



## Policy and Resource Committee

2 September 2015

<b>Title</b>	Barnet Fostering Loft Conversion and Extension Policy
<b>Report of</b>	Director of Family Services
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	Yes
<b>Enclosures</b>	Appendix 1- Barnet Fostering Loft Conversion and Extension Policy
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### Summary

This report sets out the key elements of Barnet's Loft Conversion and Extension Policy and proposes the recommendation that the Director of Family Services be delegated the authority to issue grants and loans to fostering households as set out in Appendix 1.

In December 2014 the Policies and Resources Committee approved the Capital Programme which includes £100,000 per year for the next 5 years to construct a number of extensions and loft conversions for current fostering households. In line with the Placements Commissioning Strategy, such extensions and loft conversions will increase the number of internal placements for teenagers, sibling groups and children with complex needs, significantly reducing the cost to Family Services when having to make external placements with Independent Fostering Agencies and Residential Care Homes.

### Recommendations

1. That the Committee agrees and approves the attached Loft Conversion and Extension Policy for use by the Family Services Delivery Unit.
2. That the authority to issue interest free loans and grants to eligible fostering households (i.e. all Barnet approved fostering households whether in or out of the borough where they take children in care) for loft conversions and extensions, in line with the approved extensions and conversions policy, is delegated to the Family Services Director within the available approved budget

## **1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED**

- 1.1 As part of the Children's Service Transformation at the London Borough of Barnet (LBB) the Looked After Children (LAC) Project has a number of objectives. Among these are the following:
- Increase the number of LBB foster households
  - Increase LBB's ability to place looked after children and young people with LBB fostering households which are in borough. This approach is based on the LBB family environment in borough principles rather than looked after children and young people going to Independent Foster Agency (IFA) households and Independent Residential Care Homes, unless the individual's needs indicate otherwise.
- 1.2 One way to achieve the project objectives stated above is to expand the accommodation to the homes of qualifying foster households thus increasing the number of placements that are offered by any one fostering household.
- 1.3 In December 2014 the Policies and Resources Committee approved the release of £100,000 from the Capital Programme each year for the next 5 years (to begin in 2015/16)<sup>1</sup>, and that these funds would be used to construct a number of extensions and loft conversions. It has been agreed by the Director of Family Services that this money will be provided as split funding; 50% grant, 50% interest-free loan based on a local options appraisal.
- 1.4 Qualifying households will sign up to a legally binding arrangement whereby London Borough of Barnet (LBB) will provide a 50% grant and 50% interest-free loan to a maximum amount, for the construction of an extension or loft conversion, providing one or more bedrooms and associated living space.
- 1.5 It is important that a coherent programme of delivery underpinned by a clear and consistently applied policy is developed. The attached document will define the policy for the provision of a 50% grant and 50% interest-free loan to fostering households, who wish to extend or convert their homes in order to offer wider placements to LBB children in care.
- 1.6 The Director of Family Services requires the delegated authority to make grants and to grant interest-free loans to fostering households. This report has been drafted to be presented to the Policy and Resource Committee (2 September) to request the delegation of such authority and to approve the Loft Conversion and Extension policy for use by the Family Services delivery unit.

## **2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 The approach of having the Director of Family Services provided with the authority to grant interest-free loans and grants will increase the number of placements that can be offered to LBB's looked after children, especially for teenagers, sibling groups and children with complex needs.

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<sup>1</sup> This £100,000 is included in the line 'Social care placements - residential and fostering expansions'. Please see background papers for further information.

### **3. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED**

- 3.1 An alternative option of providing a 100% grant to fostering households was considered, which would not require the Director of Family Services to grant any loans. This approach is not preferred as it would not ensure the best value of council resources. Consultation was conducted with current fostering households who stated that they would be prepared to apply for the funding with the knowledge that they would need to repay the 50% interest-free loan.

### **4. POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 Once the recommendation has been approved, the Loft Conversion and Extension Policy will be implemented and managed by the Fostering Support Team Manager as business as usual.

### **5. IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

#### **5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance**

- 5.1.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2015-20 states that the council, working with local, regional and national partners, will strive to ensure that Barnet is a place:
1. of opportunity, where people can further their quality of life
  2. where people are helped to help themselves, recognising that prevention is better than cure
  3. where responsibility is shared, fairly
  4. where services are delivered efficiently to get value for money for the taxpayer.

- 5.1.2 The Loft Conversion and Extension funding will help meet these objectives by offering increased placements to teenagers, sibling groups and children with complex needs.

#### **5.2 Resources**

##### **5.2.1 Finance and Value for Money**

- 5.2.1.1 As part of the Transformation Programme and in line with the Placements Commissioning Strategy, the service is working towards reducing the amount of money being spent on IFAs and Residential Care Homes. Such placements are being used regularly when there are no internal placements available for teenagers, sibling groups and children with complex needs.

- 5.2.1.2 An average cost per placement week has been calculated by dividing the overall cost by the number of placement weeks, for both LBB and IFA foster placements which can be seen in the table below:

Provision Type	LBB unit cost (incl. service and corporate overheads)	Independent / Private unit cost (incl. commissioning overheads)
Foster placement	£646	£901
Residential placement	£3,493	£3,708

5.2.1.3 Increasing the number of internal placements through loft conversions and extensions will help to reduce the amount of money being spent on external placements. This recommendation will support Family Services in its objective of making MTFS savings against commission placements budgets.

5.2.1.4 Funding of £100,000 per year from 2015-16 to 2019-20 been has been approved as part of the Children's Service capital programme.

5.2.1.5 Any revenue related costs e.g., legal costs that may arise, will be funded from existing Family service revenue budgets.

## 5.2.2 Procurement

5.2.2.1 There are no procurement implications identified in the release of funds authorised by the Director of Family Services as per the recommendation.

## 5.2.3 Staffing

5.2.3.1 There are no staffing implications identified in the release of funds authorised by the Director of Family Services as per the recommendation.

## 5.2.4 IT

5.2.4.1 The IT systems that will be involved in the release of the funding, tracking and receiving of repayments are Integra and Controcc. There are no perceived IT implications with this recommendation.

## 5.2.5 Property

5.2.5.1 There will be no LBB property implications in the recommendation. Once building works are completed within a fostering household, Health and Safety checks will be conducted by the Supervising Social Worker to ensure the accommodation is suitable and safe for any children/young people being placed there.

## 5.2.6 Sustainability

5.2.6.1 In December 2014 the Policies and Resources Committee approved the release of £100,000 from the Capital Programme annually for the next 5 years (to begin in 2015/16), and that these funds would be used to construct a number of extensions and loft conversions.

## 5.3 Social Value

5.3.1 The Public Services (Social Value) Act 2013 requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Before commencing a procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

5.3.2 This policy does not have direct procurement implications but the policy is consistent with a Social Value approach as it seeks to offer additional local foster placements to Barnet's looked after children which enables Barnet's children and young people to remain living within the Barnet community and supports their attendance at local educational provisions.

#### 5.4 **Legal and Constitutional References**

5.4.1 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.

5.4.2 The responsibilities of the Policy & Resources Committee are contained within the Council's Constitution - Section 15 Responsibility for Functions (Annex A) including; To be the principal means by which advice on strategic policy and plans is given and co-ordinated and to recommend to Full Council, as necessary, on strategic issues including; Ensuring the effective use of resources and Value for Money; To be responsible for the overall strategic direction of the Council including the following specific functions/activities; Customer Care, Communications and Resident Engagement; Internal Transformation programmes; Welfare programmes.

5.4.3 If any report comes within the remit of more than one committee, to avoid the report being discussed at several committees, the report will be presented and determined at the most appropriate committee. If this is not clear, then the report will be discussed and determined by the Policy and Resources Committee." As these proposals come within the remit of the Policy and resources (responsible for the Effective use of resources and Value for Money) and the Children, Education, Libraries & Safeguarding Committee (responsible for ensuring oversight of effective support for young people in care and to enhance the Council's corporate parenting role), this decision is to be taken by the Policy & Resources Committee

#### 5.5 **Risk Management**

5.5.1 The Placements Commissioning Strategy outlines our aim to place Barnet's looked after children in local placements. The approval of this policy will support our mitigation of the risk of looked after children and young people being placed out of area.

5.5.2 There is a risk that fostering households who have signed a contract to receive funding and repay the interest-free loan could miss repayments. There are mitigations in place to prevent such risks from having an adverse affect, such as a thorough financial check to ensure fostering households are able to make repayments and the recommendation that the fostering households take out insurance, in the event that they are unable to work. If a fostering household has missed a maximum of 2 repayments and they are unable to make repayments from another financial source, then the Accounts Receivable Team will take the appropriate action to reclaim the outstanding balance of the interest-free element of the loan (or both the loan and grant where applicable) in full. This may include the commencement of legal proceedings in the County Court, which will incur further

costs and interest, which will be payable by the fostering household. Aligned to this may be the commencement of their de-registration as a Foster Carer. This is subject to the terms set out by Ofsted to be approved as a Foster Carer. A charging order will be placed on each qualifying property.

## 5.6 Equalities and Diversity

5.6.1 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 discrimination, harassment, victimisation** and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;

**Advance equality of opportunity** between those with a protected characteristic (as defined in the Act) and those without;

**Promote good relations** between those with a protected characteristic and those without.

5.6.2 The relevant protected characteristics are age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race / ethnicity; religion or belief; gender / sex; sexual orientation; marital status (including civil partnership). 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.

5.6.3 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 overrepresented 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.

5.6.4 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 and supporting current foster carers to convert their homes, will better meet their needs and enable more children and young people to live within the Borough.

## 5.7 Consultation and Engagement

5.7.1 During the Transformation Programme there was ongoing consultation with current fostering households through a series of working groups and engagement events. Relevant officers were also consulted as part of the development of the Loft Conversion and Extension Policy.

## 5.8 Insight

5.8.1 The looking after children project has utilised CSG insight to support the development of a marketing and recruitment strategy for fostering to better target recruitment of fostering households. This insight is relevant to the implementation of this policy. This policy is also structured around the needs analysis that has been undertaken on the children who it is most difficult to find a local foster placement. The policy prioritises harder to place groups of children.

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 6.1 Policy and Resources Committee; 2 December 2014; Capital Programme approval  
<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s19552/Appendix%20D%20-%20Capital%20Additions.pdf>
- 6.2 CELS Committee; 20 April 2015; Placements Commissioning Strategy  
<http://barnet.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=697&MId=7928&Ver=4>