

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

ANNUAL REVIEW 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 outcomes concerning the latest review of the Borough's Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That Cabinet notes the progress made by the Council in meeting the Core Principle and aims of the refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for children in care and care leavers, during 2018/19.**
- 2.2 **Cabinet notes the action to be taken, within the current resource envelope, to address ongoing challenges in the placement of children requiring care, following the annual review, as detailed within Appendix 1 of this report.**

3.0 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 At its meeting held on 30th May 2018, Cabinet considered a report which outlined a number of factors leading to a refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers.
- 3.2 The refreshed Strategy would continue to focus on the following:
- Preventing children and young people from entering care through improving the resilience of families whilst maintaining the safeguarding and protection of such children.
 - Ensuring planning is in place when children and young people enter care, in order to support them successfully leave care as soon as possible.
 - Arrangements are in place to ensure the stability of placements for all children and young people, remaining in care.
- 3.3 However, in order to develop a more sustainable system which continues to meet the needs of children and young people requiring care whilst, at the same time, ensuring value for money and the effective use of available resources, the 'Core Principle' of the refreshed Strategy would be to enable the right children are admitted into care, at the right time in order to secure the best possible outcomes for all children in need of help or protection.

3.4 This 'Core Principle' would 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'.
- The Council 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 with 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 build positive, pro-social relationships and develop resilience.
- 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 provision is 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 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 re-integration with his/her family or extended family (kinship) networks, following a period in care, when this is in the best interests of the child or young person.
- Corporate parenting is well embedded and there are strong internal joint initiatives, i.e. with Place and Communities, alongside the wider children's partnership, all working together to deliver outstanding services and promote best outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

3.5 Annual Review of The Strategy (2019)

3.6 Cabinet will be acutely aware, that a combination of rising demand among vulnerable children; the state of the market for placements, together with the lack of a sustainable level of funding for children's social care, has resulted in what is widely perceived to be a national, children in care "*crisis*". This has meant, that year on year, the Council must maintain diligent oversight over tolerance levels within this significant area of Council expenditure.

3.7 As a result, an initial review was recently conducted to consider any characteristics among children in need of care in the Borough, together with developments in national policy which could impact on tolerance levels within the system; reduce the quality of service or drive up costs.

3.8 Outcomes Of The 2019 Review

3.9 Appendix 1 outlines, firstly, the progress made against the strategic objectives and operational priorities of the refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy and, secondly, the challenges which need to be considered moving forward.

3.10 The following is a summary of these considerations:

Progress

- Despite a national rise in the numbers of children in local authority care, Barnsley has maintained low rates due to a strong Early Help offer, preventing children from entering care, together with strong permanency planning for children in care. Performance was strong during 2018/19 with an increasing percentage of young people leaving care as a result of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs), Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs) or Residential Orders (ROs).
- Barnsley remains a top performer for the percentage of children who are being successfully adopted.
- Continuing the recruitment of additional local authority foster carers in order to improve capacity and a reduction in unit costs for both independent fostering and residential placements is financially effective and efficient. In particular, there has been an increase in the number of local authority foster carers who are able to meet the needs of older children aged 14 or more. A continuation of this trend will be of crucial importance in helping to respond to local demand.
- At 135 days we remain on track in meeting the challenging local target for the period of time taken to conduct a foster carer assessment (125 days). This is significantly better than the national average.
- Based upon expenditure per head of the population, unit costs for placing children in care amount to £203.00 which is lower than the local authority group average of £279.00.

Ongoing Challenges

- Whilst the Local Authority is successfully improving capacity within internal foster care, this is within a context of a highly competitive market.
- There has been an 11% increase in the number of adolescents entering care, during 2018/19 due to a greater national awareness of the needs of older children. An older care cohort often includes some children with more complex needs and therefore requiring more intensive and specialist support.
- The cost of one-off secure welfare placements to meet the complex needs of individual children and for which there is no alternative.
- Barnsley has a high number of adolescent children who are placed in the Borough by other local authorities due, for example, to the closure of residential facilities within their area(s) or other risks. This equated to 229 children as at 31st March this year.
- At the same time and, in order to meet our commitment to care leavers, there has been an increase in the use of semi-independent placements for the purpose of supporting care leavers making the transition to independent living.
- Whilst the percentage of ongoing placements lasting two years or more has reduced, the percentage of children who had been in care for 12 months or more, during 2018/19 increased from 65.4% to 71%.

- Whereas placement stability within the Borough remains better than both the National and Statistical Neighbour Averages, the percentage of children experiencing 3 or more placements has risen from 3.9% in December 2017 to 4.8% at the end of March, this year.

- 3.11 The cohort of children who were in the care of the Authority, during 2018/19 equated to 320 children against an original target of 300 by 2020. This was attributable to an increase of 50 children entering care during Quarter 3, many of whom were children aged under 5. However, the number of children and young people in the Council's care remains significantly below that of comparable local authorities and the National Average.
- 3.12 The in-year impact of these factors, particularly in relation to costs and funding is referenced in Paragraph 7.1 of this report, together with Appendix 'A' and in the outcomes of the annual review (Appendix 1).
- 3.13 Three unaccompanied asylum seeking children who were dispersed to the Borough via the Dubs Scheme were found placements with foster carers who were trained to meet the specific needs of such children.

4.0 PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 Given the Core Principle and aims of the refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy, this year's annual review has enabled the Council to identify the following, immediate priorities in order to maintain the sustainability of the system within the agreed resource envelope and comply with our statutory duty:
- To develop the local market through ensuring the availability of family placements, including for children and young people with complex needs who require care.
 - To continue to reduce the use of external residential placements and, at the same time, continue to increase the number and range of internal fostering placements on offer.
 - To maintain improvements in the use of kinship arrangements, including SGOs and CAOs as alternatives to admissions into care.
 - To develop the provision of emergency fostering beds and increase independent and supported living provision for young people aged 16 or over together with care leavers.
 - Revise care pathways and support services for adolescents involved in risky behaviour or at risk of criminal exploitation, through the current review of adolescent support services.
 - To identify local carers who are able to offer emergency placements at short notice in a crisis.

5.0 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 Please see Paragraph 4.1.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

- 6.1 The Strategy will continue to ensure that all vulnerable children in need of help or protection, in any area of the Borough, receive the right kind of support, including entering care where necessary and at the right time, in a way which will best enable them to maintain their wellbeing and achieve their potential, closer to home.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The financial implications of the refreshed LAC placement & sufficiency strategy is summarised in the attached Appendix A and explained below.

- 7.2 The scope of the Strategy covers 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.

- 7.3 In 2018/19, total net spend on LAC placements amount to **£13.9m** (represents 54.5% of total net spend by Children Social Care), against which a financial pressure of **£714k** was reported. The overspend in 2018/19 is mainly attributable to increased placements in semi-independent provision and a number of high cost secure welfare placements during the year. Barnsley's LAC population in 2018/19 has remained stable and fluctuated around the planned target of 300 (LAC number was 306 at the end of March 2019).

- 7.4 The following are the key planning assumptions reflected in the 2019 refreshed strategy / projections:

- Barnsley's LAC population will remain stable and be managed around 300 in 2019/20 and over the next 2 years;
- Assumed growth in the use of in-house fostering with a corresponding reduction in more expensive independent fostering agency placements;
- No growth assumed for residential placements - held at a constant level (28) over the period;
- One high cost secure welfare placement (£7,000 per week) assumed in the total residential placement numbers – reflects the high incidence or likelihood of such placement in any year;
- Inflationary uplift in fees/unit cost assumed for fostering and residential care placements.

- 7.5 Based on the above assumptions and taking into account available resources (2019/20 baseline), the projected LAC placement costs show an additional annual funding requirement of **£0.195m** and **£0.142m** in 2020/21 and 2021/22 respectively. The additional requirement for future years has been captured / reflected in the Council's revised medium term financial strategy (MTFS).

8.0 EMPLOYEE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no employee implications directly emerging through consideration of this report.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The Children Act (1989) continues to place a statutory duty upon local authorities in taking reasonable and practical steps to ensure 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 wellbeing, cannot live at home.
- 9.2 The Core Principle and aims of the refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy ensure that the Council remains compliant with the duty within an ever challenging environment for local authorities.

10.0 CUSTOMER AND DIGITAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no adverse implications concerning customer contact with the Council, access channels to services or digital transactions emerging through consideration of this report.

11.0 COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Everyone with a responsibility or interest in promoting the wellbeing and achievement of vulnerable children and young people who are in need of help or protection in the Borough, should be assured that the Placement and Sufficiency Strategy will continue to meet the individual needs of such people, through early help and targeted intervention with at-risk families; if and when they need to enter care and in supporting them during and following a period of care.
- 11.2 As part of its recent inspection of the Local Authority's Children's Services, Ofsted awarded a 'Good' judgement in relation to the experience of children in care and care leavers and commented favourably on internal foster care capacity; the use of kinship arrangements as an alternative to entering care and achieving permanence. As a result, there should be no communications or reputational implications for the Council arising through the development of the Strategy and its compliance with the statutory duty.

12.0 CONSULTATIONS

- 12.1 The annual review of the Placement and Sufficiency Strategy has been informed through direct consultation with service users in order to obtain a clear evaluation of the journey of children entering and in care, together with front line practitioners across all partner agencies within the Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust Executive Group, involved in services for children in care as well as the Council's Senior Management Team.

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

- 13.1 The Core Principle and aims of the Strategy will support the Corporate Plan's priority of enabling people to achieve their potential with the outcome that both children in care and care leavers benefit from early help and targeted intervention and are safe from harm.

13.2 Similarly, the Strategy will support 5 of the 6 strategic objectives of the Borough's Children and Young People's Plan (2019-22) namely:

- Helping keep children and young people safe.
- Improving education, achievement and employability.
- Tackling child poverty and improving family life.
- Supporting all children, young people and families to make healthier lifestyle choices
- Encouraging positive relationships and strengthening emotional health.

14.0 PROMOTING EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

14.1 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.

14.2 An equality impact assessment was compiled as part of the mid-term review of the original Placement and Sufficiency Strategy, in 2016. This was to help ensure that the specific needs of individual children and young people requiring care and with protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act are being met. Progress is monitored on a quarterly basis by the Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust Executive Group.

15.0 TACKLING THE IMPACT OF POVERTY

15.1 Ensuring stability and permanence for children in care and care leavers will be of significant benefit to the lives of children and young people in care. It will help safeguard them from harm and improve their physical and emotional wellbeing. This can provide the confidence and assurance needed for them to overcome many of the potential disadvantages faced by these young people; support them to achieve their potential and thereby acquire the skills and qualifications which will enable them to access the employment market and build social capital in our communities.

16.0 TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

16.1 Please see Paragraphs 14.1 -14.2 and Paragraph 15.1 of this report.

17.0 REDUCTION OF CRIME AND DISORDER

17.1 Through meeting the specific or complex needs, particularly of older, adolescent children in care, the Core Principle and strategic objectives of the Strategy will help in safeguarding and protecting them from harm as well as minimise any risk of them adopting risky behaviour(s) and its impact upon local communities.

18.0 RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

18.1 The Strategy's action plan will be underpinned by a log of specific risks with responsibility for reviewing such risks and initiating remedial action resting with the Trust's Executive Commissioning Group.

18.2 Any strategic risks which could inhibit achieving any of the priorities in the Strategy or targets in relevant corporate performance indicators will, also, be reported either on an exceptional basis to the Senior Management Team or via the quarterly corporate performance reporting framework.

19.0 HEALTH, SAFETY AND EMERGENCY RESILIENCE ISSUES

19.1 There are no implications for the health and safety of the public or workforce and for the resilience of the Borough to a serious or major incident, arising through consideration of this report.

20.0 COMPATIBILITY WITH THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

20.1 The Core Principle and aims of the refreshed Strategy are compatible with the Articles and Protocols of the Convention and, in particular, would support the promotion of the right of the child to be protected from harm.

21.0 CONSERVATION OF BIODIVERSITY

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

22.0 GLOSSARY

22.1 None applicable.

23.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

23.1 Appendix 1: Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care (2018-2020: Updated 2019).

Appendix 'A': Summary of financial data.

24.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

24.1 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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