



## Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee

**5 May 2021**

**Title** Family Services Quarterly Update

**Report of** Chairman of the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee

**Wards** All

**Status** Public

**Urgent** No

**Key** No

**Enclosures** Appendix 1 – ChAT Data Report  
Appendix 2 – Terms of Reference Independent Children's Social Care Review

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### Summary

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

### Officers Recommendations

1. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the performance information summarised in the report, and provided in Appendix 1.

## **1 Family Services Update**

### **National Government Update**

- 1.1 Department for Education (DfE) have launched a wide-ranging, independent review to address poor outcomes for children in care as well as strengthening families to improve vulnerable children's lives. Josh MacAlister will lead the review, he is a former teacher and founder of the social work charity Frontline. The review will look at the whole system of support, safeguarding, protection and care, and the child's journey into and out of that system, including relevant aspects of preventative services provided as part of early help. Appendix 2 outlines the key themes and questions.
- 1.2 There will also be a [separate review of the placements market](#). The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) will examine concerns around high prices paid by local authorities and inadequate supply of appropriate placements for children in their care. The launch of the study comes after concerns have been raised about private sector provision of children's social care making high profit margins, and if this has an impact on quality of provision. A recent Local Government Association report found that some independent providers of children's residential and fostering placements are achieving profits of more than 20% on their income. The CMA will look at how well the current system of provision is working and explore how it could be made to work better, including supply of placements, costs and commissioning processes. Barnet has been asked to contribute to this review.
- 1.3 Following a pause due to the pandemic, Ofsted's return to inspection in 2021 will happen in phases this spring and summer. Routine inspections for schools, which result in a school being awarded a new grade or being confirmed in its current grade, will resume in the summer term. Inspections for SEND (Special Education Needs and Disability) will resume in June 2021. Routine inspection under the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework will begin from April. Ofsted will prioritise inadequate local authorities that are ready for re-inspection, and authorities where there are concerns. During the same period, routine monitoring visits to inadequate LAs will restart.
- 1.4 The next step will be to restart the pre-Covid focused visits to LAs where Ofsted have concerns and/or have not visited for some time, with fieldwork starting in June at the earliest. Standard inspections will this summer start to prioritise inadequate LAs that are likely to move out of intervention. Short inspections will restart in the autumn.
- 1.5 Area SEND inspections, which Ofsted carry out jointly with the Care Quality Commission, are also set to begin again. Ofsted plan to restart full area SEND inspections from June 2021 at the earliest. These visits will be to areas that have not yet been inspected under the current framework. The precise restart date for full inspections will be kept under review, subject to government guidance and any COVID-19 restrictions in place at the time. Barnet is expecting a SEND inspection.

## Schools back - Pandemic update

- 1.6 On the 1st June 2020 we launched our 'Barnet – Helping Children Back to School' campaign which provides families and professionals including teachers with guidance and resources for supporting children's mental health as they return to school post lockdowns. Every school has been doing comprehensive risk assessments post the latest lockdown - plans for a return to learning will vary from school to school. Headteachers have been working with school staff, governors, unions and parents to devise arrangements that both allow social distancing and minimise the risk of infection. This has included support for accessing community testing facilities.
- 1.7 Attendance at schools in Barnet has been positive, with attendance above the national averages across all categories, illustrated in the table below:

**Table 1: DfE national attendance figures for the 25th March**

Overall		
	National	90%
	Barnet	94.6%
Primary		
	National	92%
	Barnet	95%
Secondary		
	National	87%
	Barnet	94.5%
Special		
	National	82%
	Barnet	82.3%

- 1.8 We have continued to support pupils with EHCPs and vulnerable cohorts, with social workers continuing visits throughout the pandemic. This had led to above the national average attendance for these young people:

**Table 2: DfE national attendance figures for the 25th March**

Pupils with EHCP		
	National	84%
	Barnet	89%
Pupils with Social Worker		
	National	82%
	Barnet	88%
FSM Pupils		
	National	86%
	Barnet	91%

## **Early Help and Children's Social Care**

- 1.9 All services have continued to work creatively and diligently to meet the needs of children and families whose daily lives have been disrupted by the impact of the pandemic. Demand for services, local responses and activity are regularly monitored through performance management meetings and quality assurance activities.
- 1.10 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. Barnet submit quarterly datasets to the LIIA to allow comparative data analysis on performance against key indicators across London.
- 1.11 LIIA data demonstrates that Barnet has lower than London averages against nearly all performance indicators. When Q2 20/21 is compared with Q2 2019/20 there is some indication of widening differences in data for example, Barnet MASH contacts were 10% lower than the London average in 2019/20 and in Q2 2020/21 the difference has increased to 19%. However, CHAT data shows MASH contacts in the period September 2020 to March 2021 are only 0.5% lower than the same reporting period in the previous year.
- 1.12 Barnet has a comprehensive range of Early Help provision, the LIIA data in Q2 2019/20 shows that Barnet had 5.9% more children accessing Early Help provision than the London average. In Q2 2020/21 this gap has widened further with 18% more children in Barnet accessing Early Help provision than the London average. CHAT data shows a 5.4% increase in Early Help Assessments in the period September 2020 to March 2021 when compared to the same reporting period in the previous year. The data is indicative of Barnet's continued investment in Early Help Services, including Mental Health provision, having a positive impact against the need for escalation of need into statutory support services.
- 1.13 The investment in Early Help Services and lower than usual numbers of safeguarding referrals during the pandemic due, in the main, to children staying at home, has impacted on levels of Child in Need and Child Protection Plans open to the service. An analysis of the data shows that referrals for school age children have been lower, and this has led to a lower volume of safeguarding referrals, particularly for inappropriate physical chastisement.
- 1.14 The LIIA Q2 data for 2019/20 shows a 46% gap between Barnet and the London average for open Child in Need episodes with the pandemic increasing this gap by 6% as reported in LIIA Q2 2020/21. The CHAT September 2020 to March 2021 data shows a 10.9% reduction in Child in Need Plans and a 12% reduction in Child Protection Plans when compared to the same reporting period in the previous year. The service is closely monitoring thresholds to ensure that all children who require a safeguarding response receive one and to monitor the impact on safeguarding referrals as children return to school.
- 1.15 Barnet is further investing in Early Years parenting approaches as it prepares to launch a new Parenting Hub in June 2021. The Parenting Hub will provide support to parents affected by poor mental health, relationship difficulties and addictions using evidenced-informed approaches to help them develop secure and healthy relationships with their children. The Parenting Hub will enhance the current

parenting support offer available to children and families in the borough and will work with children at risk of entry into care as well as delivering additional support to families accessing Early Help Services to minimise the need for escalation into Children's Social Care Services when parenting groups available in Universal Plus and Early Help provision are not achieving change for the child.

- 1.16 Alongside this a new MOPAC funded partnership with Khulissa is supporting engagement with parents from racially minoritized backgrounds, particularly those who have had children involved in offending or impacted by exploitation. The partnership will develop training with the aim of creating parenting champions across the borough. This is further enhanced by Barnet's engagement with the Empowering Parents, Empowering Communities (EPEC) programme which is a research based and evaluated system for training and supervising parent-led groups and courses. The training started in April, further updates will be available later in the year.

### **Children in care and care leavers**

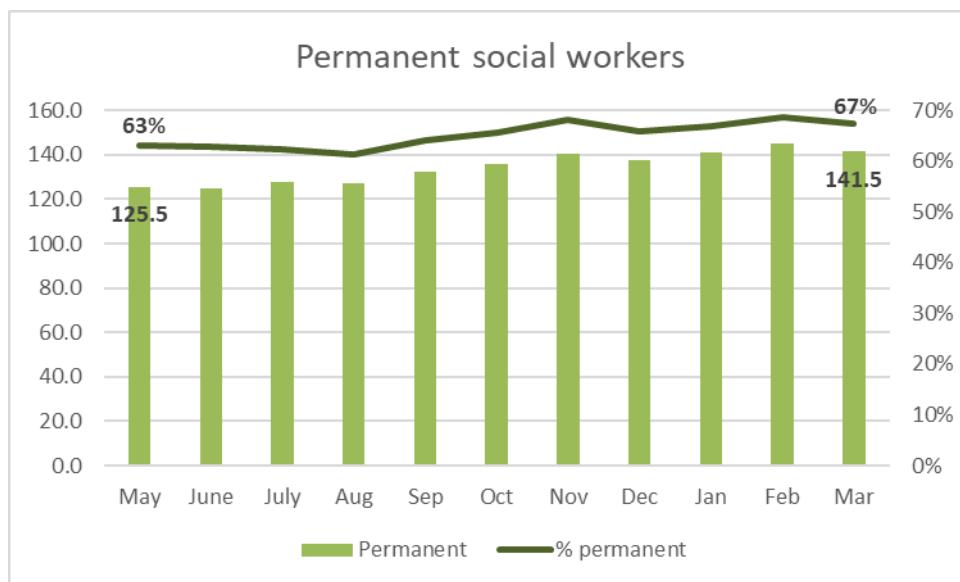
- 1.17 The number of children in care remains stable at 311. The marked increase in the numbers of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children presenting in Q3 has now stabilised however our numbers remain over the quota of 68 young people. This continues to place pressure on our Leaving Care services who currently support over 120 former UASC care leavers.
- 1.18 Visits to children continue to be a mixture of face to face and virtual visits and frequency of visits vary in line with the child's wishes and care plans. There are a small cohort of children where their visits fall out of timescales and this being followed up by team managers to ensure that the virtual contacts are recorded correctly and that any agreed change in frequency is noted appropriately.
- 1.19 The stability of placements has been maintained for the majority of our children. Over the last year we have seen a reduction in children who have had 2 or more placements with 29 young people experiencing 3+ placement moves in comparison to 38 last year. This year we saw 57 children experiencing 2 placement moves which is a reduction from the 75 children last year. The analysis of placement moves is showing that in many cases when a child moves they are moving to a permanent and better care arrangement. For a small number of children, we have seen their needs escalating and the need for residential therapeutic placements. 61% of our children remain in foster care and over 80% of under 16-year olds have remained in their same placement for more than a year. 57% of under 16-year olds have been in the same placement for over 2 years.
- 1.20 Recently published Government research briefing on youth unemployment (10/11/2020) evidences that unemployment for young people aged 16 – 24 has increased by 88,000 (17%) with almost 200,000 more young people economically inactive, and an increase of 120% in young people claiming benefits. Nationally the increase in NEET is concentrated among young men – who are disproportionately represented within leaving care cohorts. In Barnet currently 66% of our NEET care leaver cohort are male.

- 1.21 The percentage of Barnet care leavers that are in Employment, Education or Training (EET) is currently (March 2021) at 59% which is a 5% increase from this time last year (March 2020).
- 1.22 Given the national context, whilst the team acknowledge the upward shift is minimal, this is within a pandemic and work is underway within the leaving care team to maintain and improve this trajectory. It maintains a central focus for the Onwards and Upwards Team, the Virtual School and the 16+ Team within BELS. The service is completing a deep dive analysis on our young people who are NEET to understand their demographics, blocks to being EET and ensuring there is a plan developed with the young person to reintegrate them into work, training or education.
- 1.23 Barnet Family Services has through the Placement Transformation Programme developed more local placements for children and young people. Fostering recruitment has continued throughout the pandemic and have approved 11 foster cares and 7 supported living hosts. We are working closely to support foster carers, who were unable to take on the care of children during the various lockdowns, to come back on line to increase our vacancy pool. Between the 10th and 23rd May Fostering Fortnight will take place and we will be launching a refreshed recruitment campaign via social media platforms as well as in the community on buses and locally placed posters. A programme of activities will be published soon for an exciting week of activities to celebrate fostering and the commitment of our carers. The number of provisions within Barnet for over 16-year olds has been increased through the Moving Forward projects and the therapeutic children's home will enable us to place our more complex young people locally.
- 1.24 The new children's home in Woodside Ave is in its final stages of construction and the handover process begins on 23 April. It is anticipated that the construction company will have fully completed all works at the end of May as there is some outstanding work on the perimeter of the property. All new posts for this therapeutic Children's Home have been successfully recruited to and planning has commenced for the first young person who will transfer to this home in June. Visits to the property will be arranged during May for members before children become resident. The Children in Care Council and a focus group of care leavers are working on agreeing a name for the home and the Ofsted registration application will be submitted once the keys of the property have been handed over to us.
- 1.25 Meadow Close is in the process of converting to a semi-independent provision and improvements to the house are being progressed that will enable the young people to be effectively supported to live independently. An example of this is alteration to the kitchen to facilitate the young people to cook for themselves and to have the necessary secure storage space for their equipment and groceries.

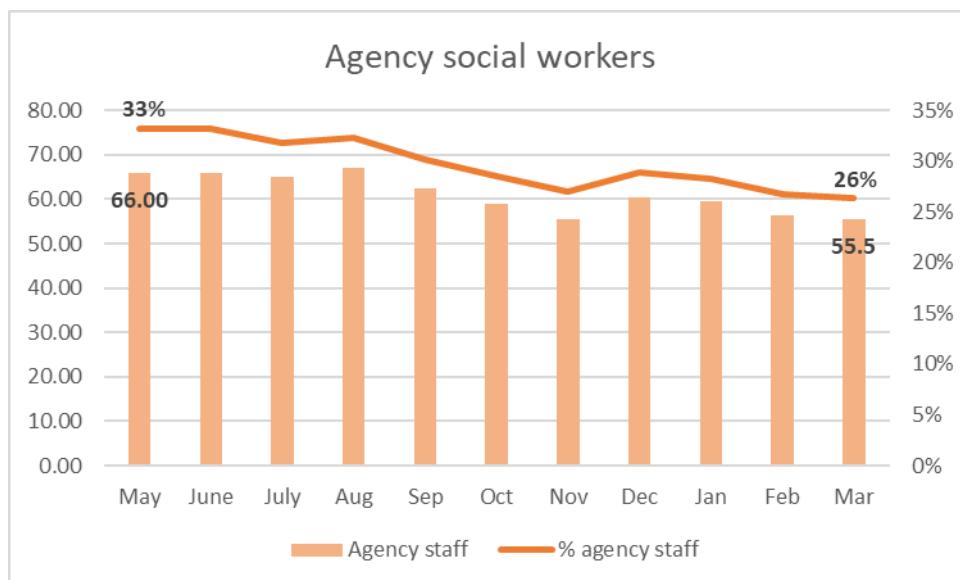
## Workforce

1.26 The workforce in Family Services remains stable, with an increase in permanent social workers against a decrease in agency staff. Overseas recruitment has been successful, with three new social workers starting in mid-June and two more to follow. We have recently completed appointments for our new children's home at Woodside Avenue for clinical practitioners and Residential Therapeutic Support Workers, as well as for the new Parenting Hub. As part of our "grown your own" approach to recruitment. We have also increased our cohort of social workers joining us through Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE), a programme that gives newly qualified social workers extra support during their first year of employment. The programme aims to develop their skills, knowledge and professional confidence.

**Table 3:**



**Table 4:**



## **Holiday Activities Food Funding– numbers receiving and total budget for Easter**

- 1.27 The Department for Education announced in November 2020 that every local authority will have access to the £220 million Holiday Activities Food (HAF) Programme fund which aims to build upon the initial delivery funded since 2018. The HAF programme aims to support families who are on reduced incomes that face increased costs with childcare and food pressure points during the school holiday period. It has been evidenced that free holiday club offers with additional access to breakfast or lunch have a positive impact on young people.
- 1.28 The London Borough of Barnet has been allocated £1,163,420 DfE funding. The 0 – 19 Early Help Service is working collaboratively with schools, stakeholders, partners and Young Barnet Foundation which will supports the community ensuring the most vulnerable are offered access to the HAF Programme. The aim of the programme is to make free places available to children eligible for free school meals for the equivalent of at least 4 hours a day, 4 days a week, 6 weeks a year. The funding covers 4 weeks in the summer and one week of provision in each of the Easter and Christmas holidays.
- 1.29 We have successfully delivered an Easter programme of online and in-person activities via the HAF fund under the BACE Holidays Programme, standing for Barnet. Active. Creative. Engaging. Holidays! This has included nutrition and cookery lessons to complement the food voucher that all attendees received, outdoor activities including football lessons and sessions that were tailored for children and young people with SEND. We received a range of donations to support the delivery of sessions, and produced brochures and full colour activity packs for attendees.
- 1.30 147 children attended council run face to face sessions, with more attending voluntary sector led provision over Easter and we have received positive feedback from parents and children. A detailed evaluation is now being completed so that we can plan for activities over the rest of the year.

## **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**

- 3.1 Not applicable.

## **4 POST DECISION IMPLEMENTATION**

- 4.1 Not applicable.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION**

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

- 5.1.1 Family Friendly is a key part of the Barnet Plan for 2021-2025 with the vision of “Creating a Family Friendly Barnet, enabling opportunities for our children and young people to achieve their best”.

## **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 The majority of Medium Term Financial Savings for 2020-21 were 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 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 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 report appendixes notes, in our performance data.

## **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. This includes “We built this home”, a new part of care leaver support provided through Barnet Family Services. It is aimed at developing new ways of supporting care leavers to develop the independent skills that will support them through their transition to adulthood. The project is a series of workshops offered to young people between the ages of 16 and 25 to support them as they move into their own accommodation and ensure they have the necessary skills to live independently. Onwards and Upwards are currently co-designing the workshops together with care leavers.

5.7.4 These workshops will include the development and learning of practical skills such as:

- Let's fix it: home repairs and maintenance
  - How to unclog a toilet, kitchen sink
  - How to change a lightbulb
  - How to patch a hole, to paint a wall
  - How to defrost a refrigerator / freezer
- Keeping my home clean:
  - Mould in the bathroom / kitchen
  - Cleaning routine, including the oven, bins, fridge
  - Stains on the carpet / furniture
  - Using appliances such as washing machine, cooker

5.7.5 In addition, these practical home maintenance workshops will be run alongside health, personal care, nutrition, cooking, budgeting and finance sessions to complete a package of independent living skills. Thus, combining life skills and wellbeing to develop and transition to independence.

## **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. An overall Engagement and

Participation strategy will be developed and co-produced in the next quarter following the collation of different workstreams. The strategy will outline how we embed our service user feedback and child participation into service delivery and development. Three new roles have been created to support consultation and engagement activity (a Service Development Officer and two Child Participation roles based in BICS and Onwards and Upwards) in Family Services. A full update on engagement activities is forthcoming at next CES committee.

- 5.8.2 Our annual children in care and care leavers surveys will now be delivered by Bright Spot. The Bright Spots programme was developed as a partnership between Coram Voice and the University of Oxford supported by the Hadley Trust to help Local Authorities to identify how children and young people (CYP) feel and to use that knowledge to develop services and strategic thinking. The survey questions are based on feedback from workshops with 170 children in care and care leavers across the country and what they said was important to them and what they felt made their lives good. By asking the same questions of children and young people around the country Bright Spots can compare our children in care and care leaver's experiences to those in other areas and see where they are particularly struggling or doing well. The survey is now live, with survey results expected by late summer.
- 5.8.3 Furthermore, Listen Up has been commissioned to collect feedback and experiences of our most marginalised children with an analysis due the same time as Bright Spots.

## **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. This report updates the Committee on our performance data.

## **6 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 6.1 None.