	The City Council is obliged to support children whose families have no recourse to public funds due to their immigration status where families are destitute under the Children Act 1989 Section 17 as a child in need.
3.4.	The Governance, Resources and Customer Services Overview and Scrutiny Report of December 2013 recommended 14 points for the local authority to action.

4.0.	Update
4.1.	<p>The initial progress of defining NRPF services was managed using a project based methodology so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The aims of the work are defined and scoped. ii. The work to support NRPF is planned and documented. iii. The benefits of the work in relation to NRPF are clear. iv. The risks, issues and dependencies associated with the work are recorded and acted on. v. The work is regularly reported on to enable senior management oversight and control. <p>This has now concluded and on the whole is now secure. The service is now a front facing service.</p>

4.2.	<p>An analysis of the NRPF service was conducted from April 2015 to July 2015, including considering progress against O & S recommendations.</p> <p>Parallel to this, work was undertaken consolidating the current children and families open to the team. Data held on CareFirst was validated which highlighted that there were children and families with NRPF status being supported by other teams within Children's Social Care. Therefore, we did not have a true reflection of the cost as subsistence was being paid from a different budget. Also, the law and processes with the Home Office around NRPF case is very technical and managers and social workers in other teams do not have this expertise.</p> <p>All NRPF cases, unless a child is in care or on a child protection plan have moved into the NRPF team. Work still continues, in terms of cases that need to remain with the areas, ensuring the subsistence is paid from the central NRPF budget.</p> <p>The Service currently has a Team caseload of 289 children which equates to 173 families.</p> <p>NRPF costs are 1.63% of the Children's Services budget. Staffing is £248,206. The total cost for NRPF subsistence and housing costs is £2,511,247.</p>
4.3.	<p>The NRPF Team have produced an NRPF Pathway to standardise practice. This has identified who referrers are and pathways for referrals and outcomes.</p> <p>One of the recommendations was to review, publicise, and update the NRPF Pathway. This has been reviewed and there is an established referral pathway and assessment process. The establishment of MASH has created a single point of referral for all concerns about children including NRPF.</p>
4.4.	<p>Partnership working was highlighted as an area of weakness between Children's Social Care and organisations offering services to families with NRPF.</p> <p>Stakeholder events have been held in May 2015 and September 2015, which have mapped all stakeholders working with NRPF families in Birmingham. These proved to be very successful. Moving forward these events are to be themed for example, looking at other local authorities and how they offer services, changes in legislation and judgements and how these impact on the offering services. These are planned to continue every quarter.</p> <p>Initially there was an indication of commissioning out services for children and families with NRPF. The local authority has a statutory duty to provide a social work service to all children in need and that includes children in NRPF families. Therefore the service has remained within BCC Children's services. We are now working more closely with the Commissioning Centre of Excellence to secure better quality and better value accommodation for NRPF families and obligations to offer services, as the children whose families have NRPF are children in need in the locality of Birmingham.</p>

4.5.	<p>We have developed a clear policy about payment and subsistence for children and families with NRPF. A policy and subsistence schedule has been produced and this includes recent changes in legislation in respect of Children and Families with no status and the current government changes on benefits.</p> <p>Approval of the policy is now imminent and this is being sought through the Executive Director and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Councillor Brigid Jones.</p>
4.6.	<p>NRPF Connect is a national system hosted by Islington Council to share information about families with the Home Office Immigration service. Birmingham has signed up to the service. The database is accessible by all practitioners within the service to check on the progress of applications and then make representation as to why there is drift.</p> <p>This went live as of November 2015. This resulted in resolving seven cases within a very short period of time. This is helping resolve cases more quickly. We are informed when families have leave to remain and can work or claim benefits. Our support can then end.</p> <p>Systems are now in place to ensure better case progression is evidenced in terms of resolving families' status here in the UK. Better links have been made with UK Border control and the Home Office to offer technical advice to social Workers. The Home Office form part of the quarterly partnership meetings.</p> <p>In essence this will ensure that we only offer services and subsistence to the children and families that we need to support.</p>
4.7.	<p>Accommodation for children and families was part of the original review and still remains an issue. The NRPF service uses five hotels and seventeen letting/Landlords. We are developing a new procurement process in order to standardise the quality of accommodation and move away from poor quality accommodation and the use of high cost hotels.</p> <p>The team does have a Housing Officer who serves the purpose of ensuring any issues with the current accommodation offered are resolved in a timely manner for the child and families. The officer has a quality assurance function with the current providers.</p>
4.8.	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>BCC Children's Services are represented on the NRPF West Midlands forum and National Networks. This supports updating on local and national practice. We also meet quarterly with the Home Office.</p> <p>The NRPF service is now stable. There is no longer a budget pressure. Social work practice is improved and more focused on the needs of children. An updated policy and payment schedule is about to be agreed.</p>

	<p>We are working more closely with the Home Office, sharing data and resolving issues for families more quickly.</p> <p>We are entering into a new procurement process to improve the quality and cost of accommodation.</p>
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5.0.	Reason for a Decision
5.1.	No decisions are requested.

6.0.	Background Documents
6.1.	Children and Families with No Recourse to Public Funds: A report from Overview and Scrutiny, Birmingham City Council 03 December 2013.