

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 14 JULY 2021

ANNUAL 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 inform Cabinet of the outcomes of the latest annual review of the Borough's Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for children in need of care and care leavers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet approves for adoption the refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for children in care and care leavers, based upon the commissioning intentions and mitigating actions summarised in Paragraph 4.15- 4.32 and Paragraphs 7.5 – 7.7 of this report with further detail incorporated in Appendix 1.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

3.1 Sufficiency is an essential element of delivering our *Pledge* to children and young people in need of care (CiC) in Barnsley. Good sufficiency, that is compliant with the statutory Sufficiency Duty, ensures that as a local authority and wider Children and Young People's Partnership we plan for the best local care and support available to secure good outcomes for our children.

3.2 Earlier this year the latest annual review of the Strategy took place with an emphasis on ensuring the refreshed Strategy will continue to focus on the following objectives:

- To ensure accommodation of enough quality and volume which satisfies our ambition to improve outcomes for children in care;
- To ensure maximum value for money in providing accommodation and support amid significant resource pressures and national challenges;
- To ensure the needs of children can continue to be met particularly those children and young people with complex needs;
- To develop the local market for accommodation and support of children in care to ensure children can be cared for in line with our ambitions and as near to home as possible.

3.3 The Children and Young People's Trust Executive Group is committed to continued investment in early intervention, prevention and 'edge of care' services; to avoid, wherever possible, unnecessary admission to care and specialist service provision. The priorities identified by all partners are:

- That children and young people are supported to remain with their families and communities wherever possible and enter the care system only when necessary;
- That children and young people who are admitted to care will receive high quality support to remain in care only for as long as is necessary to ensure successful reintegration to their families and communities and;
- That where children and young people do spend time in care, the experience is a positive one which will help them to realise their potential, achieve successful outcomes, sustain positive health, wellbeing and resilience throughout their life journey.
- Planning for Children in Care (CIC) will continue to be carried out jointly with all relevant partners to ensure we effectively maintain our focus on all aspects of children and young people's lives. We particularly want to improve health and educational attainment outcomes and the numbers of care leavers in education, training and employment.

4.0 PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

4.1 The Covid-19 Pandemic will continue to have a long-term impact on schools, settings, care providers and services who have carried out significant work to maintain provision during this difficult period. Despite extensive support, some families are unable to increase their parenting capacity due to poor mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse and being overwhelmed, resulting in neglect and a need for care by others, this includes large sibling groups. Overall the number of children in care in the Borough increased throughout the first three quarters of 2020/21, peaking at 352 at the end of January. At the end of March 2020/21, the number reduced to 333. This is above the Strategy's optimal target of 300 (now revised to 310).

4.2 In addition to increased care numbers challenges remain in meeting care needs for our older children and adolescents. Of the admissions into care in 2020/21, 45 were aged 10 or older (28%, above a 3-year average of 20%). At 31st March 2021 163 of CIC are aged 10 or older (49% of CIC). An older care cohort often includes some children with more complex needs and therefore requiring more intensive and specialist support and care arrangements which is difficult due to the current market position.

- 4.3 The Local Authority's CiC number is well managed and as a proportion of the relevant population (65.6 per 10,000) compares favourably to the statistical neighbours' average rate (111.4 per 10,000) and below the National Average of 67.0 per 10,000. This is achieved through robust care management and permanency planning for children, exiting them out of the care system where it is appropriate and safe to do so. At the end of 2020/21, 309 children who are accommodated by the Local Authority were in family placements (93.6%) increasing from 91.7% in 2019/20 and above Barnsley's 90.7% target. Many of Barnsley's performance targets highlighted throughout the Strategy (Appendix 1) exceed local targets and national averages placing Barnsley in the upper performance quartile in key areas of delivery. This demonstrates Barnsley's ambition for outstanding services, the commitment of Barnsley's workforce and carers, and our drive for continuous service improvement.
- 4.4 Performance for the proportion of looked after children placed within 20 miles of their home address was 91.6% at the end of 2020/21 and above target (84%). Performance is slightly lower than 2019/20 performance (92.1%) but ranks above the 2019/20 statistical neighbours (84.9%) and national (73%) averages.
- 4.5 Barnsley's performance in relation to in-house foster carers as opposed to the use of Independent Fostering Agencies showed significant improvement in 2021 (an increase from 68% to 71% at year-end), with an in-year month end high of 74%.
- 4.6 Barnsley's excellent performance in terms of adoption and alternative permanence arrangements makes a strong contribution to maintaining the number of children in long-term care at the expected target of 300. In 20/21 adoptive placements have been secured for 19% of our children who have left care, this is significantly above the latest national average, of 11% for England in 2019/20.
- 4.7 A considerable proportion of our children leaving care are placed with their extended family or other connected persons subject to SGO. In total 75 children and young people left care in 2020/21, subject to Adoption, SGO or CAO (58%).
- 4.8 The ongoing monitoring of demand by the Fostering service indicates that we currently have sufficient carers for short term placements where the long-term plan for the children is often adoption or placements with relatives. The greatest challenge is to recruit foster carers who want to care for children aged 5 and over who need long term placements.
- 4.9 Extensive work is being done by the fostering service to encourage current in-house carers to consider placements for this cohort including offering additional training relating to adolescent behaviours and encouraging new carers to consider long-term placements. All new in-house foster carers are approved without defining by either short or long term.

- 4.10 Our in-house Fostering service has seen a net increase of 12 placements across 2020/21. Throughout the year, the service has approved a total of 26 new carer households including Connected Persons which equates to 15 general household approvals and 11 Connected Person carer approvals.
- 4.11 The Mockingbird Family Model is in its second year of DfE funding. To date there are 2 constellations in Barnsley. The 1st constellation was launched in August 2020 and has 1 Hub Home Carer, 8 satellite families and 13 children. The 2nd constellation launched in February 2021 has 1 Hub home Carer, 8 satellite families and 12 children some of these children have been placed in the family-based constellation from external residential children's homes. Constellation 3 is now being developed. This model provides peer support to carers, opportunities to develop specialisms and manage complex behaviours, increasing placement stability and good outcomes.
- 4.12 Throughout 2020/21 the service has managed the level of demand for semi-independent placements below the placement sufficiency target of 5, declining from 5 at the end of April 2020 to 2 at the end of March 2021. Close management and oversight of semi-independent provision has, in 2019/20, contributed to reducing this pressure.
- 4.13 The Yorkshire and Humber Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) Transfer Regional Rota is now in operation. Yorkshire and Humber have seen an increase in spontaneous arrivals of UASC. The area's most acutely affected are local authorities along the East coast where individual and groups of unaccompanied children are arriving at ports. This is leading to a divergence in UASC number across the region.
- 4.14 The Next Steps
- 4.15 Subject to Cabinet's approval of the refreshed Strategy, our priorities will include the following:
1. Prevent entry into care where appropriate by continuing to develop family support and early intervention and prevention services.
 2. Ensure wherever possible that children in need of care in the Borough are placed with families in Barnsley;
 - a. Increase the numbers of children placed with internal Council foster carers;
 - b. We will continue to develop the local Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) market through engaging with providers to encourage Barnsley based families to care for children in need of care in the Borough.

- 4.16 Continue to Improve and develop the recruitment and retention of BMBC foster carers to ensure more Barnsley children can be placed and remain with Barnsley carers;
- 4.17 Promote support and develop the Local Authority's Fostering Approval process so carers can care for all age groups and on both short- and long-term basis.
- 4.18 Continue the Implementation of the Mockingbird project; Foster carer hub model; including:
 - a. Implementation of 3rd and 4th satellite cohorts to continue to offer a high level of support to the constellation carers and a high level of training to enable carers to manage some of the most complex children over time and in the long term.
 - b. Integrating the Mockingbird project within the In-House Fostering service.
- 4.19 Implement the Cabinet approved business case to develop a further 5 bedded directly managed children's residential home in the Borough.
- 4.20 Increase the range of 16+ independent living provision to support transition to adulthood for those in long term care;
- 4.21 Develop a joint approach between adult and children's social care to incorporate a shared lives scheme for some children in care aged between 16 and 18;
- 4.22 Develop the mechanisms for quality assurance and future demand for 16+ provision; Berneslai Homes.
- 4.23 Develop and procure a 16+/semi-independent framework of local providers.
- 4.24 Continue to support the development and implementation of the Regional Adoption Agency (RAA);
- 4.25 Work effectively with Partners across the Children and Young People's Trust to meet a wide variety of additional needs including mental health and support to Carers;
- 4.26 Continue to make joint funding requests for packages through the appropriate resource allocation panels;
- 4.27 Align annual assessment processes across education, health and care to address resourcing pressures caused by changes to funding or support in relation to re-assessment of need.
- 4.28 Maintain close working relationship with local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) to ensure pathways for CiC are effective and support our CiC population.
- 4.29 Continue to support and develop regional approaches through active membership of the White Rose Commissioning Consortium and alternative mechanisms;

- 4.30 Build on the proposed provider engagement programme to develop positive working relationships with Private Providers.
- 4.31 Utilise the Private Provider forum to generate Best Practice discussions and opportunities for increased understanding around Quality Assurance.
- 4.32 To implement any learning and good practice emerging from the Independent Review of Children's Social Care whose initial report entitled the '*Case for Change*' report was about to be published at the time this report was compiled

5.0 CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 Please see Paragraphs 9.1 and 9.2 of the 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 S151 officer or his representatives has been consulted on the financial implications of this report, outlined below and summarised in the attached appendix A.
- 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) and adoption allowances.
- 7.3 In 2020/21, total net spend on LAC placements **£15.320M** (represents 55.8% of total net spend by Children Social Care), against which a financial pressure of **£1.539M** was reported. The overspend in 2020/21 is mainly attributable to increased placements in external fostering, a number of high cost semi-independent placements and the cost of SGO/CAO/Adoption allowances during the year.
- 7.4 Barnsley's LAC population in 2020/21 has fluctuated throughout the year peaking at 352 in January and ending the year at 333. This is considerably higher than the increase to 310 anticipated in last year's strategy refresh and the target benchmark of 300 set for the year.

7.5 The following are the key changes reflected in the refreshed strategy as well as the planning assumptions that informed the forecast LAC numbers and cost projections for the 2-year period (2021 – 2023):

- The budget for 2021/22 has been increased by £1.5M as part of the council's budget setting process to address the cost pressures in 20/21. In addition, the Council's MTFs allows for demographic / growth funding of £0.2M for 2022/23 (based on the 2020 refreshed strategy);
- The budget requirement for 2022/23 reflects the efficiency savings of £0.200M relating to the opening of a new children's residential home in 2021/22;
- Barnsley's LAC population will be managed over the medium term down from 333 at the end of March 2021 to 315 by the end of March 2022 and 310 by the end of March 2023;
- The above reduction in LAC numbers has been reflected mainly in independent fostering and other kinship / family placements;
- Annual growth (based on trends) has been allowed for other placements such as SGOs, CAO, and Adoption Allowances;
- The number of external residential care placements has been reduced to 10 (from 15) due to the assumption that during 2021/22 five children will move into a new in-house residential home;
- One high cost secure welfare placement (£6,500 per week) assumed in the total residential placement numbers – reflects the high incidence or likelihood of such placement in any year;
- Current weekly unit costs of residential and foster care placements have been used in calculating the future years projections, and with 2.5% uplift.

7.6 Based on the above budget / cost assumptions, the CIC cost model shows a balanced budget in 2021/22 and an additional funding requirement of £0.045M for 2022/23. The additional funding requirement in 2022/23 would be considered as part of the next review / update of the Council's medium-term financial strategy.

7.7 Whilst, a balanced budget is anticipated for 2021/22, there are significant risks of cost overrun in the year as a result of the following:

- Increase in LAC numbers than planned in 2021/22 and 2022/23 – the cost implications of a 3% and 5% increase in LAC numbers have been modelled and shown in the attached strategy document;
- Increase in the number of high tariff placements (with above average weekly cost) due to the complexity of needs. E.g. there are many

residential placements than expected above the current weekly average cost of £3,825, which are beginning to exert pressure on the 21/22 budget;

- Delay and slippage in the implementation of the new children's residential home scheduled for October in 2021 – this would impact on the delivery of the full year efficiency target of £200k;

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 statutory compliant.

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 To ensure all related services and plans are aware of the strategy to achieve implementation.

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. In addition to our ambitions for children in our care we have also included in the strategy the 10 key developments which were shared at the Care Experienced Conference 2019.

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

13.1 The Core Principle and aims of the Strategy support the Council's Plan and particularly the development of a Healthy Barnsley and a Learning Barnsley..

13.2 Similarly, the Strategy will support the 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 our ambitions for the health, wellbeing and educational achievement of our children.

14.2 The annual review will 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 through the Strategy.

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 and reduce current and future social, education and health inequalities.

16.0 TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES

16.1 Giving children the best start in life is a fundamental part of improving health and reducing health inequalities. Our ambition is that children and young people in care sustain strong and positive relationships and feel valued by those around them. Children and young people have a strong role to play in shaping their local communities as part of Barnsley 2030. Inequalities in children's development, health and wellbeing originate in multiple disadvantages, which compound to

affect children's long-term outcomes and undermine the development of social capital.

16.3 Implementing a localised, equitable and integrated health, care and education offer substantially increases opportunities to reduce social and economic inequalities, improving health and wellbeing outcomes for all our families.

16.4 The impact of adverse childhood experiences on our vulnerable children and young people have led the Council to try and ensure that children have the best start in life, sustaining good outcomes throughout childhood and adolescence, so as adults they will live well and stay well. Managing complex adolescent risk via strong systems leadership and the right service provision is also essential.

16.5 The emotional mental health and wellbeing of children and young people is just as important as their physical health, especially within the current climate of the coronavirus pandemic. Good mental health allows children and young people to develop the resilience to cope with life's situations, thrive and grow into healthy adults.

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 risk taking behaviours' and of these negatively impacting 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 and the Placement Sufficiency Board.

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 The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic upon our commissioning intentions for children in need of care together with expenditure has been extensively covered in this report and the refreshed Strategy. The proposals should have no impact upon the Borough's resilience to a separate major incident.

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, tackling climate change or the conservation of biodiversity emerging through this report.

22.0 GLOSSARY

22.1 None applicable.

23.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

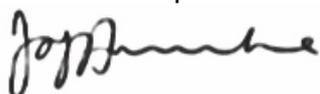
23.1 Appendix 1: Draft Refreshed Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care (2020-2023):

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

Report author: Jon Banwell (Head of Services for Children in Care)

Financial Implications/Consultation



Joshua Amahwe (24/05/2021)

(To be signed by senior Financial Services officer)