

	<p align="center">Children, Educational, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee</p> <p align="center">20 April 2015</p>
<p align="right">Title</p>	<p>Placements for Looked after Children</p>
<p align="right">Report of</p>	<p>Commissioning Director for Children and Young People Family Services Director</p>
<p align="right">Wards</p>	<p>All</p>
<p align="right">Status</p>	<p>Public</p>
<p align="right">Enclosures</p>	<p>Appendix A: Placements Commissioning Strategy</p>
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<h2>Summary</h2>
<p>This report sets out the key elements of Barnet’s new commissioning strategy for securing placements for looked after children. The strategy has been developed as part of a wider transformation programme within the council’s Family Services to review and reshape service provision to both improve service quality and to deliver revenue savings as set out in the council’s medium term financial strategy. The full strategy is set out in Appendix A</p> <p>Following the development of the commissioning strategy for placements for looked after children, work is now underway to deliver its ambitions and the first wave of activity is focussed on growing the Barnet Fostering Service to enable more looked after children to be supported in placements closer to Barnet; exploring options to prevent entries to care and reviewing the use of residential placements for looked after children.</p>

Recommendations

- 1. That the Committee approve the new commissioning strategy for the placement of looked after children contained in Appendix A to improve support for children and families, to increase the number of local placements through improving support for foster carers and to reduce the long term costs associated with residential placements.**

- 2. The Committee is asked to approve the recommendation that the Corporate Parenting Panel is requested to oversee the implementation of the strategy.**

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

1.1 Every local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that their area provides sufficient accommodation for looked after children which meets their needs. In early 2014 Barnet initiated the Looking after Children project to review the current model of placements provision and to develop and implement a new model. The Placements Commissioning Strategy was a key deliverable of this work. The Looking after Children project has subsequently implemented key elements of the strategy.

1.2 Looked After Children in Barnet

1.2.1 Barnet's *rate* of looked after children per 10,000 children under 18 is low when compared to London, England, and Barnet's Statistical Neighbours. In 2014, Barnet had a rate of 36 children in care per 10,000. The trend over the past ten years shows Barnet's rate gradually reducing year on year, from a rate similar to England to a rate significantly lower. This low rate indicates that overall Barnet is not taking children into care unnecessarily. The numbers of Looked After Children over the past 7 years has remained relatively stable with an average of 308 children.

1.2.2 However, in relation to actual number of looked after children, as opposed to the rate, Barnet has one of the highest numbers of looked after children, when compared to its statistical neighbours due to our population size.

1.2.3 The predominant age for children becoming looked after in Barnet is 10-15 years. This is followed by children aged 5 – 9 years. Understanding the age of children entering Barnet's care is important to the development and delivery of appropriate placements and other support services.

1.2.4 In the ten year period between April 2003 and March 2013, 1,710 children had at least one episode of care. Of these, 87% of children and young people had only one episode of care. This data suggests that accurate decision making is taking place for children and young people and very few children are experiencing multiple episodes of care.

1.3 Placement Provision and Distance from Home

1.3.1 As at end February 2015, Barnet had 309 looked after children, the majority of which were placed in foster care. The table below provides a detailed breakdown.

Provision Type	Number of Children	% (denominator all LAC)
LBB Foster Carers	124	40%
Non LBB Foster Carers	87	28%
LBB Residential Homes	9	3%
Independent Residential Homes	37	12%
Semi-Independent Living	32	10%
Other (e.g. Secure welfare, placed with own parents, secure remand)	20	6%

Figure 1: Placement provision as at end February 2015

1.3.2 The largest proportion of looked after children are currently placed with Barnet recruited Foster Carers, 84% of whom reside in the borough, resulting in 104 of these children and young people being placed less than 20 miles from their primary address. 87 children and young people are currently placed with non-LBB Foster Carers, with 52 of these children and young people residing less than 20 miles from their primary address.

1.3.3 Those placed in Independent/Private provided residential homes, are on average, placed 65 miles from their primary address. It is important to note that of the 37 children and young people in independent residential homes, 17 are joint funded SEN placements, meaning many of these children and young people are in SEN schools to meet their specific needs.

1.3.4 On 3 March 2015 Edward Timpson MP wrote to Local Authority Directors of Children's Centres highlighting the issue of children placed in distant children's homes. Since 2013 there has been a decline in Barnet's children being placed further from their home, although we are in line with our statistical neighbour average. LB Barnet has responded to this letter outlining the steps we are taking to enable more looked after children to be supported in placements in or closer to Barnet, in line with the Placements Commissioning Strategy.

1.4 Views of children and young people

1.4.1 There is ongoing engagement with looked after children and young people through Family Services participation work and voice of the child coordination. Recent mystery shopping exercises, engagement with the Role Model Army and messages from other engagement events such as Speak Out Day and Achievements Day provide a good insight to the views of our looked after children and young people. Key messages from young people that have informed the commissioning strategy include:

- Older looked after children feel more involved in decision making about placements than younger children
- Placement moves need to be minimised
- Some placements are too far from a child's school

- It is important for looked after children to feel welcomed into their foster family
- 16-17 year olds and care leavers (18+ years) have told us that they want more housing options
- 16-17 year olds said they felt involved in their future planning but want more advice and guidance, particularly on employment and financial advice.

1.4.2 In response to the views of children and young people leaving care on their housing options, a report is being prepared for the next Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel which sets out current provision and future requirements to meet needs.

We need to continue to involve older children in decision making about their placements and need to work to ensure that younger children have more involvement in decisions about their placements. We recognise the importance of minimising placement moves; the consolidation of support for LBB foster placements will help us to promote placement stability. We know that LBB foster placements are, overall, closer to Barnet than Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements. Our objective to develop additional LBB foster placement capacity will help to keep as many looked after children in their current schools as possible.

The assessment training that foster carers receive emphasises the importance of children feeling welcomed into a foster family and part of that family. We will seek to develop ways of further facilitating this.

1.4.3 In respect of future planning for young people preparing for independence, we will take seriously the views that future housing options are an area of concern for those aged 16-17 years and 18+ years; and we recognise the need for an holistic approach to future planning, including the provision of advice and guidance.

1.5 Key elements of the strategy

1.5.1 The strategy to provide placements to looked after children in Barnet has a key overarching objective to enable children and young people to remain geographically closer to Barnet, promoting continuity, enabling them to maintain their networks and access to education provision, even when they need to be looked after for a period of time.

1.5.2 Delivery of the placements strategy is based on key strands of activity:

A. Developing services to support children and young people to remain with their families wherever possible

1.5.3 This work is currently focusing on the development of a set of clearly defined interventions to be provided by early intervention and prevention services to support children and young people to remain with their families where possible. Alongside our in-house provision of support, Barnet has jointly commissioned three evidence based interventions from Action for Children with Harrow and Hounslow. The three interventions, Multi Dimensional Treatment Foster Care, Multi-Systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy are currently being implemented in Barnet. A set of clear outcome

measures will monitor the impact of these services and will support future commissioning decisions about their continuation locally

B. Reducing the number of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements by increasing the number of looked after children in LBB/internal foster placements

- 1.5.4 It is nationally recognised that IFA foster placements are more expensive than in-house provision and often result in children being placed at a greater distance from their families, friends and education. This is also the case in Barnet, the strategy sets out that an IFA placement is, on average, £255 per week per child more expensive (IFA placement cost of £901 per week compared to LBB unit cost of £646) We also know that Barnet's in-house foster placement provide high quality, local placements to our children and young people and our ambition is to make this available to more of our looked after children.
- 1.5.5 The Placements Commissioning Strategy sets out an ambitious target to grow Barnet's in-house fostering service and by 2019-2020 (table below) which would give Barnet one of the largest proportions of looked after children placed with in-house foster carers in the country.
- 1.5.6 However, fostering recruitment is challenging nationally, and even more so in London. The cost of housing in London, particularly Barnet, is a key barrier to recruiting new fostering households. Intelligence that Barnet holds from households making enquiries with our fostering service demonstrates that there are a number of potential fostering households contacting Barnet who do not have the required spare room to foster a looked after child aged older than 2 years. Barnet has been working in a focused way, using creative solutions where possible, but it is clear from comparator information in the IFA market that this is also a challenge for IFAs. Of the 32 IFAs on the Framework commissioned by the West London Alliance, recruitment totalled net gain 1 fostering household in 2013-14.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Total households recruited	16	22	23	24	13	13
Total de-registrations	10	11	12	13	13	13
Net gain	6	11	11	11	0	0
Total no. fostering households	96	107	118	129	129	129
Total placements capacity: year end	144	161	178	195	195	195
Placements utilised: year end	110	123	135	148	148	148
In-house placement share	57%	64%	71%	78%	78%	78%

Figure 2: Targets to grow Barnet's in-house fostering service¹

1.5.7 There are three main groups of children who are more difficult to provide with in-house foster placements:

- Children over the age of 11
- Sibling groups
- Children with complex emotional and behavioural needs

1.5.8 Recruitment activity is taking particular focus on recruiting fostering households to offer placements to children with these types of needs. This recruitment activity is being supplemented by an in depth review of Barnet's already approved fostering households, to offer additional placements to children with these needs. Capital monies have been approved by Policy and Resources Committee to implement a part grant, part loan programme of extensions to foster carers homes, where the extension will enable an additional placement to be provided to children with the needs mentioned above.

C. Redesign the approval process for prospective foster carers to ensure that they are assessed and approved as efficiently as possible

1.5.9 To deliver the commissioning strategy, the approval process for prospective foster carers has been redesigned and a new operating model has been implemented which is supporting fostering applicants in a more timely and effective manner. Some of the key changes focus on reduction in timescales, the identification of applicants who can be 'fast tracked' due to their level of expertise, and the tracking and support methods used during the application process. The target for the time it should now take from an enquiry to a fostering households being approved is 6 months.

D. Prevent escalation of children's needs through a developed support offer to foster carers and placements

¹ N.B In-house placement share uses the denominator of all looked after children in foster placements, not the total looked after children cohort

1.60 One of the main focuses of strategy to prevent escalation of needs is to improve support for foster carers and the following activities are underway or have been completed:

- Strengthening the offer and the referral pathways for non-financial support to fostering households
- Consolidating the financial support offer
- Reviewing the training offer for changes to take effect in 2015/16
- Strengthening the links between Fostering Recruitment, Placements and Fostering Support teams
- Introduced 1:1 therapeutic support for foster carers of teenagers – the first element of an enhanced support offer

E. Progress with step down plans where appropriate for looked after children in residential placements

1.6.1 The majority of residential placements provided to Barnet's children and young people are out of borough. The exception is the placements available in Barnet's two local authority managed residential homes, each registered to accommodate and support up to six children and young people aged 12 years and above, of either gender with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The overall effectiveness of both LBB residential homes is judged to be good by Ofsted and both homes are providing a high quality of care to our Looked after Children. The ethos and vision of the homes managers mean that the homes work to build strong relationships with young people, supporting them to engage with education. Good links have been made with health agencies and there is a regular presence from CAMHs workers in the homes to encourage the accessibility of this service accessible for young people. However, the physical quality of one of the homes is poor and options for a replacement home are being explored through the Council's Capital Programme.

1.6.2 Residential provision plays an important role in the continuum of care for our Looked after Children and young people. In line with each child's placement plan and care plan, we will ensure that residential providers, whether LBB or independent, work towards the desired outcomes for each particular child. In line with our permanence policy, we will work with a child or young person to support them into a family environment where this is the most appropriate placement choice for them.

1.6.3 Barnet has been commissioning an increased number of placements from independent/private providers to meet an increased demand for residential placements. Barnet has a higher proportion of Looked after Children in residential placements (particularly SEN schools) than both the England and London averages.

1.6.4 Barnet has developed a framework to support work to step young people down into lower intensity placements. The framework is linked heavily to the statutory care planning requirements and is driven by the young person's social worker and Independent Reviewing Officer who are best placed to work with the young person to understand and plan for their needs. Drawing on a range of skills, views and opinions from each young person and the professionals

working with them, this work will continue to ensure each young person is in the most appropriate placement and their longer term care plan and transitions are given central focus. Barnet is working towards needing fewer residential placements for our young people, to bring our placements profile into line with London and England averages.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Committee are asked to agree the strategy and note the progress being made to improve placements for looked after children. Barnet has a statutory duty to provide accommodation for looked after children, as outlined in paragraph 5.3.1 of this report. This strategy, which the Committee are recommended to approve, is the means in which through which we will deliver this obligation.
- 2.2 The second recommendation is for the Corporate Parenting Panel to oversee the implementation of the strategy to provide a strategic oversight of its delivery.

3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 The alternative option is to continue with the current situation. This will not address the views of children and young people or the national evidence which demonstrates that multiple moves and being placed at a distance from family and local connections is generally not in a child or young person's best interests. Increasing the number of foster placements in Borough is also a cost effective way to meet the sufficiency of accommodation duty.

4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 The delivery of the Looking After Children project and the placements commissioning strategy is being overseen through the Family Services Transformation programme. Beyond the life span of the transformation programme, the work will be led by business as usual service delivery and improvement.

5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

The Looking after Children Project and the placements commissioning strategy is working to support the Corporate Plan strategic objective to '*Support families and individuals that need it– promoting independence, learning and well-being*'. It also supports the outcome '*To create better life chances for children and young people across the borough.*'

5.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

- 5.2.1 The placements budget for looked after children is held within the Family Services Delivery Unit. The budget for 2015/16 is £13m (including staffing

budgets for all in-house provision).

- 5.2.2 Capital funding of £700,000 was approved by Policy and Resources Committee in the Capital Programme for 2015/16 year to enable the rebuild and relocation of Meadow Close children's home. In addition, £500,000 (£100,000 per annum from 2015-16 to 2019-20) was also approved for extensions and conversions to foster carer homes to enable them to provide additional placements for harder to place looked after children.
- 5.2.3 The Looking after Children project and the placements commissioning strategy is being governed through the Family Services Transformation Programme which has already gained authority for the deployment of required resources.
- 5.2.4 The growth of the Barnet fostering service is based on a thorough needs analysis and represents a high quality, value for money way of providing placements to looked after children, to support them to achieve their best outcomes.
- 5.2.5 Barnet's MTFS 2016-17 to 2019-20 sets out savings against the cost of providing placements to looked after children.

	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total
MTFS saving	£131,000	£144,000	£149,000	£69,000	£493,000

5.3 Legal and Constitutional References

- 5.3.1 Section 22G of the Children Act 1989 requires local authorities to take steps that secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority are looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area ('the sufficiency duty'). When meeting this duty, the local authority must have regard to the benefit of having a number of accommodation providers in their area and a range of accommodation in their area capable of meeting different needs.
- 5.3.2 The Council's Constitution, in the Responsibility for Functions – Annex A, outlines that the Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee is responsible for ensuring oversight of effective support for young people in care and to enhance the Council's corporate parenting role.

5.4 Risk Management

- 5.4.1 The risks associated with the delivery of the Looking after Children project and the placements commissioning strategy are reported using the Council's risk management framework and are mitigated and governed through the Family Services Transformation Programme.

5.4.2 The most significant risk facing the successful delivery of the placements strategy is the risk of not recruiting enough new fostering households to meet the needs of our looked after children. As outlined in paragraph 1.5 B above, there are constraints being faced both regionally and nationally in relation to fostering recruitment. To mitigate these risks, Barnet has delivered and will continue to develop a series of recruitment campaigns, as outlined in the fostering recruitment strategy. There are multiple strands of activity related to this, part of which is being delivered in partnership with other parts of the Council, including the use of street advertising which provides high visibility support to campaigns.

5.5 Equalities and Diversity

5.5.1 The 2010 Equality Act outlines the provisions of the Public Sector Equalities Duty which requires Public Bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups
- foster good relations between people from different groups

The broad purpose of this duty is to integrate considerations of equality into day business and keep them under review in decision making, the design of policies and the delivery of services

5.5.2 The Barnet placements commissioning strategy is based on a thorough needs assessment and sets out the profile and needs of Barnet's looked after children. Section 4 of the strategy provides data on the LAC population. This indicates that males, children and young people with SEN or a disability and specific ethnic groups, including Black African and Black Caribbean are over-represented in the LAC population. The Looking after Children project has been developed on the basis of this needs assessment and strategy and is designed to better meet the needs of our looked after children.

5.5.3 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken on the placements commissioning strategy. Successful delivery of the commissioning strategy is anticipated to have an overall positive impact on groups with protected characteristics, by ensuring that the recruitment of additional carers will better meet their needs and enable more children and young people to live within the Borough.

5.6 Consultation and Engagement

Staff, looked after children and foster carers form a key part of the development of the looking after children project and the implementation of the placements commissioning strategy. During the course of the project, fortnightly staff and foster carer working groups have been meeting to review and challenge the service development work that is ongoing. Consideration is now being given to how the service embeds this consultation and partnership activity into business as usual practice. Further to this, there have been ongoing engagement with looked after children and young people through mystery shopping exercises, through the Role Model Army and by taking on board the messages and feedback from other engagement events such as

Speak Out Day and Achievements Day. Paragraph 1.4 above sets out a summary of the views of children and young people and how this has impacted on the strategy.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.