

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PEOPLE) TO CABINET

(16th May 2018)

REVIEW AND 'REFRESH' OF THE BARNSELY PLACEMENT AND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS (2018-20)

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the development and formulation of the Borough's revised Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for children in care and young people leaving care.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That Cabinet notes the outcome of the recent review of the current Barnsley Placement and Sufficiency Strategy and approves, for adoption, the refreshed Strategy, as summarised in Paragraphs 4.2 – 4.8 of this report and detailed in Appendix 1.**

3.0 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 The Children Act (1989) continues to place a statutory duty upon local authorities in taking reasonable and practical steps in ensuring sufficient accommodation is available for children who are in or are entering the care of the Authority and who, in the interest of their safety and overall wellbeing, cannot live at home.
- 3.2 The Council's original Placement and Sufficiency Strategy was considered and approved by Cabinet, at its meeting held on 26th March 2014. The Strategic Objectives of the Strategy were and remain as follows:
- To prevent, where appropriate, children from entering care through high quality family support, together with effective early help and intervention services.
 - Improve the recruitment and retention of quality, local authority foster carers.
 - Review and mitigate the use of costly independent fostering agencies and residential placements, together with placements outside the local authority area.
 - Increase the range of independent living provision for young people aged 16 or over.
 - To maintain the stability and permanence of quality placements that will lead to improved outcomes, particularly in the wellbeing and educational attainment of children in care.
 - Improve value for money and the effective use of resources within such activity.

3.3 Following an initial review, undertaken in 2016, the Strategy was updated to enable Cabinet, at the meeting held on 13th July 2016, to take into account the revised forecasts for the number of children who were expected to enter care during the period 2016-18, together with the reasons attributable for the increase at national and local level.

3.4 Our Performance

3.5 Between 2014 and 2016 the number of children in or entering care, in Barnsley, increased from 250 to around 300. Numbers have remained stable at around this level and the draft Strategy therefore forecasts for an average care population of around 300 between now and 2020. The actual number of children in care fluctuates at any one time as children are received into care and discharged from care. Forecasting actual numbers is challenging and the strategy based on trend data. Whilst there may be a small increase it is not expected that the number will fall below 300.

3.6 At this level, the number of children and young people in care, locally, remains below both the National Average and the average among our statistical neighbours. The measures which have contributed to Barnsley's performance in comparison to other areas, are summarised in Pages 4-5 of the revised and refreshed Strategy (*Please see Appendix 1*).

3.7 At the same time, as part of the Strategic Objective of mitigating the use of costly residential and independent fostering agency placements, gradual progress is being made in the recruitment of internal, local authority foster carers. Progress is, also, being made in achieving greater stability and permanence in placements through the effective use of instruments such as Child Arrangement Orders and Special Guardianship Orders where Barnsley continues to perform exceptionally well in terms of the number of children placed for adoption.

4.0 MEETING FUTURE CHALLENGES

4.1 Second Review And 'Refresh' Of The Strategy

4.2 In 2017, a second review of the Placement and Sufficiency Strategy commenced which considered the onset of a number of future challenges. These are summarised, below:

4.2.1 Sufficiency

- To ensure accommodation of sufficient volume and quality, leading to improvements in the range of outcomes for children in care and care leavers.
- That such accommodation exists in a system which is resilient and has the capacity to cope with increases in the complexity of cases, particularly for older children and teenagers.
- To ensure maximum value for money in meeting the placement and other needs of children in care, amid significant resource pressures and national challenges, concerning children's social care. Evidence of these pressures and challenges has been reflected notably within independent, national reviews of firstly,

children's residential care (2016) and secondly, fostering provision (2018), together with the Sector Led Care Crisis Review (2017-18)

- To effectively meet the needs of older children and adolescents, often with more complex needs. Our ambition is that children and young people are placed with families wherever possible. The challenge will, therefore, be to continue to recruit local authority foster carers with the required training and skill levels to be able to meet these young people's needs more effectively and efficiently whilst providing greater value for money.
- In addition, the revised Strategy places a renewed focus on developing the local market for the provision of independent foster placements and for residential provision where there is an express need, in order to ensure the needs of children in care can be met in, or as near to Barnsley as possible.

4.2.2 Prevention

As well as the above named challenges, the second review of the Strategy took into account the prevailing priorities of the Barnsley Children and Young People's Plan, namely that:

- Wherever possible and when it is safe to do so, children and young people are supported to remain with their families and communities and enter the care system only when absolutely necessary and unavoidable.
- Children and young people who are admitted to care will receive high quality support in order to remain in care only for as long as is considered necessary to eventually ensure successful re-integration to their families and communities.
- When children and young people do spend time in care, the experience is a positive one which will help them maintain their physical and emotional wellbeing and achieve their potential.

4.3 Re-Prioritising Our Approach To Placement And Sufficiency

4.4 At the same time, the recent review has reinforced the belief that placement stability is not just about ensuring the sufficiency of accommodation within a more sustainable system. Many children who are entering or are in care may have endured traumatic experiences and need immediate therapeutic support. A great number of these children and young people may also need access to mental health services as well as support throughout their journey into adulthood.

4.5 As a result, Cabinet is recommended to consider and approve a refreshed Strategy to enable a continued focus on the following:

- Preventing children and young people from entering care through the use of family support and providing services which explore alternatives to entering care, whilst maintaining the protection and safeguarding of these children.
- Ensuring planning is in place when children and young people enter care in order to support children in moving out of care as soon as possible.
- Arrangements are in place as soon as possible to ensure the stability of placements for children and young people remaining in care.

4.6 Core Principle And Aims Of The Refreshed Strategy

4.7 In order to develop a sustainable system which continues to meet the needs of children and young people requiring care whilst ensuring value for money and the efficient and effective use of the resources we currently have, the 'Core Principle' of the refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy (2018-20) will be to enable the right children are admitted to care, at the right time in order to secure the best possible outcomes for all children in need of help or protection.

4.8 This will be underpinned by the following aims:

- Barnsley MBC will continue to share the same aspirations for children in care as any other good parent in accordance with our 'Pledge'.
- Barnsley MBC will continue to listen to and consider the perspective of children and young people whilst ensuring that their needs are at the centre of service planning and practice.
- The provision of early help, Child in Need Services and Child Protection Plans will be the first consideration in meeting assessed needs as part of helping children remain within their families or immediate family network, where this is safe to do so.
- Early intervention and family support will continue to be an important element in de-escalating family problems impacting on vulnerable children and will help prevent the need for children to enter care.
- To use strengths based and restorative approaches within troubled families which help to build positive, pro-social relationships and develop resilience among such families.
- Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, kinship care arrangements will be explored as a preferred alternative arrangement to entering care.
- Local authority foster carer arrangements will be put in place as a first option if kinship care arrangements are not possible and if a foster care placement is considered the best option for the child.
- Residential care will only be selected if family and kinship care arrangements are not possible, where foster care arrangements are not able to best meet the needs of the child and where residential care has been rigorously assessed as being the best option for the child.
- An approach through which children and young people in need of care in the Borough are, wherever possible, placed in or close to Barnsley, in order to maintain the ongoing support of family and kinship networks, together with access to local services.
- Meaningful support will be provided to facilitate a child or young person's reintegration with his/her family or extended family (kinship) networks, following a period in care, when this is in the best interest of the child or young person.

5.0 PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

5.1 As indicated earlier in the report, the rising number of care proceedings involving vulnerable children both locally and nationally has led to a growth in demand with numbers stabilising at around 300 children. With the resources currently available it is imperative that the Core Principle and priorities which have been generated via the recent Review should form the basis of a refreshed Strategy going forward.

- 5.2 The refreshed Strategy will ensure the care system focuses upon the most vulnerable children and that associated strategies and policies, particularly concerning the provision of early help and family support as well as those aimed at tackling issues such as neglect and domestic violence, prevent children from entering care as well as enable reintegration within families and/or family networks, following a period of care. Equally, through placing children, in need of care, within or close to Barnsley as part of maintaining family and kinship networks and the nurturing of increased internal foster care capacity, such measures will help in providing permanence or stability in placements.
- 5.3 The overall result of the 'Refresh' and revised Strategy will enable all vulnerable children to receive the right kind of help and support at the right time and in a way which is right for them, whilst ensuring the resources currently available to the Council are used effectively and efficiently.

6.0 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 6.1 The outcomes of the recent Review leading to the Refresh of the Borough Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers will enable the development of a more coherent, sustainable and resilient system that focuses on the most vulnerable children, whilst helping enable other children, in need of help, to be reintegrated with their family or extended family network (*only if this is in the safe interests of the child*) through early help and support and at a point closer to home.
- 6.2 This represents the best way for meeting the needs of these children and at the same time, making the most effective use of available resources and maximising value for money.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE AND SERVICE USERS

- 7.1 The review and refresh of the Placement and Sufficiency Strategy will continue to ensure that all vulnerable children in any area of the Borough, receive the right kind of help at the right time and in a way which will enable them to best improve their wellbeing and achieve their potential, closer to home.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The financial implications of the refreshed Placement & Sufficiency strategy is summarised in the attached Appendix A and explained below.
- 8.2 The scope of the Strategy covers Children Social Care spend on looked after children (LAC) placements and includes the following: residential and foster care (in-house and external provision), supported / secured accommodation and other placements e.g. special guardianship orders (SGOs), child arrangement orders (CAOs) or adoptions.
- 8.3 In 2017/18, the total net spend on the above LAC placements is **£13.3m** (represents 55% of total net spend by Children Social Care), against which a financial pressure of **£650k** is currently reported for the 2017/18 financial year. The financial pressure in 2017/18 has arisen due to the increased number of external residential care placements during the year (at an average weekly cost of £2,870).

- 8.4 Barnsley's LAC population in 2017/18 has remained stable between 280 and 300; although it currently stands at 310 (March 2018). The refreshed strategy assumes that the LAC population in Barnsley will remain stable at around 300 for the next 2 years. Also, it is assumed that the number of fostering and residential care placements (key cost drivers) would remain consistent around 250 (i.e. 82% of total LAC population). Proposed actions / measures detailed in the strategy are aimed at managing LAC numbers down to the assumed range / target. It should be noted that growth has been applied to other placement types e.g. SGOs, adoptions, etc. to encourage the use and diversion to low cost placement types.
- 8.5 Based on the above assumptions and taking into account available resources (2017/18 baseline), the projected LAC placement costs show an increased funding requirement of **£0.543m** in 2018/19, increasing to **£0.904m** in 2019/20. The increased funding requirement for 2018/19 has been included within the Children Social care approved budget. The additional requirement for future years has been captured / reflected in the Council's revised medium term financial strategy (MTFS).

9.0 EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 No employee implications are anticipated through the approval and adoption of the refresh and revised Strategy.

10.0 COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Every stakeholder, with a responsibility or interest in promoting the wellbeing and achievement of vulnerable children and young people in need of help or protection in Barnsley, should be assured that the revised Strategy will continue to meet the individual needs of such children and young people, through early help to families; when entering care and in supporting them during and following a period of care.

11.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 11.1 The revised Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers has been informed through direct consultation with service users, including children in care as well as front line practitioners across all partner agencies within the Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust involved in services for children in care and care leavers, together with the Council's Senior Management Team.

12.0 THE CORPORATE PLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

- 12.1 The Core Principle and priorities of the revised Strategy will support the Corporate Plan Priority of enabling people to achieve their potential with the outcome that children and young people in care, together with care leavers benefit from early, targeted support and are safe from harm.

13.0 PROMOTING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

- 13.1 Improving the wellbeing and progress of all children in care, irrespective of their individual characteristics, through good placement provision and increased stability will build upon the continuous improvement being experienced in the health and educational achievement of such children.

13.2 An Equality Impact Assessment was compiled as part of the previous 'refresh' of the Strategy in order to help ensure the specific needs of individual children requiring care and with protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act (2010) are being met. Progress is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust Executive Commissioning Group.

14.0 TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

14.1 Ensuring stable placements which best meet the needs of the most vulnerable children in need of help or protection and helping such children both in and following a period of care, will impact positively on their safety and wellbeing. This can provide the confidence and assurance needed for them to overcome multiple deprivation; achieve their potential and thereby acquire the skills and qualifications which will enable them to play an active part in their communities and in the local economy.

15.0 TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

15.1 Please see Paragraphs 13.1 and 14.1.

16.0 REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

16.1 Through meeting the specific or complex needs of vulnerable children and young people at risk of harm, abuse or exploitation, the Core Principle and priorities of the refreshed Strategy will help in safeguarding and protecting these children as well as minimise any risk of adopting risky behavior(s) in others.

17.0 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

17.1 The Strategy's Action Plan (2016-20) together with the Fostering Provision 'Outcomes Framework' indicated at the end of the Appendix will be underpinned by a log of specific risks. Responsibility for reviewing risks and initiating remedial action will lie with the Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust Executive Commissioning Group.

17.2 Any strategic risks which could inhibit achieving any of the actions in the Plan or targets in local performance indicators will also be reported either on an exceptional basis to the Senior Management Team or via the Corporate Plan quarterly performance reports.

18.0 HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES

18.1 There are no implications for the health and safety of the public or workforce arising through this report.

19.0 COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

19.1 The Core Principle and priorities of the revised Strategy are compatible with the Articles and Protocols of the Convention and, in particular, would support the promotion of the child's right to be protected from harm

20.0 CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

20.1 There are no implications for the local environment or the conservation of biodiversity emerging through the report.

21.0 GLOSSARY

21.1. None, applicable.

22.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

22.1 Appendix 'A': Financial Summary Of Implications

Appendix 1: Barnsley Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care (2018/20) (Revised)

23.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

23.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email governance@barnsley.gov.uk so that appropriate arrangements can be made

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Financial Implications/Consultation

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*(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer
where no financial implications)*