



Children, Education, Libraries and Safeguarding Committee

21 February 2017

Title	Placements Commissioning Strategy
Report of	Commissioning Director, Children and Young People
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	Yes
Enclosures	Appendix A: Placements Commissioning Strategy
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Summary

This report sets out the key elements of Barnet's placements commissioning strategy for looked after children and care leavers. It identifies current and projected gaps in provision and sets out plans to address them. 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 strategy is a key part of the operationalisation of the 'Resilient Families: Resilient Children' vision. The full strategy is set out in Appendix A.

Recommendations

1. That the Committee approve the following Placements Commissioning Strategy
2. That the committee notes that the strategy aims to achieve the following: to better enable children and families to build their resilience, to increase the number of local placements through improving support for foster carers and to reduce the long term costs associated with residential placements.

1. WHY THIS REPORT IS NEEDED

Every local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that their area provides sufficient accommodation for looked after children which meets their needs. This update to the 2015 Placements Commissioning Strategy outlines the strategy going forward based on progress made since the last strategy and an updated understanding of the needs of Barnet's children and young people. It will support the delivery of placement savings within the Medium Term Financial Strategy as part of the Family Services 2020 transformation programme.

1.2 Progress against previous strategy

The Placements Commissioning Strategy published in 2015 set out the target operating model going forward with the aim of increasing use of fostering and kinship placements. The use of these types of placement has increased from 43% (March 2014) of all placements to 47% (November 2016), while the use of IFAs and external residential placements has decreased from 37% to 27% during the same period. There has been a significant increase in the number of other placements such as in semi-independent accommodation, which reflects the increased number of UASCs during this period.

The strategy also set out a series of enablers. Progress against these is outlined below:

- Re-design fostering processes and enhance offer to foster carers – fostering processes were re-designed, increased marketing took place and an enhanced offer was delivered. This has helped to deliver the change in placement mix outlined above.
- Work with other boroughs, including around the transition to adulthood – Barnet has worked as part of the West London Alliance to put in place an approved list for semi-independent provision for 16 and 17 year olds, launched in April 2016. Careplace, a web based, e-Brokerage tool for facilitating placement referrals, has also been developed through the WLA.
- Review Barnet's housing offer to young people and foster carers – Barnet's Housing Strategy now includes care leavers as a key vulnerable group and the council has made changes to its Housing Allocations Scheme to give young care leavers more priority for council and housing association homes. Foster carers can access capital funding for house extensions where there is robust evidence it will enable them to support another child or larger sibling groups.
- Develop options for improving physical environment of Meadow Close children's home – proposals are being progressed for a re-located children's home at Woodside Avenue that will better meet the needs of children and young people.
- Our recently developed placements dashboard brings together data and financial information to enable better budget management. Specifically,

managers will be able to identify what proportion of any over/under spend on placements is attributable to volume, unit cost and / or income.

1.3 Key elements of the strategy

The core principles have not changed:

'Barnet seeks to ensure that children who enter the care system are given a good start in life, with a stable home and access to education and other support. Wherever possible, we seek to enable children to remain with their families. Where it is necessary for children to remain in care and to live with alternative carers, we will support them in the most appropriate type of placement and we seek the most appropriate permanence options for children and young people. The availability of high quality support in stable and local placements is integral to supporting our looked after children to achieve good outcomes.'

The updated strategy has four key objectives that support this, which are being carried out through the Resilient Futures project, part of the Families Services 2020 programme.

1. Permanence is everybody's business and is secured at the earliest opportunity and families are reunified where this is in the child's best interests:

Children in care achieve permanency as quickly as possible. Whenever it is in the child's best interests, this will be within a family environment and may include reunification with their birth family, long-term fostering, special guardianship or adoption. Carers are well-supported and have access to high quality professional development opportunities. Children experience stability in their relationships with adults through thoughtful placement planning and careful matching. Consideration for permanency should be across the whole system, starting at the front door. We will clarify management expectations on achieving permanence in the best interest of the child.

2. Our placement mix meets local need and provides value for money:

Through the development of existing partnerships and increased use of in-house provision, we provide and commission a mix of high quality placements that help children and young people thrive and develop resilience. We do this as cost effectively as possible, commissioning for value and quality.

3. Young people are supported from care to independence:

Young people in care are supported in the transition from care through the provision of high quality leaving care services which support care leavers to find and maintain suitable accommodation arrangements, including 'staying put' and 'staying close' where appropriate.

4. Highly skilled, stable workforce building respectfully curious relationships with families and children:

Achieving sufficiency for looked after children, young people and care leavers is dependent upon our workforce development strategy. We will recruit staff that are committed to our vision of a resilience based model of practice and create an environment and systems that empower staff to be in control of their work. We will challenge and support the workforce, creating a dynamic learning organisation where good practice is shared across the service and with partners.

1.4 In order to successfully deliver the placements commissioning strategy going forward and to ensure the above objectives are being met, Barnet will be doing the following interventions. This is not an exhaustive list:

1.4.1 Adoption regionalisation

Barnet has agreed in principal to join the London Regional Adoption Agency (RAA), subject to detailed financial analysis. The Department of Education anticipates that RRAs will speed up matching, improve adoption support and achieve cost efficiencies. Expected local benefits include economies of scale coupled with an ability to maintain relationships with children / adopters via a hub and spoke model. Final detailed operational arrangements will be developed by September 2017.

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

1.4.3 Family Group Conferences have been routinely provided in Barnet to families of children who are on the edge of care to help prevent escalation of need. From April 2017, we will significantly increase the capacity of this service, including as an integral part of our early help offer.

1.4.4 A new team of Specialist Clinical Practitioners integrated within children's social care will provide highly specialist clinical assessments and interventions aimed at supporting children, young people and their families to build their resilience and minimise risk, using evidence-based techniques

1.4.5 A flexible, family-friendly facility will be built to act as a base for our rapid response services to deliver wrap around support to adolescents and their families. The hub will provide a space for family therapy, family group conferencing, positive activities and other family-based group activities as well as a training space for carers and residential care workers.

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

1.4.7 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, £339 per week per child more expensive (IFA placement has a cost of £904 per week compared to LBB unit cost of £565). We also know that Barnet's in-house foster placements 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.

1.4.8 There are three main groups of children who are more difficult to provide with in-house foster placements, therefore recruitment activity is taking a particular focus on recruiting fostering households to offer placements to children with these types of needs:

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

1.4.9 Semi - independent commissioning

1.5 West London Alliance and our in-house provision are unable to meet the forecast rising demand for placements for young people aged 16+, including UASCs. In anticipation of the need to increase our capacity to provide semi-independent accommodation, LB Barnet has commissioned a local provider to provide eight units of provision, plus on-site support and 24 hour security. The provision includes up to ten hours support per young person per week.

1.5.1 Step Out multi-disciplinary team incorporating specialist adolescent foster carers, residential care workers and other agencies

1.5.2 Residential care workers, specialist foster carers and other disciplines will be brought together under one management umbrella to improve placement stability and permanency outcomes for children aged 11-17 who are looked after and could move to other types of provision or are at risk of placement breakdown. The remit of this staff group will be extended to provide outreach support/ crisis interventions to foster and birth families in order to promote placement stability and reduce the need for teenagers to enter care. Significant numbers of our adolescent looked after young people are placed out-of-borough in IFA placements or externally-provided residential care and in some cases this is a consequence of insufficient supply of suitable in-house placements; these carers will help bridge that gap.

2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The Committee are asked to agree the updated 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 1 of this report. This strategy, which the Committee are recommended to approve, is the means in which we will deliver this duty.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND NOT RECOMMENDED

- 3.1 Progress has been made on the existing Placements Strategy which requires updating to ensure that Barnet continues to meet the changing needs of children and young people in a way that helps build their resilience, as well as delivering on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

4 POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1 The delivery of the Resilient Futures project and the placements commissioning strategy is being overseen through the Family Services 2020 programme. Beyond the life span of the programme, the work will be led by business as usual service delivery and improvement.

5 IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION

5.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

- 5.1.1 ***Ensure that Barnet is a place of opportunity, where people can further their quality of life:***

Family Services seeks to build community resilience to provide a good start in life for children and young people. "Community factors can also promote resilience. Children are likely to find it easier to access support outside the home when they live in cohesive neighbourhoods with formal facilities that encourage participation and achievement." (Hill et al, 2007)

- 5.1.2 ***Every child in Barnet has a great start in life, with the security and safety to grow in a nurturing environment:***

The Family Friendly Barnet vision, as set out in the Children and Young People's Plan 2016-2020, means that children, young people and their families are safe, healthy, resilient, knowledgeable, responsible, informed and listened to. Family Services will focus on developing families' resilience, which evidence indicates is pivotal to delivering the best outcomes for children and young people.

- 5.1.3 The Practice Improvement Plan is a key mechanism through which Family Services will deliver the Family Friendly Barnet vision, which seeks to build resilience in children and parents.

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 2016/17 is £15.3m (including SGOs/ROs and under 18 UASCs). The Medium Term Financial Strategy (2017/18 to 2019/20) includes £2.069m of savings in relation to reducing

placement spend, in addition to £1.53m in relation to health and education contributions to joint placements.

- 5.2.2 The Resilient Futures project and the placements commissioning strategy is being governed through the Family Services 2020 Programme which has already gained authority for the deployment of required resources, including for interventions to enable children, young people and families to develop their resilience.

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. 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. Elements of the Practice Improvement Plan implementation, and roll-out of the resilience model, will involve the commissioning of services and training, learning and development. Opportunities to secure social value through these mechanisms will be considered as part of any commissioning process.

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 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.

5.5 Risk Management

- 5.5.1 The risks associated with the delivery of the Resilient Futures project and the placements commissioning strategy are reported using the Council's risk management framework and are mitigated and governed through the Family Services 2020 Programme.
- 5.5.2 The most significant risks facing the successful delivery of the placements strategy are:
- Lack of capacity – impacting on ability to build and maintain momentum.

- Poor co-ordination / implementation of changes – both within and beyond the Sufficiency Strategy - which leads to duplication of effort and/or sub optimisation of new initiatives.

Mitigation in both cases is the continued oversight of a project board with the right people participating to ensure that areas of greatest need are prioritised and dependencies and linkages are identified and managed.

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 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.

- 5.6.2 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. 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 mixed are overrepresented in the LAC population. The Resilient Futures 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.

5.7 Consultation and Engagement

There is ongoing engagement with looked after children and young people through Family Services participation work and voice of the child coordination. As part of a West London Alliance (WLA) consultation exercise in autumn 2016, 96 young people from Brent, Harrow, Hounslow and Barnet gave their views on what is most important to get right before a placement or placement move, what is most important in the first few days following a placement and things to consider in the longer term. This has been incorporated into Barnet's Placements Strategy as well as influencing WLA commissioning arrangements. For example, feedback has been shared with around 130 providers to provide a clear message to the market on what young people have told us and our subsequent expectations from providers, feedback has been used to create the standards against which providers will be assessed when awarding contracts, and contract implementation will include ensuring that the views of children and young people are at the forefront of service delivery. The evaluation questions from the tender focus on a range of areas - safeguarding, management, outcomes for CYP and transition. The views of

children and young people will be incorporated in model answers for the evaluation, and providers will be expected to demonstrate how they take on board views of CYP throughout service delivery. Once contracts are awarded, ensuring that the views of children and young people are at the forefront of service delivery will be included as part of contract implementation / contract monitoring.

5.8 Insight

5.8.1 Looked After Children in Barnet

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. As at March 2016, Barnet had a rate of 35 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.

5.8.2 The predominant age for children becoming looked after in Barnet is 10-15 years. This is followed by children aged 16+ years. Understanding the age of children entering Barnet's care is important to the development and delivery of appropriate placements and other support services.

5.8.3 As at end March 2016, Barnet had 315 looked after children, the majority of whom were placed in foster care. The table below provides a detailed breakdown.

Provision Type	2016	Number
LBB Fostering	36%	114
Independent Fostering Agency	21%	66
Independent/Private Residential	10%	32
Other	14%	44
Kinship Fostering	13%	41
Placed for Adoption	3%	9
LBB Residential	3%	9

5.8.4 Barnet had over a third of its looked after children placed within the borough as at 31 March 2016, which compares favourably to the outer and inner London averages, although significantly below the England average. In total, nearly two-thirds of Barnet's children in care were placed either within the borough or within 20 miles of its boundary.

5.8.5 Barnet has a comparatively high proportion of children placed in secure units, children's homes and semi-independent living accommodation when compared to the national profile. This is partially because Barnet, along with most other London boroughs, has on average larger proportions of young people aged 16+ in care, who are the cohort most likely to be placed in semi-independent accommodation.

5.8.6 In Barnet the number of UASC in care has increased by 100%. In 2015 the number was 10; this has increased to 20 in 2016. This is a significantly higher increase than nationally and regionally. This will have implications for caseloads, diversity of foster carers and specialist placements, as well as early intervention and prevention services.

6 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A - Children's social care, Placements commissioning strategy.