

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 (CHILDREN'S SERVICES) TO CABINET ON 8th JULY 2020

REVIEW AND REFRESH OF THE BARNSELY PLACEMENT AND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS (2020-23)

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet's approval for the adoption of the refreshed Borough-wide Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for children in need of care and care leavers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Cabinet approves for adoption the refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for children in care and care leavers 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 range of factors leading to a refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers for the period 2017-20.

- 3.2 The refreshed Strategy would continue to focus on the following objectives:

- 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 in successfully leaving 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 message was reinforced in the annual review of the current Strategy whose outcomes were presented to Cabinet at its meeting on 2nd October 2019.

4.0 PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

- 4.1 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 and impending changes to regulations concerning placements in unregulated settings for young people aged under 18, has made our statutory responsibilities to children in need of care and those leaving care, a critical area of expenditure for the Council. This has meant, that year on year, the Council must maintain diligent oversight over tolerance levels, based upon an optimum population of children in care equating to 300 children; prevent both any reduction of quality among providers and the escalation of costs.

4.2 As a result, a further review has recently taken place leading to a refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for the period 2020-23 and a draft copy is appended to this report.

4.3 Summary Of The Refreshed Placement And Sufficiency Strategy For Children In Care And Care Leavers (2020-23)

4.4 The 'Core Principle' of the refreshed Strategy will continue to be underpinned by the following aims:

- Barnsley MBC will 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, with the Place Directorate and Communities and Adults Directorate, alongside the Children and Young People's Trust Executive Group, all working

together to deliver outstanding services and promote best outcomes for children in care and care leavers.

4.5 The Current Context And Emerging Challenges

4.6 The refreshed Strategy has been formulated in recognition of the following considerations:

4.6.1 Progress Achieved During 2019/20

- Unit costs (*including per head of population*) for looking after a child in the Borough are now below the average for local authorities
- Good use has been made of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders as part of averting a vulnerable child's entry into care.
- The number of adoptive placements has increased and now composes 8.6% of the total number of children in care. This is more than double the National Average of 3.8%.
- The percentage of care leavers who are aged over 18 that are benefiting through staying put arrangements has increased against the challenging local target, whilst further care leavers are benefiting through quality semi-independent accommodation from trusted providers.

4.6.2 Prevailing Challenges

- The additional cost pressures arising through rising demand for placements and inflationary factors.
- We continue to face challenges in increasing the net total of Local Authority foster carers and, therefore, in reducing our dependence on independent foster carers even though in some instances, unit costs have been reduced. The factors militating against progress are detailed in the revised, draft Strategy
- Mainly, as a result of the state of the market, permanence or the stability of placements continues to be more of a challenge than we would like, although the percentage of children who have had to ensure 3 or more placements during a 12 month period within the Borough is better than both the National Average together with the average among statistical neighbours.

4.7 The Next Steps

4.8 Subject to Cabinet's approval of the refreshed Strategy, our immediate priorities will include the following:

- Develop the local market to ensure the availability of family placements, including for older, adolescent children and children and young people with complex needs;
- To increase the net number, quality and capacity of Local Authority foster carers and foster placements in the Borough, building upon the *Mockingbird* Programme and at the same time, reduce dependence on external fostering provision.
- Increase Local Authority in-house residential and semi-independent provision for children in care and care leavers respectively, in order to manage and mitigate gaps in the market.

- To maintain placement stability and continue to support the use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders as a viable alternative to formal care.
- To re-balance the system in order to improve the onus upon family-based placements.
- To access the improved skills, capacity and economies of scale which should be afforded through our involvement within the South Yorkshire Regional Adoption Agency.
- Ensuring pathways for access to services, including therapeutic services, which will maintain and improve the physical, mental and emotional health of children in care.

4.9 Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children

4.10 As part of the Yorkshire and Humber Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Transfer Regional Rota it is currently anticipated that a very small cohort of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children will become the responsibility of the Local Authority under the refreshed Strategy. Central government has undertaken to provide local authorities, looking after UASC, with funding at a rate of £114 per person per night for each UASC in their care

5.0 **CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

5.1 Please see Paragraph 4.1 of this report.

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 CIC 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 (CIC) 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 2019/20, total net spend on CIC placements amount to **£14.5m**, against which a financial pressure of **£944k** was reported. The overspend in 2019/20 is attributable to:

- Increased placements with Independent Fostering Agencies, which is over and above what was in the plan;
- increase in residential placements during the year (peaked at 20 but returning to 15 by the end of the year); and
- rise in the use of alternatives to public care such as special guardianship orders and child arrangement orders.

- Barnsley's CIC population in 2019/20 has remained stable and fluctuated around the planned target of 300 (CIC number was 303 at the end of March 2020).

7.4 The following are the key planning assumptions reflected in the 2020 refreshed strategy / projections:

- The 2020/21 forecast is based on latest cost projections (as at 31st May) as well as an estimated increase of 2 additional potential unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) semi-independent placements;
- Barnsley's CIC population will remain stable and be managed around 300 in 2020/21 and over the next 2 years;
- Assumed annual growth in the use of in-house fostering with a reduction in more expensive independent fostering agency placements;
- The revised strategy also reflects an increase in Out of Authority residential care numbers to 16 (from 15);
- One high cost secure welfare placement (£5,000 per week) assumed in the total residential placement numbers – reflects the high incidence or likelihood of such placement in any year;
- The strategy includes annual growth / increases in the use of other less expensive placements such as Special Guardianship Orders, Adoption Allowances, etc;
- Inflationary uplift in fees/unit cost assumed where relevant.

7.5 A cost pressure of £1.2m is forecast for the current financial year, which mainly reflects the ongoing budget pressures facing the CIC budget and a number of placement changes projected for the current year. It is envisaged that this cost pressure will be addressed using the non-recurrent social care support grant.

7.6 Based on the above growth assumptions (detailed in para 7.4) and taking into account current MTFs funding allowed for, the following funding gap of **£1.3m** (full year effect) and **£0.1m** is projected for 2021/22 and 2022/23 respectively. Consideration will be given to reflecting the above funding gap in the revised medium term financial strategy (MTFS) position for the council.

7.7 A modelling of the implications of Covid-19 on CIC numbers and placements have also been undertaken and reflected in the strategy. The modelling assumed a 3% (+10) and 5% (+15) increase in children in care numbers in 2020/21, with numbers falling back to planned levels in the following year. The forecast funding gap or overspend in 2020/21 based on these different scenarios is £1.5m and £1.6m respectively.

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 intensely challenging environment for local authorities in meeting such needs.

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 The Impact Of Covid-19 Upon Meeting Our Statutory Responsibilities To Children In Need Of Care
- 11.2 At the present time, the need for social distancing and restrictions on public movement can create potential risks in assessing, reviewing and maintaining contact with children and young people experiencing care. Equally, the risks of potentially not attending their school or seeing their friends on a regular basis could lead children in care to abandon a placement, such as in residential care.
- 11.3 The Barnsley Children and Young People's Trust has developed a *Vulnerable Children's Tracker* through which partners, including schools and Children's Social Care aim to provide 'wrap-around' support to groups of vulnerable children such as those experiencing care. This has included the presence of social workers in schools as part of ensuring children in care attend school and are safeguarded from any potential harm.
- 11.4 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, in spite of Covid-19, 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 whilst at the same time, adhering to social distancing and the need to self-isolate if this proves necessary.
- 11.5 As part of its inspection of the Local Authority's Children's Services in October 2018, 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 further 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.

13.3 Data relating to comparable performance with the average for English local authorities, during 2018 and 2019, is detailed in Pages 6-7 of the Appendix and in the Strategy's Outcomes Framework in Page 17 of the Appendix.

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 continues to be 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, together with tracking and ensuring attendance at their school and setting, 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 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 Please see Paragraphs 11.2 – 11.4 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 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, climate change or the conservation of biodiversity emerging through this report.

22.0 GLOSSARY

22.1 None applicable.

23.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

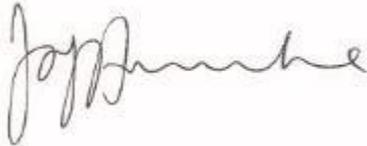
23.1 Appendix 1: Draft Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care (2020-2023):

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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Financial Implications/Consultation



Joshua Amahwe (17/06/2020).....
(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer)