


**CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SAFEGUARDING COMMITTEE**
**11th January 2021**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Family Services Quarterly Update</b>
<b>Report of</b>	Chairman of the Committee, Councillor David Longstaff
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public, save appendices 2 and 3 in accordance with Paragraph 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	No
<b>Enclosures</b>	Appendix 1 – ChAT Data Report Appendix 2 - Quarter Two 2020-21 LIIA dataset Report (Not public document) Appendix 3 – Barnet Self-Assessment 2020 (Not public document) Appendix 4 – Ofsted Annual Education Conversation Letter Appendix 5 – Housing Needs of Care Leavers Report
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**Summary**

This report gives an update on Family Services progress against key areas and asks Members to note and scrutinise performance data, that can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.

It provides an overview of the contents of our annual self-assessment, which was discussed with Ofsted as part of our annual conversation at the start of November.

Housing Needs for Care Leavers are addressed in appendix 5. The paper has been prepared by Family Services in conjunction with Barnet Homes, in response to the housing needs of care leavers. It focuses on the challenges of care leavers entitlement to suitable and appropriate housing; the banding of care leavers and how direct offers are made. Recommendations are included for how the Council could respond to the current and future

level of housing needs and ensure that the needs of care leavers can be met. The recommendations are focused on enabling young people to move into independent living accommodation, and range from reviewing the housing protocol and exploring options for changing banding, to housing stock options. Any decision on the Council's housing allocations policy is reserved to the Housing and Growth Committee and therefore this committee is asked to review and make recommendations to that committee.

### **Recommendations**

- 1. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the performance information provided in Appendix 1 and 2.**
- 2. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the Self-Assessment in appendices 3**
- 3. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to review and comment on the recommendations set out in Appendix 5 and refer it to Housing and Growth Committee for consideration. (appendix 5).**

## **1 Family Services Update**

### **Family Services performance update**

- 1.1 The services are continuing to work hard with children and families during an unprecedent disruption to their lives to mitigate risk and to meet local needs. We continue to monitor performance through stocktake, audit and reviewing performance management information. We also work with authorities across London to consider trends.
- 1.2 The London Innovation and Improvement Alliance (LIIA) is the Association of London Directors of Children's Services (ALDCS) sector-led improvement partnership and is hosted by London Councils. We submit quarterly datasets to the LIIA to allow comparative data analysis on performance across London. The data is provided on the condition that it is used for internal reporting only and other LAs data should not be shared with external partners or the public. For this reason, Appendix 2 is exempt from publication and its contents should not be shared on a wider basis.
- 1.3 According to LIIA data (appendix 2), in Q1 Barnet were aligned with other boroughs with a 14% reduction in contacts. There is a difference from Q1 to Q2 in that across London there has been an increase of 17%, whereas in Barnet the contacts have increased by only 2.8%. There appear to be no unusual or pandemic-related themes in the contacts other than the lower volumes. We have not seen the volume of children making allegations through schools. We are working with schools trying to understand this trend. There are several theories about why the rates from schools have

reduced, including whether this is the result of bubbles and schools' organisation, leading to children getting fewer opportunities to make disclosures confidentially.

- 1.4 Over many years Barnet has had relatively low rates of children in need and children in need of protection. This is associated with a range of factors including for example levels of deprivation. 148 children are currently the subject of a Child Protection Plan which the CHaT report (appendix 1) shows remains a lower rate than the rest of London and English averages. There are 446 children on Child in Need Plans, also at a lower rate than the London and England averages. Conversely, compared to a decrease across London in the number of Early Help assessments, there has been a 50% increase in Barnet in the last quarter. The numbers of open Early Help assessments are now at the point they were at pre-COVID and there is a 10% increase compared to Q3 last year. We are completing data analysis to identify any trends to help us to further understand these comparative figures.
- 1.5 There have been 66 new children coming into care in last six months, 16 of whom were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who had arrived at hotels in the Borough placed by the Home Office. Nine of the 66 children have previously been looked after. In the same period, 64 children were made no longer looked after, resulting in a net increase of two children in care over the period to 320. There is a small cohort who have not been visited for the past 6-9 months, and this is being followed up by social workers who have remained in virtual contact with young people during the Covid period.
- 1.6 Unemployment in Barnet has increased significantly and this has affected young people disproportionately.
  - 22% of care leavers (aged 17-18) are currently showing as NEET
  - 43% of care leavers (aged 19-21) are currently showing as NEET

A project is being developed to address this situation, including developing an apprenticeship and supported accommodation offer with Centrepoint during 2021.

## **Family Services Self-Assessment**

- 1.7 Each year all Local Authorities in England are required to develop a self-assessment. This is to aid continuous improvement and is considered as part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) arrangements. Members have reviewed self-assessments as part of their role in scrutinising performance. The self-assessment is exempt as it contains information in more detail than the ChAS data report, including anonymised case studies giving personal and confidential information about children and families.

- 1.8 In their inspection report from 2019, Ofsted made 4 recommendations and the progress made is considered in the self-assessment (appendix 3).
- 1.9 The self-assessment also sets out a range of actions to be developed across services and implemented over the next year to improve provision in Barnet further.

### **Annual Conversations**

- 1.10 The Annual conversation for Education was held on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020. A letter from OFSTED is attached for information in appendix 4. The Annual conversation for social care was held on the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020. A letter is awaited.
- 1.11 During the annual conversation, inspectors noted the progress we have made against the 2019 recommendations, and the focus over the coming year.
- 1.12 Ofsted noted we have made progress on publicising our advocacy arrangements. The commissioned provider has been fully involved in this process and they are clear that this is a priority for the service, and they have worked in partnership with Foster Carers to encourage awareness. the Lead Inspector noted that "the numbers of children who had access to advocacy support was considerably higher than at the time of the inspection, which is positive." Continued focus on ensuring children and young people have access to advocacy support will be in place until this can be demonstrated as routine in practice, and is a priority for the Independent Reviewing Service over the coming year.
- 1.13 We have continued to deliver child protection conferences throughout the pandemic, this moved from a completely virtual model to one where families are being supported in person by social workers following feedback from both conference chairs and families. Other participants continue to join online and this has resulted in improved attendance from the professional network. inspectors noted that they had not seen this hybrid model and commented positively on our acting on feedback from families. To ensure we keep learning from the views of families using our service, going forward we will be conducting quarterly workshops/forums aimed at improving the way in which we continue to develop by encouraging meaningful participation of children and young people in shaping the development of the service.
- 1.14 Ofsted concurred and noted that "The biggest challenge over the last few months has been in supporting the workforce, and there have been lots of keeping in touch meetings and written briefings." Our vision remains to build

a competent, resilient and thriving workforce who are curious about what is happening in children's lives and passionate about creating change. Over the last six months there has been stability in the Social worker workforce with a decrease in agency Social Workers against a comparative increase in full time staff. Current projects, including international recruitment and an additional cohort of non-qualified Social workers, will reduce the need for further agency workers. In addition, we are starting to see more agency staff become interested in becoming permanent Barnet staff, this a result of seeing the agency workforce decrease, and due to job security concerns during the recent pandemic. Projections are that we will have a significantly reduced agency workforce by March 2022. This will support further workforce development.

- 1.15 Monitoring elective home education is a key priority for use coming out of the national lockdown in the summer, as the pandemic is impacting on the numbers of parents choosing to educate their children at home. In April 2019 there were 228 children registered for elective home education in Barnet. The number in February 2020 was 257, which rose to 310 in October 2020. As well as monitoring the suitability of home education and taking follow-up action if there are any concerns, we are working to try to persuade as many parents as possible of the benefits of returning their children to school and to make them aware of the risk assessments and 'covid19 secure' control measures in schools. Ofsted inspectors agreed that this has highlighted the lack of clarity in the guidance in relation to the support that these children are entitled to.

### **Winter Grant**

- 1.16 The Winter Grant agreed by Members on 30th November 2020 has been operational since mid-December. Over 9000 children have benefitted from the scheme during the Christmas period.
- 1.17 A further update will be presented to Members at a future meeting.

### **Housing for Care Leavers**

Corporate Parenting Advisory Panel discussed issues relating to pressures in the availability of suitable housing for the Council's care leavers. The paper makes a series of recommendations to improve the present arrangements. This committee's terms of reference include policy and strategy to support children, education and schools, which includes policies to support care leavers in accordance with the statutory framework set out under the Children Act 1989. However, decisions on housing policy, including the housing strategy, the housing allocations arrangements and advice and assistance to be provided to those at risk of homelessness are within the remit of the Housing and Growth committee. Appendix 5 is a report prepared by officers within Family Services and in Barnet Homes setting out options to provide additional support for care leavers. Members are asked to consider and comment on this report and refer

it to the Housing and Growth Committee to consider whether any changes should be made to existing policies to further support care leavers.

## **2 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider and scrutinise the work of Children and Young People's Services, and to fulfil the council's statutory obligations in this regard.

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

Not applicable.

### **4 POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

Not applicable.

### **5 IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

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

- 5.1.1 The delivery of good services to children and families is a key mechanism through which Barnet Council and its partners will deliver the Family Friendly Barnet vision to be the most family friendly borough in London by 2022.
- 5.1.2 Family Friendly also forms part of our corporate Covid-19 recovery priority. The approaches taken supports the corporate and committee aims to:
  - Maintaining good or better services
  - Improve services for children and young people and ensuring the needs of children are considered in everything we do.

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

- 5.2.1 There are no additional financial implications arising directly from this report.
- 5.2.2 Medium Term Financial Savings were delivered for 2019-20. The majority of 2020-21 Savings targets are on track to be delivered, with mitigations plans in place for savings targets that impacted by Covid-19 and/or other factors. Additional spend on Covid-19 and recovery is being tracked by the services.

#### **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.

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

- 5.4.1 Local authorities have specific duties in respect of children under various legislation including the Children Act 1989 and Children Act 2004. They have a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need in their area and, if this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing services appropriate

to the child's needs. They also have a duty to promote the upbringing of such children by their families, by providing services appropriate to the child's needs, provided this is consistent with the child's safety and welfare. They should do this in partnership with parents, in a way that is sensitive to the child's race, religion, culture and language and that, where practicable, takes account of the child's wishes and feelings. Under the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities must consider how the child or young person can be supported to facilitate their development and to help them achieve the "best possible educational and other outcomes

5.4.2 Local authorities have specific duties to care leavers under the Children Act 1989 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017. The corporate parenting duties and powers under the 1989 Act include:

- to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people;
- to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings;
- to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people;
- 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;
- to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people;
- for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and,
- to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

5.4.3 In addition the Council has a duty to appoint a personal advisor to provide support to care leavers until they reach their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday. This support can include support from the Council as housing authority or from other housing organisations. Chapter 22 of the Homelessness Code of Practice gives guidance on housing options for care leavers and confirms that local processes and practices should not routinely involve care leavers being treated as homeless when care placements come to an end in order to place the housing authority under an obligation to secure accommodation under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996. The guidance recommends that local authorities have in place a joint protocol to cover arrangements for achieving planned, supportive transitions to independent living; identifying homelessness risk early and acting to prevent it, and providing a quick, safe, joined up response for care leavers who do become homeless. Housing options for care leavers should be based on the circumstances of the individual and the guidance confirms that there should be no blanket presumption that at 18 a young person who has left care will be ready for their own tenancy and that options could include supported lodgings, supported accommodation or independent accommodation with visiting support. Specific circumstances may require that a young person is supported to access accommodation close to a strong family support network or near to other significant adults, such as ex-foster carers or there may be a need to avoid certain locations due to childhood experiences or associations.

#### **5.4.4**

- 5.4.5 The Council's Constitution, Article 7 notes that the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee has 'Responsibility for all matters relating to children, schools and education.'

### **5.5 Risk Management**

- 5.5.1 Specific risk management is being carried out for Children and Young People's Plan. Any Family Services risks are recorded on the Family Services Risk Register and monitored each quarter by the Senior Leadership Team with escalations to CMY if necessary.

### **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
- 5.6.2 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 Equalities and diversity considerations are a key element of social work practice. It is imperative that help and protection services for children and young people are sensitive and responsive to age, disability, race and ethnicity, faith or belief, sex, gender reassignment, language, maternity / parental status and sexual orientation. We continue to closely monitor this, as this report notes; the lockdown and subsequent economic downturn has had a disproportionate impact on 18-24-year olds in the Borough, who are less likely to find employment, and that have in some cases remained in their accommodation (appendix 5).
- 5.6.4 As the self-assessment (appendix 3) refers to, alongside all other service areas there has been a focus on responding to the incidents over the summer in relation to racism and Black Lives Matter. Within Family Services, we have been consulting and reflecting on what we need to do to support a diverse and inclusive service, where all staff feel a sense of belonging and an opportunity to contribute to how we break down structural racism and bias. We have begun this journey by, initially, facilitating a series of staff conversations, establishing a strategic focus group of Race Equality Representatives from each service area and selecting an Equalities Lead. The group will represent staff and service user views, ideas, feedback and experiences. Participants will receive consultation and support to ensure they feel equipped to take on this crucial work. We have been developing the anti-racism strategy and action plan, which all roles will be responsible for actively implementing.

## **5.7 Corporate Parenting Principles**

- 5.7.1 In July 2016, the Government published their Care Leavers' strategy Keep on Caring which outlined that the "... [the government] will introduce a set of corporate parenting principles that will require all departments within a local authority to recognise their role as corporate parents, encouraging them to look at the services and support that they provide through the lens of what a reasonable parent would do to support their own children.'
- 5.7.2 The corporate parenting principles set out seven principles that local authorities must have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people, as follows:
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; and;
  7. to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
- 5.7.3 The needs of children in care and leaving care are at the forefront of our considerations in all our development activity. The Housing Needs of Care Leavers report (appendix 5) addresses how Barnet Council will meet our statutory duty to support care leavers up to the age of 25; this includes services assisting care leavers in preparing for adulthood and in independent living through housing and accommodation services.

## **5.8 Consultation and Engagement**

- 5.8.1 Consultation and engagement with young people is central to social work practice and service improvement across Family Services. Barnet Family Services are expanding on engagement activities and as a part of the plans we are recruiting for a post that will focus on service user engagement.
- 5.8.2 Our Self-assessment references some of the engagement work, including the advocacy review, and developments on Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) reviews. A priority for the IRO service this year has been to fully embed the Child Participation model. Two events (bowling) were held in October and December 2019 with children and young people aged between 7-17 years attending. This was to encourage relationship building between the IROs and

young people, and the feedback has been positive. We hope to run more events when restrictions on social interaction are loosened. For those young people who would benefit from being taken out individually at midway points, and young people who remain reluctant to attend their reviews, individualised support is still available. We have found that virtual 1:1 participation cannot compensate for physical 1:1 support, and this may impact engagement. We have also worked with young people who have since transferred to leaving care services on producing information booklets on the work of the reviewing service. The record of review is now a more personalised letter form, to promote the participation of young people in the reviewing process.

- 5.8.3 The focus for the IRO service this year is to continue to develop in line with children and young people's wishes and input and to ensure that all midway tracking and contact is routinely recorded. The focus on advocacy support will continue until this can be demonstrated as routine in practice. Bespoke practice development and training will be implemented to support evidencing the impact that IRO's they have on the circumstances and experience of the children that they are involved with.

## **5.9 Insight**

- 5.9.1 Insight data will continue to be regularly collected and used in monitoring the progress and impact of the Children and Young People's Plan and to shape ongoing improvement activity. Please see references to our Insight data as part of the self-assessment.

## **6 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 None.
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