

**BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT OF: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**TITLE: BARNSELY DRAFT CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS STRATEGY (2022-25)**

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>17 AUGUST 2022</b>
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	<b>Children's Services</b>
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Public or Private</b>	<b>Public</b>

**Purpose of report**

To seek Cabinet's agreement to approve and adopt the Borough's proposed Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy

**Council Plan priority**

The Strategy will support the following priorities in the Council Plan:

Healthy Barnsley

- By ensuring children in care and care leavers maintain their health and wellbeing and thereby reduce inequalities in both health and income

Learning Barnsley

- Particularly through ensuring vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people are supported to attain good education outcomes and to achieve their potential within sustainable local communities.

**Recommendations**

**That Cabinet approves for adoption the Barnsley Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy as part of our continuing 'Pledge' to children in our care together with our Local 'Offer' to young people leaving care**

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Cabinet will recall that on 16<sup>th</sup> June it considered the latest annual report of the Corporate Parenting Panel which outlined how, in accordance with the Council's statutory responsibilities, the Panel had taken steps to continue to improve the range of outcomes for children in need of care, together with young people leaving care, including recent developments to enhance our local 'Offer' for young people leaving care.

## **2.0 PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 The impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic has perhaps been felt more acutely by the most vulnerable people in society who have the greatest needs. In Children's Services, the effect of restrictions such as social distancing has inevitably impacted upon service provision. Whilst in Barnsley, our statutory responsibilities to children in need of help, protection and care continued to be met in full, this could not be the case in other parts of the country.
- 2.2 The need for a relationship-based approach in the quality of practice and provision in children's social care has remained paramount and, as the final report of the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, together with other documentary evidence have made clear, the experiences of children in care and young people leaving care has, potentially, been harrowing nationally, particularly when schools and settings were closed; health assessments disrupted and contact with friends, family and social workers curtailed. .
- 2.3 For this reason, Children's Social Care and Safeguarding in Barnsley undertook an extensive review into the experiences of children in our care together with young people leaving care to determine if there was anything further the Council and its statutory partners could do to shield this vulnerable and disadvantaged cohort of young people, following their experiences during the Pandemic as well as their current experience of the cost of living.
- 2.4 Appended to this report is the draft Barnsley Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy (2022-25) which begins by outlining our strategic vision for this group of young people and how this will support our overall Vision for the Borough as *A Place of Possibilities* by 2030.
- 2.5 This strategic vision will be underpinned by the following principles for corporate parenting:
1. To act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
  2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
  3. to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people

4. 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
5. To promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
6. For those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work

2.6 Our commitment will be to ensure that all children in care and care leavers in Barnsley should expect the following:

- To be looked after in a safe and caring home
- To respect, promote and support their individual identity
- To enable them to receive a good education which helps them achieve their aspirations.
- To help them maintain their health and wellbeing
- To help prepare them in making the transition to adulthood
- For the Council and its statutory partners to learn and build upon the voice and experience of children in care and care leavers.

2.7 The draft Strategy goes onto indicate the additional measures which will be undertaken to fulfil these principles and expectations. These include:

- Continuing to increase the number of Local Authority foster carers, investing in skills and capacity and, at the same time, continue to reduce the number of children and young people in need of care having to be placed in accommodation outside of the Borough.
- Continuing to increase the long-term stability of placements, including through the commissioning of a Local Authority, directly managed residential facility in the Borough
- Providing the capacity to support the mental or emotional health and wellbeing needs of children and young people in care, together with those leaving care
- To build upon the percentage of care leavers aged 19-21 who are engaged in education, employment and training.
- To enhance our Local 'Offer' to young people leaving care through development of the care leavers 'hub'
- To continue to ensure the voice and experiences of children in care and care leavers inform the quality of practice and provision particularly through the office of the Young Mayor of Barnsley; Youth Council and the Care4Us Council

### 3.0 IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

#### 3.1 Financial and Risk

- 3.2 Consultations have taken place with representatives of the Service Director of Finance (S151 Officer). The financial implications and risks of the proposed Children in Care and Care Leavers' Strategy are summarised below.
- 3.3 The scope of the Strategy mainly covers budgets / spend on children in care (i.e. mainly looked after children placements) and provision for care leavers. It should be noted that the proposed strategy has been developed within the context of increasing number of children in care and rising cost of care support / provision to this vulnerable cohort.
- 3.4 In 2021/22, a financial cost pressure of £4.0M was reported for Children Social Care, of which £3.2M was against the children in care budget, mainly attributed to increased numbers and cost of external residential (£2.6M) and fostering care (£0.4M) placements than anticipated. Barnsley's LAC population number stood at 348 at year end compared to a planned number of 300 for the year.

#### Outlook for 2022/23 and beyond

- 3.5 The financial outlook for 2022/23 is challenging, in spite of additional investment in children social care of £4M to fund additional social workers (to address rising caseloads) and increased LAC placements numbers and cost (360 LAC number planned for the year). It should be noted that the recent influx and movements in LAC placements since end of March 2022 have resulted in increased cost pressures - estimated at £1M for 2022/23 (although it is anticipated that the measures put in place would reduce this pressure to £0.5M).
- 3.6 The Service continue to face challenges around the acquisition of a suitable property for the proposed council-owned children's residential home. Latest project timescales indicate that the new home would not be operational until June 2023. The slippage means a cost pressure of £0.2M in 22/23, with a reduced savings in 23/24 (£150k).
- 3.7 The following table detailed the planned LAC numbers for 22/23 and 23/24 and the resource requirement:

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	Actual	Plan	Plan
Fostering – in-house	194	220	222
Fostering – External agencies	66	58	52
Residential - external provision	41	24	24
Residential – Owned home	5	10	10
Other placements*	42	48	42
Assumed CIC Population	<b>348</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>350</b>

Total Costs (£M)	17.966	18.482	17.987
Total Budget (£M)	14.949	17.981	17.987
<b>Variance</b>	<b>3.017</b>	<b>0.490</b>	<b>0</b>

3.8 Paragraph 2.7 summarises the Action Plan developed by the Service to manage the above cost pressures in 2022/23 and ensure that spend on looked after children placements is on budget over the medium term. Specifically it includes the following:

- increase our numbers of foster carers – there is a target to recruit 23 new carers in 2022/23 and are making excellent progress with 2 newly approved and 14 planned to fostering panel in the first half year;
- We want to reduce our use of IFA carers by 8 in 2022/23. We have seen a significant reduction from September to March but we want to see this trend continue with a further reduction of 8 as we increase our inhouse capacity;
- improvement in children experiencing stability in long term care and on the number of placement moves for children in care;
- There are 19 young people in external residential provision. We want to reduce the number of children and young people placed in external residential homes.
- Some of the above will be achieved by opening a new residential home.

3.9 The following highlight some of the financial risks with the above strategy and financial plan:

1. increasing number of placement breakdowns and moves during the year – which creates further pressure against budgets;
2. increase demand and children in care, including higher unit placement cost above assumed rates;
3. further slippage in the opening of the new children’s home;
4. slow down in the recruitment of in-house carers.

### **3.10 Legal**

3.11 The draft Strategy has been formulated with due regard to the Council’s statutory responsibilities towards children in need of care and young people leaving care as part of ensuring continued full compliance.

### **3.12 Equality**

3.13 An equality impact assessment has been formulated in support of the draft Strategy and is appended to this report

### **3.14 Sustainability**

3.15 There are no implications for sustainability in the Borough, emerging through this report.

### **3.16 Employee**

3.17 The draft Strategy expressly commits to continuing to increase the number, skills and capacity of Local Authority foster carers as part of creating additional stable and caring placements. This will help enable children to remain in their communities where safeguarding considerations permit and also prevent children from being accommodated in costlier residential provision, outside of the Borough.

### **3.18 Communications**

3.19 Subject to Cabinet's approval, the principles and expectations inherent in the draft Strategy will be promoted in the dedicated part of the Council's Web site as part of our multi-agency approach to supporting the needs of children in care and care leavers.

## **4.0 CONSULTATION**

4.1 The development of the draft Strategy has been informed by the voice and experiences of children in care and young people leaving care, together with the perspective of front-line social workers and practitioners.

## **5.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1 The draft Strategy demonstrates the Council's enduring commitment and passion towards improving the range of outcomes for this vulnerable group of children and young people, shielding them from adverse circumstances and promoting their resilience.

## **6.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1 Please see Paragraphs 2.1-2.7 and Paragraph 5.1 of this report. Subject to Cabinet's approval the draft Strategy will be underpinned by an action plan and risk log as part of maintaining progress against the principles and expectations outlined.

6.2 Progress will be reported to Cabinet, primarily through the quarterly corporate performance framework and to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the regular series of performance reports concerning children's social care.

6.3 In continually reviewing the effectiveness of the Strategy, developments, such as the outcomes and recommendations of the recently concluded Independent Review of Children's Social Care will inform the Strategy's development as part of our ambitions to commission and provide outstanding, evidence-based provision for children in care and care leavers.

## 7.0 GLOSSARY

7.1 None, applicable.

## 8.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

- 8.1 Appendix 1: Barnsley Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2022-25)  
Appendix 2: Barnsley Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy (2022-25): Equality Impact Assessment

## 9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1 If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email [governance@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:governance@barnsley.gov.uk) so that appropriate arrangements can be made

## 10.0 REPORT SIGN OFF

<b>Financial consultation &amp; sign off</b>	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date <i>Joshua Amahwe (15/06/2022).</i>
<b>Legal consultation &amp; sign off</b>	Legal Services officer consulted and date <i>Jason Field 12/07/22</i>

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