



## Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee

**Date**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Family Services Quarterly Update</b>
<b>Report of</b>	Chairman of the Committee
<b>Wards</b>	All
<b>Status</b>	Public
<b>Urgent</b>	No
<b>Key</b>	No
<b>Enclosures</b>	Appendix 1 – Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT) Appendix 2 – Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) Children’s Social Care Placements Report Appendix 3 – Ofsted Inspection Report for New Park House Appendix 4 – Special Guardianship Policy Appendix 5 – Connected Carers Policy Appendix 6 – National Referral Mechanism Report
<b>Officer Contact Details</b>	Chris Munday, Executive Director for Children’s Services

### Summary

This report gives an update on Family Services progress and asks Members to scrutinise performance data, that can be found in Appendix 1. A summary of recommendations from the Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) Children’s Social Care Placements Report, which can be found in full in appendix 2, and an update on two of the children’s homes managed by Family Services,

### Officers Recommendations

1. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the ChAT performance report summarised in this report and provided in Appendix 1
2. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) report into the Children’s Social Care placements market summarised in this report and provided in Appendix 2, and to note and provide comments on our placements sufficiency programme an update on the Greenbank House provision, and the London Accommodation Pathfinder programme secure?

**3. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to agree the revised Special Guardianship Policy, provided in Appendix 4**

**4. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to agree the revised Connected Carers Policy, provided in Appendix 5**

**5. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the Nationals Referral Mechanism report summarised in this report and included in Appendix 6**

## **1. Why this report is needed**

- 1.1 The Children and Social Work Act 2017 says that when a child or young person comes into the care of the local authority, or is under 25 and was looked-after by the authority for at least 13 weeks after their 14th birthday, the authority becomes their corporate parent. As corporate parents, it's every councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting these duties towards children in care and care leavers. Children can be in care in a range of different settings, with the authority acting as corporate parent to all of them. This includes foster care, children's homes, secure children's homes and kinship care. Every councillor and officer within a council has a responsibility to act for those children and young people as a parent would for their own child.
- 1.2 Family Services performance update provides members with an overview of the key data items used by the service to measure performance and identify opportunities for strategic development as well as lines of enquiry to ensure standards and statutory obligations are met. A copy of the full performance report is available in appendix 1.
- 1.3 Ensuring the availability of good quality placements for our children remains a priority for Family services. This report provides a summary of The Competition and Marketing Authority (CMA) study in March 2022 into the supply of children's social care placements which will inform the development of our revised sufficiency strategy. A copy of the full report is provided in appendix 2. In March, Ofsted inspected New Park House children's home, and their report is summarised in this paper. We have also included an update on work in our newest children's home, Green Bank House.
- 1.4 We have responded to updates in guidance, legislation or best practice and have revised our Special Guardianship Policy, Appendix 4, the Connected Carers Policy, Appendix 5
- 1.5 and have reviewed our engagement with the National Referral Mechanism, the framework through which potential victims of trafficking in the UK are identified, so that they can be supported and protected, detailed in Appendix 6, and include this work for scrutiny by the committee.

## **2. Reasons for recommendations**

### **Family Services Performance Update**

- 2.1 Services are continuing to work with children and families during as they recover from a significant disruption to their lives caused by the COVID19 pandemic.. We continue to monitor performance of services through our stocktake and case audit quality assurance

approaches. We regularly review performance management information including the CHaT report (appendix 1). We also work with authorities across London to consider trends, including using comparative datasets. We are strengthening our approach to gather feedback from children, young people and their families.

- 2.1.1 Capacity in the system remains stable, though contacts into the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), the first point of referral for the public and professionals about children and young people, are up slightly in the period from 10471 to 10756. This has been mirrored by an increase the number of Early Help Assessments 1819 to 1984, and referrals rising from 1396 to 1417. The rate of referrals remains at 14%. We have seen an increase in new child protection plans from 116 to 123 following a previous reduction, however the overall number of children on plans remains stable. The number of children looked after has reduced in the period from 342 to 334, and the number of new children looked after decreased from 81 to 80. 29% of children coming into care were unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.
- 2.1.2 The timeliness of completed assessments is an area of focus for performance identified in the ChAT, currently at 74% within timescales, and the recruitment of a new Assistant Head of Service will support the teams in increasing this percentage. Audits show that the quality of the assessments taking place is good, and the rate of re referrals into the service shows the assessments as right first time. We have seen a reduction in children experiencing 3 placement moves, and our placements sufficiency programme is seeking to further improve the figures on numbers of children with placement moves by ensuring provision of suitable accommodation locally which meet the needs of these young people. We have invested additional resources and are increasing the number of young people in education, employment or training. This is up from 69% to 73% for 17-18 year olds and 57% to 59% for 19-21 year olds. We continue to be ambitious in increasing these numbers, especially within the post covid context. More recent data shows a more significant increase and will be reported to a later committee

## **Children's Services Placements**

- 2.2 The Commissioning and Marketing Authority (CMA) launched a study in March 2021 into the supply of children's social care placements. This was in response to concerns regarding the shortage of appropriate places for children in care and high prices paid by local authorities. These factors, combined with growing numbers of children requiring placements create significant strain on Local authority budgets. The CMA considered how social care placements operate as a market (supply and costs) whilst recognising that quite unlike other markets, market risks, mismatches of supply and demand or failures in social care placements have significant consequences for highly vulnerable children.
  - 2.2.1 The CMA reviewed both Local Authority placement provision for children and external provision. A total of 41 Local Authorities submitted responses to the CMA questionnaire and 4 boroughs, including Barnet, responded to additional questions on specific themes (such as staffing and running costs for our residential homes, home capacity and fostering costs and fees). Responses were received from 15 of the largest providers of independent children's homes and fostering services, plus 27 smaller providers. Contributions were also made via round table discussions and specific feedback from Association of Directors of Children's Services, Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers and The Independent Children's Homes

Association, amongst others.

2.2.2 Overall, the CMA report demonstrates the challenges of placements sufficiency, for both Local Authorities and providers. Their recommendations show they understand the importance of quality, regulation, standards and matching for children's experiences and outcomes. The report takes account of the wider complexities in the current placements landscape:

*"...the placement market as it operates today is not the result of deliberate policy choices by national governments on how children's social care should be delivered, but rather a reaction by multiple local authorities, voluntary providers and provider providers to a range of factors- including regulatory developments, financial constraints and reputational risk- that have played out over time".*

2.2.3 The final report includes a wide ranging series of recommendations across the placements landscape. Recommendations are provided separately for England, Scotland and Wales. Recommendations for England fall under three categories:

1. Improve commissioning by commissioning at scale, better forecasting and market shaping, the recommendation that some functions are undertaken by collaborative bodies, national support and initiatives to support more inhouse foster care recruitment and retention.
2. Reduce barriers to providers creating and maintaining provision, specifically a recommendation to review Ofsted regulatory requirements and planning constraints.
3. Reduce the risk to children from the potential negative effects of market failure though market oversight, financial risk mitigations and contingency planning residential providers existing the market in a disorderly way.
4. London Association of Directors of Children's Services are working on developing a range of new initiatives collectively to address some of these challenges. This work needs to be done in partnership with central government and Ofsted

2.3 Development of Secure Provision; As reported to Policy and Resources in December 2021 officers in Family Services have been working with Department for Education (DfE) and across London Boroughs to deliver the ambition of providing better care, support, and opportunity for our most vulnerable adolescents. The proposal will establish sufficient beds required for secure welfare provision in the capital where children are at significant risk to themselves or others. The plan is for 24 welfare beds with 6 step-down beds. At present it is difficult to find placements and when they are available young people are placed an average of nearly 200 miles away, breaking important relationships with families and services. The proposal has been submitted with full support of all 33 boroughs and the major stakeholders for children and young people in London. Funding has now been approved by the DfE Barnet is the lead Local Authority. The work at present involves a detailed site search across London, development of a practice model, early design of a building and the development of a pan-London vehicle to oversee and govern the project going forward. A paper will be brought to committee in September to progress the governance of this work.

- 2.4 The London Accommodation Pathfinder (LAP) is a bold and ambitious pan-London project, backed by Ministry of Justice / Youth Justice Board (MOJ/YJB) funding to commission alternative pathways to custody for 16 and 17 year olds vulnerable boys who are in the youth justice system. The children within the youth justice system have often fallen through the net of services and many are never assessed or have the required interventions, the LAP gives them that opportunity for their needs to be supported at the intensity that they require. Children in London are more likely to be in custody than in any other region in England. There are nearly twice as many in custody than would be expected given the size of the population. There is also significant racial disproportionality in the use of custody in London with 78% of children imprisoned coming from BAME backgrounds. Yet, despite the efforts of many professionals across the system, custody often fails these children as nationally over four in ten go on to re-offend.
- 2.3.1 The LAP was presented at the Barnet Community Safety Partnership board and at the Barnet Youth Offending Service partnership board. There has been engagement with the Youth Justice Service, Vulnerable Adolescents and at Risk Service, Met Police, Safer Neighbourhood Team and Anti Social Behaviour Team to establish the risk management plan of the property and location risk assessment. We will seek engagement with local residents as part of the planning application and when LAP is operational, and we have engaged with Barnet housing and regeneration services. There is a letter of support from the Youth Justice Board and from London Association Directors of Children Services.
- 2.3.2 Four properties are being identified across London, at which children will be given intensive support and monitoring over six months by an accommodation provider and partners who specialise in working with this cohort. It is a transformative, evidence-based approach that is expected to grow in London and beyond. It is proposed that one of these properties will be 1 Alexandra Grove, NW12 8NU. It is anticipated that the first residents would start being accepted between November and December 2022 in the North Central London region.
- 2.3.3 The property at 1 Alexandra Grove is currently registered as a hostel comprising 6 self-contained bedsits and as such is not a managed property. This planning application would be for a change of use to 'sui generis' to be used for this specific purpose, which would be a managed home for up to five children. Some refurbishment work would be undertaken by Barnet Homes to make the property suitable for this usage. A lease would be put in place by Barnet Homes to the accommodation provider. A partnership risk assessment has been undertaken and there is a detailed risk management plan in place, which gives a full description about how the property/service would operate in order to mitigate any risks.
- 2.4 New Park House is based in New Southgate and is one of two children's homes run by Barnet. New Park House looks after up to five young people between the ages of 11 and 18 and is a medium to long stay setting, and at the time of inspection there were 3 young people living in the home. On the 2nd and 3rd March 2022, Ofsted inspectors visited the home to conduct a routine inspection under the social care common inspection framework and judged the overall experiences of children and young people living there to be Good.
- 2.4.1 Inspectors found that young people living in the home have positive and trusting relationships with staff, who work to meet their needs and ensure they have good

experiences. There were several examples included which illustrated how young people are supported to maintain their own identity by developing their own interests and cultural practices, including accessing college courses, vegan cooking, boxing and access to interpreters and opportunities to practice their faith. Children reported that they feel safe in the home, and staff promote positive behaviour. Some areas of improvement were identified by inspectors in terms of leadership and management of the home. We fully accept these findings, and a plan has been developed to address these.

2.5 Greenbank House is a 6 bed therapeutic children’s home. All admissions are planned, and children are assessed as to whether the home will meet their needs and if they will match well with other children in the home. Children who are placed out of borough are being referred to this home as an opportunity to bring vulnerable children back into Barnet as well as children with complex emotional needs arising from trauma. Greenbank House opened in August 2021, and between then and October 2021 saw the admission of four young people aged between 13 – 15. Three young people came to Greenbank House after the breakdown of their long-term foster and residential placements. One young person was stepped down from a tier four mental health service, to be supported with emotion regulation skills and independence.

2.5.1 The therapeutic needs of the young people included support with attachment difficulties, relational trauma and emotion regulation. The young person who stepped down from a tier four mental health service progressed to semi-independent living arrangement in April 2022 as a more appropriate provision to meet her developing needs as she neared adulthood. One young person remains in Greenbank House and a second child is progressing through the admissions process and will move in next week. We will be making 2 beds available to our North London Consortium Partners as the need for this type of provision is needed across London.

	<b>Start date</b>	<b>End Date</b>
Child 1	10.08.2021	12.04.2022
Child 2	04.09.2021	08.02.2022
Child 3	20.09.2021	27.01.2022
Child 4	09.10.2021	To date

*Table 1: Timeframe of young people residing in Green Bank House*

2.5.2 Learning from the needs of the 4 young people who have progressed through Greenbank House has highlighted the significance of appropriate matching of need in parallel with factoring young people’s presentation, including emotional, behavioural and therapeutic need. The referral pathway has been reviewed to ensure robust analysis of young people’s presenting need in line with the therapeutic offer. The past 10 months have been a learning process of all staff, clinical practitioners and the management team. The admission criteria for Greenbank House is based on the clinical and therapeutic need of the young people as the home is a therapeutic intervention provision and this is what distinguishes Greenbank House from the other internal provisions Meadow Close and New Park House. Progressing all appropriate referrals with a planned and thorough transition plan is essential to the successful outcome for a child.

2.5.3 At Greenbank House, relationships are at the core of the work. Supporting young people to feel a sense of safety, security and trust within a relationship is incredibly

important when working to heal relational trauma. This includes an emphasis on relational repair after a rupture, utilising principles of Dyadic Developmental Practice. The three pillars of trauma informed practice are also a central aspect of the work, with an emphasis on creating connections (relationship building), managing emotions, and creating safety. Embedding these therapeutic modes of practice has been done via clinician-led case consultations, bitesize workshops, an ongoing training programme throughout the year, and direct work with the young people.

- 2.5.4 Systemic principles have been central in supporting staff with team dynamics and feedback loops and there is evidence of really progression in embedding these approaches throughout Green Bank House. All staff at The Green Bank House have had time over the last 10 months to co-create and embed the therapeutic model of working and reflect on the ways they could and could not meet the needs of past young people, and the changes they hope to make in the future.
- 2.5.5 Our Ofsted registration application has been submitted, and the registration fee has been taken from Ofsted, which indicates they are processing the application. However, there appears to be a significant back log of applications, and therefore we are awaiting the initial Ofsted inspection visit. Following this first visit, we will then be formally inspected within 3 months.
- 2.5.6 Overall, there has been a strong progression in relationship building between staff and young people that have been placed since August 2021. The young people have expressed valuing the regular in-house therapy sessions and key work sessions, and in time have shown openness and capacity to reflect on their own emotional and behavioural wellbeing, which is a significant step for them. Young people have also enjoyed the array of activities and the time spent with staff, building relationships and having fun. Young people's progress is being measured by goal-based outcomes, therapeutic care plans, holistic support care plans, and three-monthly review meetings with young people, key workers, clinicians, and the house manager. For the 3 young people who have moved on from Green Bank House, they have been supported by key workers, clinicians, and the house manager of Green Bank House to transition smoothly into their new placements, whilst also maintaining the positive relationships that were built whilst at Green Bank House.

## **Special Guardianship**

- 2.6 Special Guardianship offers an option for children needing permanent care outside their birth family. It can offer greater security without absolute severance from the birth family as in adoption. It can meet the needs of a significant group of children, mainly older, who need a sense of stability and security but who do not wish to make the absolute legal break with their birth family that is associated with adoption. It also provides an alternative for achieving permanence in families where adoption, for cultural or religious reasons, is not an option.
- 2.6.1 The Barnet Children's Safeguarding Partnership completed a Rapid review in relation to the circumstances of two children who were recently taken into care and are subject to care proceedings as a result of significant neglect. One of the children was subject to a Special Guardianship Order and the learning from this review has led to the review and updating of the Special Guardianship Policy. Learning from this review centred on how support for Special Guardians could have been strengthened considering all the challenges that Covid19 presented for agencies, recognising that

the service that is provided by the Carer Support Team is voluntary.

- 2.6.2 A change in approach has been agreed whereby the support plans will incorporate 3 monthly visits to all Special Guardianship families within the first year of the granting of an order, household checks with internal and external agencies will be undertaken, together with annual home visits to complete Special Guardianship reviews. As this remains a non-statutory service, the proposals for home visits, household checks cannot be enforced upon families, but the expectations are now set out in the updated SGO policy and will be stipulated much earlier in the Special Guardianship assessment process and detailed clearly within support plans. The updated policy is included in Appendix 4 for agreement by Committee.

## **Connected Carers**

- 2.7 If a child or young person cannot live with their parent(s), Connected Carers can take on the responsibility of looking after them daily. The child formally remains a Child in Care to Barnet, but the Connected Carer becomes their approved Foster Carer. The child or young person benefits from the additional support from their social worker but is offered the opportunity to remain within a familiar setting with someone that they already know. Connected Care is aimed at grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, close family friends or even neighbours. Anyone who has a positive and pre-existing relationship with the child or young person can become a Connected Carer.

- 2.7.1 Family services has revised and updated of existing Family and Friends policy, renaming it the Connected Carers Policy to ensure compliance with legislation changes and practice improvement, and this updated policy is included in Appendix 5 for agreement by Committee. This policy sets out how Barnet Council will support connected carers and the children they are caring for, provides information on the assessment process and details of the support that connected carers can access. This policy is underpinned by the principles of the Children Act 1989; the key principle being that a child should be enabled to live within their families unless this is not consistent with their welfare.

## **National Referral Mechanism**

- 2.8 Arising from the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Human Trafficking, the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) is a process launched by the government in 2008 designed to identify victims of human trafficking and ensure they receive appropriate protection and support. The NRM further assists the Home Office to build a clearer picture about the scope and types of human trafficking in the UK. In 2015 the NRM was extended to include all victims of modern slavery in England and Wales following implementation of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. The extension of scope includes within the NRM scheme any child, irrespective of immigration status, thought to be a victim of trafficking and any person who is considered a victim of slavery, servitude and forced or compulsory labour. The report in Appendix 6 sets out Barnet Family Services engagement with the NRM.
- 2.8.1 The Vulnerable Adolescents Strategy 2022 – 25 will build on the previous two-year strategy and set out the multi-agency response to tackling the increasing numbers of children and young people who are victims of modern-day slavery, county lines and criminal exploitation. The Strategy will be subject to a consultation exercise over the summer period.

2.8.2 The missing coordinator will take on the role of Single Point of Contact to align missing and NRM activity for children. This will support the provision of data to the Home Office who are running a pilot with 10 authorities to assess the effectiveness of devolved decision making in assessing young people against conclusive grounds criteria. Barnet will be providing local data as a comparator site to the pilot authorities.

### **3. Alternative options considered and not recommended**

3.1 N/A

### **4. Post decision implementation**

4.1 N/A

### **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 resource implications.

#### **5.3 Legal and Constitutional References**

5.3.1 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”.

5.3.2 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

5.3.3 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.'

## 5.4 **Insight**

5.4.1 Family Services uses a comprehensive suite of performance information to support decision making, including local and regional datasets, audit and financial analysis. This information is scrutinised by Senior Leaders in a variety of forums including Placement Board, Performance Board, MTFS Board and in quarterly meetings with the Lead Member for Children and Families, and the Chief Executive.

## 5.5 **Social Value**

5.5.1 All commissioning activity includes social value as a standard monitoring item.

## 5.6 **Risk Management**

5.6.1 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 CMT if necessary.

## 5.7 **Equalities and Diversity**

5.7.1 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

- 5.7.2 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
- 5.7.3 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.

## 5.8 Corporate Parenting

- 5.8.1 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.'
- 5.8.2 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:
- 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.

## 5.9 Consultation and Engagement

- 5.9.1 My Say Matters, the Family Services consultation and participation programme, has been launched and the first quarterly report will be published in July and available for the next CES committee.

## 5.10 Environmental Impact

- 5.10.1 N/A

## **6. Background papers**

6.1 [Social Care Common Inspection Framework](#)

6.2 [Children Act 1989 Special Guardianship](#)

6.3 [Children Act 1989 Family and Friends Care](#)