

# **Barnsley Corporate Parenting Panel**

## **Annual Report: 2022-2023**

### **1.0 Context**

1.1 This report sets out an annual update on the Corporate Parenting arrangements in Barnsley, with progress and outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023. It reminds Members of key legislation and guidance and highlights local performance and continued service improvement, setting out the priorities for the coming year.

### **2.0 Proposals and Reasons: Corporate Parenting – Our Responsibilities Legal Framework**

2.1 At the heart of our service delivery to our children, young people and care leavers is our commitment to the seven principles of corporate parenting as set out in Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act (2017) and the statutory guidance: *Applying corporate parenting principles to looked after children and care leavers* (2018).

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
- to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work

2.4 The Children and Social Work Act (2017) introduced new provisions for care leavers being to provide Personal Advisers (PA's) up to the age of 25 and for councils to publish a Local Offer for this cohort of young people leaving care. The Local Offer was reviewed in full in January 2023 and a significantly improved offer was launched which has been well received by our Care Leavers in terms of benefits and the workforce.

<https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/media/24571/barnsleys-local-offer-for-care-leavers.pdf>

2.5 Associated statutory guidance also introduced in the Children and Social Work Act (2017), focuses on supporting the education of children in care and previously looked-after children including Adoption, Child Arrangements Orders and Special Guardianship. Other key duties for professionals involved with children in care states that, '*Social workers, virtual school heads, Independent Reviewing Officers, school admission officers, and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) departments should work together to ensure that, except in an emergency, appropriate education provision for a child is arranged at the same time as a care placement*'. In Barnsley, any consideration of a placement or change in placement for children in care is considered alongside the Virtual School and SEND professionals.

### **3.0 Corporate Parenting – The Role and Responsibility of Councillors**

3.1 Effective corporate parenting requires knowledge and awareness of the needs of children and young people in care and the services they receive. This is a shared responsibility by the Council as a whole. The role of the corporate parent is therefore:

- a) To receive and consider accurate and timely management information reports on the numbers, characteristics and needs of children in care and care leavers.
- b) To receive and consider reports demonstrating how effectively Barnsley is serving its children in care population through the provision of services and targeted initiatives.
- c) To receive briefings on new national and local initiatives designed to improve children and young people's life chances.
- d) To gain knowledge of services based on direct involvement and opportunities to meet and gain the views of stakeholders, especially listening to the views of children and young people in care and members of the Care 4 Us Council.
- e) To monitor and review progress on the new Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-25 and the 'expectations' to children in care and care leavers in terms of placement sufficiency and quality.
- f) To ensure that decisive action and challenge is taken to address any shortcomings in the services provided to children and young people

#### **4.0 The Barnsley Expectation to Children and Young People in Care**

4.1 What all children and young people in our care can expect from us:

- We'll look after children in care in a safe and caring home.
- We'll promote, support and respect their identity.
- We'll ensure all children in care receive a good education.
- We'll support children in care to be healthy.
- We'll prepare children in care for the future; and
- We'll involve children in care in decision making and making it happen

#### **5.0 Corporate Parenting in Barnsley**

5.1 Children in Care are those children and young people aged 0 -18 years who cannot safely remain with their birth family and are cared for by the local authority. The local authority has continuing responsibilities for young people up until they are 25 years of age who have been in care for a period of at least 13 weeks (or periods amounting to 13 weeks) after their 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. This includes all unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and children with multiple disabilities.

5.2 The Corporate Parenting Panel is responsible for children in care, children at the edge of care and children and young people who have left care.

5.3 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel in their roles must act as 'pushy parents' and continually question, '*would this be good enough for my child*'.

#### **6.0 Corporate Parenting Panel Overview and Membership**

6.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is chaired by the Cabinet Spokesperson for Children's Services.

6.2 The Panel meet every two months and the strong commitment to children and young people is reflected in the consistent attendance by the full range of Members, which include:

- Elected Members appointed by Barnsley MBC

- Executive Director, Children’s Services, Barnsley MBC
- Service Director, Children’s Social Care & Safeguarding, Barnsley MBC
- Virtual Head Teacher for Children in Care, Barnsley MBC
- Head of Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, Barnsley MBC
- Safeguarding Nurse for Children in Care, Barnsley MBC
- Designated Nurse Safeguarding Children / LAC, South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board and Designated Doctor, Barnsley Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
- Head of Service, Children in Care Services, Barnsley MBC
- Service Managers for Children in Care and Care Leavers Teams, Residential Children’s Homes and Independent Reviewing Officer, Barnsley MBC
- Principal Social Worker Barnsley MBC
- Service Manager – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Senior Representative from Barnsley College

We have also now introduced twice per year two children/ young persons led panels. The first one was in October 2022 and was led by members of the Care 4 Us Council. In May 2023 the panel was led by children and their foster carers from one of BMBC’s Mockingbird Fostering Constellations which was a great success.

## **7.0 Corporate Parenting Work Programme in 2023/24**

7.1 **Please see the Annex** at the end of this report

## **8.0 Progress and Outcomes for Children in Care & Care Leavers in 2022-23**

8.1 We know that Barnsley has stable communities, with well-established extended family networks that frequently support vulnerable children within the family. This factor has an impact on both the numbers of children with protection plans and the numbers of children in our care, which we continually scrutinise. Over the course of 2022/23 our numbers of children in care have significantly increased and were recorded as 410 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, a 15.8% increase in the year.

8.2 Children in care and care leavers need strong, stable relationships with their allocated workers who knows them well and sees them regularly, some over and above regulatory/practice requirements. Whilst there has been a permanent Head of Service for the Children in Care, Care Leaver and Provider Service portfolio since May 2022, there has been some continued instability in the service due to change of personnel at Senior and Team Management levels alongside turnover of Social Workers due to sickness absence and some Social Workers employed on an agency basis. This has resulted in some children and young people experiencing more frequent changes of social worker that we would like, impacting upon the quality of relationships and progress of timely care planning.

8.3 Following a review of the workforce, spans of control for managers and caseloads, two additional permanent Team Managers posts have been created resulting in there now being two permanent teams in the structure for Children in Care and two Care Leavers (Future Directions). Two of the teams have permanent Team Managers and a third experienced permanent Team Manager for Future Directions is due to commence in post in July 2023. In addition, we have also increased our number of Personal Advisors for Care Leavers on a permanent basis resulting in all Care Leavers now been allocated a Personal Advisor much earlier (16 years and 3 months) to ensure additional support is in place during preparation for adulthood. We have also had success in recruiting six new permanent Social Workers for the Children in Care Teams, enabling us to gradually reduce our reliance on agency social workers.

- 8.4 As part of the improvement plan for Children and Young People's service there are identified strategic and operational actions and priorities within the Development Plan for Children in Care and Care Leavers. Progress is tracked on a monthly basis through the Development Board. Service Improvement Plans (SIPs) are also in the process of being finalised and detail and track operational priorities in terms of improving the quality of service delivery. This includes tracking the recommendations from the Ofsted Inspection of BMBC's Care Leaving Service (Future Directions) following the focused visit in January 2023.
- 8.5 In November 2022 a multi-agency 'Operational Group' was formed to deliver the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2022-2025. The Operational Group works collectively on the strategy within the four workstream areas of **health, education, participation, and sufficiency** and reports into the Corporate Parenting Panel on a 6 monthly basis. An action plan has been devised for each workstream to deliver on the strategy and progress is reviewed each meeting in terms associated impact measures, data and outcomes. The following areas have been identified as a key focus within the delivery plan of the operational group thus far:

#### Participation

- Drove forward the children's participation 'Bright Spot's' survey's 'Your Life Your Care and Your Life Beyond Care' which concluded on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 with a 56% response rate by our Care Leavers and 55% response rate from Children in Care. Full survey results will be available by the end of July 2023.
- Launch of holistic Leaving Care and Youth Justice delivery hub – Commerce House – unfortunately the launch has been delayed until August 2023 due to health and safety.
- Improving participation in the Care 4 Us Council membership.

#### Health

- Linking in with health groups and opportunities in communities with external providers (sports, leisure, participation, education) for children in care and care leavers.
- Revised the SDQ process to ensure that this is a meaningful measure regarding the wellbeing of children in care and a multi-agency response to any difficulties is identified and a response provided at the earliest opportunity.
- Introduced a monthly Emotional Wellbeing Intervention Meeting that discusses and determines early intervention for children in care and their carers from existing and external resources of differing expertise such as CAMHS, Substance Misuse, Virtual School, and Social Care.
- Training – secured bespoke training alongside our partnership organisations that will assist workers to implement low level emotional wellbeing techniques with CYP and support departments such as foster carers and key workers.
- Deliver Healthy Child Programme and complete Review Health Assessments up to age 18
- Reviewed and revised the health offer to Care Leavers – to include health passports, emotional support, CAMHS Pilot until 25 years, support for young parents.

#### Education

- Virtual School post-16 and care leavers focus on EET
- Changed the PEP system - the all-in-one system will allow the Virtual School and social workers to engage directly with school data and monitor at risk pupils collaboratively.
- Introduced motivational assessments for children and young people to support well-being.

In addition, going forward the group will consider the implementation plans for the Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy identified a part of the Social Work Reforms 2023 for children in care and care leavers.

8.6 A revised Sufficiency Strategy (2022-2025) has also been produced and was presented to Cabinet last month. The purpose of the Sufficiency Strategy is to set out the Council's vision for, and approach to, providing sufficient, safe, secure and appropriate placements for children in care and young people over the next 3 years. A Sufficiency Strategy Implementation Group co-chaired by the Head of Service for Children in Care and Head of Service for Children's Commissioning, commenced in May 2023 to focus on the following workstreams within the strategy.

Workstream
Review of all high cost placements (External Placements).
Planning for Permanency Initiative
Review of Health Funding contributions (Continuing Health Care, S117 Funding, Special Educational Needs contributions – increase revenue to Barnsley MBC
Expanding Barnsley's own provision – Specialist Residential / New Children's Home, Care Leaver provision and pace bed
Market Development - Block booking with external providers
Full review of the Fostering Service, recruitment and retention
Development of Preventative Early Intervention Services - Edge of Care Services and Family Group Conferencing
Commissioning Approach - Contract Management and Quality Assurance
16+ Offer and specification - Developing offer with new 16+ homeless provider from October 2023

8.7 The numbers of children in care in Barnsley has continued to rise during 2022/23 from 350 as at 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 at 350 to 410 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. The year on year rise in relation to children in care numbers brings with it challenges in identifying suitable care arrangements. Whilst every effort is given to identify wider family and friends as carers, demand remains for placements predominantly for older children and sibling groups. An audit of the last 20 children and young people who entered care is scheduled to take place in the next three months to review decision making and practice.

8.8 In terms of other data, that is limited this year due to our performance data being reconfigured into Business Intelligence reports following the launch on a new electronic social care system, Mosaic, in November 2022. Performance clinics continue to be held on a fortnightly basis to track key performance indicators available to social care and the manual trackers that have been devised in the interim

8.9 There are strong collaborative relationships across the service with BMBC's new Virtual School Head who was appointed in November 2022. During 2022/23 there was a significant focus and improvement in our school attendance for Children in Care and also ensuring that all children and young people have an appropriate education offer. Attendance and behaviour are tracked on a day to day basis via welfare cloud and any issues are immediately addressed by the Virtual School Head and Advocates in conjunction with the child's Social Worker. The Virtual School Head and Advocates work collaboratively with schools to ensure the educational needs of children in care are being met within school and bespoke plans are in place where

required. Overall attendance of children in care up to the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2023 was 91.68%. Primary age attendance was, 96.7% and secondary age 87.8%.

- 8.10 The Virtual School has implemented a new Personal Education Plan (PEP) system which is an electronic based PEP, utilising the Welfare Cloud system. This is a significantly positive move away from the previous dated system. The new PEP allows for much more flexible working for social workers who can complete their element of the PEP when suitable to their workload and visits to young people. This will allow social workers to conduct PEPs when with the young person 1:1 away from school. The new system has been designed to be less onerous on social workers and designated teachers whilst still gleaning appropriate data and information.
- 8.11 The Virtual School has introduced the Motional assessment, monitoring and intervention tool for social workers and schools. This system allows for social and emotional profiles to be quickly created providing professionals with an in depth review of our young people, their mental health needs and how best to work with and support them. All schools in Barnsley now have the Motional package of support and are utilising it to support all looked after children and those with a social worker.
- 8.12 A monthly Education, Training and Employment Panel, made up of representatives from social care and employment and skills, continues to meet to ensure care leavers get the targeted information, advice, guidance and support they need to participate and progress in education, employment and training. This is a valued panel and offers further reassurance on our support to care leavers. Our overall ETE performance figures for care leavers reduced to 62.3% during 22/23, resulting in the target of 68% not being achieved. The target has continued to be set at 68% for the forthcoming year with a renewed focus on the 19-21 care leaver co-hort.
- 8.13 The Planning for Permanency initiative has been launched in May 2023 which forms part of one of the workstreams within the Sufficiency Strategy (2022-2025). There are two broad strands to the **Planning for Permanency** initiative needing to be successfully implemented; improve practice through offering an intensive support service to enable children and young people to remain living successfully with their family and improve practice to ensure that the right children are in care at the right time and right place.

Improve practice to support children and young people to remain living successfully with their family

Currently there is focused DFE funded work being undertaken with North Yorkshire County Council to enable Barnsley to further develop their early intervention services to support offer intensive support services for children, young people and their families to address what is not working well and remain living together successfully. This includes the development of a specific Edge of Care Team / service and also a Family Group Conference (FGC) team.

Family Group Conferencing is an evidence-based model designed to support families to find solutions to problems that are putting children at risk. The family group conference is facilitated to enable family members to plan and make decisions to keep the child or children safe. The team will focus on working on families who have a Child in Need plan, particularly if risks are escalating, families with a Child Protection Plan, families who are already in a Public Law Outline process and with Children in Care where there may be an opportunity for a child or young person to return home.

The Edge of Care Team will be a multi-disciplinary team made up of practitioners who have complementary skills and experience developed through working with adults with complex

needs as well as with families. The team will take a systemic approach that is able to help and challenge families to change to the extent that they are able to stay together or reunite.

Improve practice to continuously review permanency plans for children to ensure that the right children are in care at the right time and right place

Barnsley's current practice in terms of continuously reviewing permanency plans and ensuring that the right children are in care at the right time and right place is underdeveloped. Barnsley needs to move to a position whereby Local Authority care (Long Term Fostering, Residential Care) should not be seen as an indefinite final care plan of a child's care arrangements until they are 18 years old. Assessments needs to be regularly refreshed and consideration given at each Children in Care review if alternatives to Local Authority care are available to the child and would be in their best interests. This could include reunification to birth parents or extended family, Special Guardianship to Foster Carers or Connected Carers or adoption.

To formally develop this practice within Barnsley the 'Planning for Permanency' initiative has been developed. A tracker of all Barnsley's children in care has been developed to achieve a baseline cohort and six workstreams have been identified. Progress has begun to be tracked through an additional performance meeting to ensure that children and young people identified in the baseline cohort are receiving the right package of care to meet their needs.

As a result of the scoping exercise undertaken approximately 259 Children in Care have been identified as being appropriate for consideration for a move to more appropriate care arrangements / change in legal status in at least one of the identified work-streams. Workstreams include:

- Discharge of Care Order for children living at home on Placement with Parents Regs (PwP) or 38(6)
- Children on the Adoption Pathway
- Supporting Children in Care to Permanence.
- Regulations 24 / Connected Persons placements
- Reunification of Looked After Children aged 14-16 years old
- Children and Young People subject to Section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

8.16 As part of the transformation review, a full review of the Fostering Service is currently being undertaken by the Interim Fostering Service Manager and finance colleagues to include a review of the financial remuneration to foster carers as well as the general support offer, with a view to focusing on how Barnsley MBC can improve recruitment and retention of foster carers. This report will be available in July 2023. Positively, whilst the number of fostering / SGO assessments for children who have been placed with connected family carers increased over 2022/23, the number of mainstream foster carers approved for Barnsley MBC throughout the year was only 11 fostering households. Coupled with the number of fostering households who resigned, this resulted in a net figure overall. The fostering service has recruited an additional interim Team Manager who commenced in June 2023 to specifically focus on strengthening recruitment processes in Barnsley. In addition, there has been an interim Fostering Panel Advisor in post since January 2023 who is delivering upon a service improvement plan to strengthen the quality of assessments and reports which are presented to the fostering panel and improve the panel's quality and function.

8.17 Barnsley MBC continues to be part of One Adoption South Yorkshire (Regional Adoption Agency - RAA) to deliver adoption services for children collectively across the four South Yorkshire Authorities. The number of children in Barnsley who were adopted in 2022/23 has

significantly reduced compared to the number in the previous year 2021/22. Further analysis will be provided within the Adoption Annual report. Some of these children were placed within the RAA. As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 a small cohort of children were placed for adoption and a further small cohort who were matched to prospective adopters pending their transition. A small number were also placed with Early Permanence Foster Carers who could go on to adopt the child in the future should their care plan be one of adoption.

- 8.18 Barnsley continues to have two Residential Children's Homes, both of these homes now have permanent Registered Managers who are now line managed by an Interim Residential Service Manager. The post has been approved on a permanent basis to go out to advert. Newsome Avenue which provides short break care for children with disabilities was last inspected in September 2021 and maintained *Good* in all areas. There is now a continuous improvement plan in place at Newsome Avenue where practice continues to be challenged and taken forward by the team and Registered Manager, led by the Service Manager to include a full review of the waiting list and how short break stays at Newsome are allocated through the Short Breaks Panel. Barnsley MBC's mainstream children's home has been on 'pause' since September 2022 following an Ofsted Inspection under the Social Care Common Inspection Framework which resulted in an *Inadequate* judgement. All actions have now been addressed and following some structural work being undertaken on the home there is a plan for Spring Lane to re-open in October 2023 as a three bedded home. A continuous improvement plan is in place which has included a full training and development plan for the staff team.

## 9.0 Priorities for the Corporate Parenting Panel for 2023 - 2024

- Effectively oversee and manage workstreams linked to the Placement Sufficiency Strategy (2022- 2025) outlined above.
- Continue to collectively drive forward the actions within the Children in Care and Care Leavers Operational Group linked to Health, Education and participation, to include actions following the evaluation of the Bright Spots Survey data.
- Monitor progress of the Planning for Permanency Initiative.
- Track and strengthen placement stability through meaningful SDQ measures and the Therapeutic Offer Group.
- Focus on recruitment and retention of Foster Carers for Barnsley through a reviewed offer.
- Monitor progress of young people in our residential homes through Regulation 44 reports
- Track adoption timeliness and provide support to our Regional Adoption Agency
- Continue to track and monitor school attendance within school and reduce the number of children and young people who are not in employment, education or training.
- Track and strengthen the numbers of Care Leavers engaged in Employment, Education and Training
- Improve transitional planning for Disabled Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People into Adulthood

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