



Children, Education & Safeguarding Committee

20 March 2023

Title	Family Services Quarterly Update
Report of	Chair of the Committee, Councillor Coakley-Webb
Wards	All
Status	Public
Urgent	No
Key	No
Enclosures	<p>Appendix 1 – Children’s Services Analysis Tool (ChAT)</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Ofsted Annual Self Evaluation Exempt (Not for publication by virtue of paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as amended as this relates to information relating to any individual)</p> <p>Appendix 3 – Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting letter</p> <p>Appendix 4 – Staying Put Policy</p> <p>Appendix 5 – Children and Families Early Help strategy</p>
Officer Contact Details	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.

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 Appendix 1.

2. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the Ofsted Annual Self Evaluation in Appendix 2 and Annual Engagement Meeting letter in Appendix 3.
3. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the Conditions for Success programme, detailed in the report.
4. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the updates to the offer for Care Leavers in Barnet, detailed in the report.
5. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the Staying Put Policy in Appendix 4.
6. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to note and provide comments on the Government's response to the Independent Review of Children's Social Care.
7. That the Children, Education and Safeguarding Committee is asked to approve the Children and Families Early Help Strategy in appendix 5.

1. Why this report is needed

- 1.1 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.
- 1.2 Each year all Local Authorities in England are required to develop a self-evaluation. This is to aid continuous improvement and is considered as part of the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) arrangements. Members have previously reviewed self-evaluations as part of their role in scrutinising performance. The self-evaluation in appendix 3 is exempt as it contains information in more detail than the CHaT data report. The self-evaluation is discussed in the annual conversation with Ofsted, and a summary of this discussion is included in appendix 3.
- 1.3 The Conditions for Success programme has launched to ensure Children and Young People in Barnet receive an effective service which meets their needs in a timely way by:
 - a. ensuring that children and young people focussed work is of a good standard.
 - b. creating a workspace and environment where all the supporting infrastructure is in place to allow officers to thrive in their role, with reduced bureaucratic barriers enabling more time to be spent with children and young people face to face.
 - c. ensuring sufficient high quality social workers are directly employed in the borough efficiently and effectively.

- 1.4 Barnet's care leaver local offer was launched in April 2019, as required under the Children and Social Work Act (2017). The local offer sets out our offer for young people who have been looked after by Barnet Council, including the information, services and support available. This offer is being continuously developed and enhanced in line with the emerging needs of this cohort of young people. Ofsted have introduced a new judgment for 2023 to the ILACs framework specifically about the experiences and progress for Care Leavers, and this report provides members with an update on the Council's work with this group of young people.
- 1.5 Since May 2014, fostered young people in England have the right to stay with their foster families when they reach 18, if both parties agree. This can last at least until a young person is 21. 'Staying Put' aims to help young people gradually progress to living independently, as many young people leaving home at 18 may not be ready to live alone. Staying Put gives young people the opportunity to be in education, training and employment without the disruption of having to move into 'independence' during this important period of their life. We have recently updated our Staying Put policy which is included in appendix 4 of this report.
- 1.6 Stable Homes, Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation is the Government's Children's Social Care Reform consultation in response to the May 2022 Independent Review of Children's Social Care. The deadline for responses to this consultation is May 2023 and will be published in September 2023.
- 1.7 Approval for the Children and Families Early help Strategy to go out for public consultation was given at the November 2022 CES with agreement the strategy would be brought back for approval to the January 2023 CES. As the January CES did not take place the report has been deferred until the March CES.

2. Reasons for recommendations

2.1 Family Services Performance Update

- 2.2 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, remain higher than pre-pandemic and are up from 10417 in the last CES report to 10556 in the most recent CHAT (appendix 1). This is likely to be a seasonal change due to the school summer holidays (appendix 1). This has been mirrored by an increase the number of Early Help Assessments from 1788 to 1874, and referrals down slightly from 1568 to 1495.
- 2.3 We have had a slightly higher volume of assessments completed in this most recent reporting period with 1105 completed, and assessment timeliness data is now 67% due to a range of factors including capacity. Although assessments are taking longer to complete, the cases are not coming back into the system for re-assessment, showing that the capacity challenges are not affecting the outcomes of assessment. When there are re-referrals that require a statutory social care assessment, we monitor whether the quality of the assessment completed in the first instance was good enough and whether it resulted in the family not getting the help they needed at the time.

- 2.4 The volume of children who are subject to Section 47 enquiries has increased, but 91% of Child Protection Conferences arising from Section 47 enquiries have resulted in a Child Protection plan which demonstrates we are taking the correct children to conference. Child in Need figures are beginning to reduce, which is in line with the statistics across England. Boys are still heavily weighted in the older age range as we often have concerns around their involvement in criminal exploitation.
- 2.5 We are closely monitoring caseloads across Family Services, with a weekly report going to senior managers. Many London Authorities have seen some challenges with Social Work staffing as the London Pledge appears to have resulted in fewer staff moving around London. There is an associated pattern of Social Workers now taking jobs outside of London so that they can earn higher than London Pledge rates of pay. We are currently looking at how we can create capacity and ensure our retention rates are maintained , and this forms a key branch of our Conditions of Success Programme.
- 2.6 The CHAT shows 336 children currently in care and 318 care leavers. There has been a decrease in children coming in and exiting care alongside an increase in UASC coming in through the National Transfer System. There has been a steady improvement in the dental checks data as an outcome of our partnership with the Healthy Smiles Pilot Project, where private dentists are being funded by the NHS to undertake dental checks for young people instead of the NHS dental practices. We still have challenges in our recruitment for foster carers and we are doing creative outreach work including meeting with Barnet religious leaders to see how we can engage with local congregations and religious groups.
- 2.7 **Self Evaluation**
- 2.8 In their focussed visit report from August 2021, Ofsted made 2 recommendations and the progress made is considered in the self-assessment (appendix 2), along with progress against actions from the 2019 full inspection and priorities identified during the last self-evaluation. The Self Evaluation is an opportunity to reflect on our achievements and opportunities for further development, and it forms the basis for discussion in our annual engagement meeting with Ofsted as part of the ILACs inspection framework.
- 2.9 **Ofsted Annual Engagement Meeting**
- 2.10 Ofsted undertook an Annual Engagement meeting on 18th November 2022. The meeting was held between senior officers of the Council and the link senior Ofsted advisor. The meeting considers a range of information including the self-evaluation and the CHaT. There are also discussions about the impact of national policy changes such as the changes associated with unregulated provision.
- 2.11 Inspectors report on the findings of the AEM and the notes (Appendix 3) and they noted that “Your self-evaluation and performance information were comprehensive and provided good insights into your work across practice and performance, setting out your ambitions across the service.”
- 2.12 **Conditions for Success**
- 2.13 We have created the Conditions for Success programme to facilitate cross-directorate working to ensure our staff have what they need to ensure children and young people

get the best service possible. This has been established following feedback from staff at our annual staff conference, as well as from performance discussions at senior management level within Family Services.

2.14 Current workstreams include: a refreshed recruitment campaign for Social Workers, IT and Facilities work to ensure that the office environment has the right infrastructure in place to meet the needs of staff, and a new communications strategy.

2.15 We have the following measures of success for this programme:

- a. Timeliness of assessments
- b. Quality of assessments
- c. Manageable caseloads
- d. Decrease in agency numbers
- e. Increase in permanent workforce
- f. Increase speed of recruitment
- g. Staff satisfaction

2.16 **Staying Put Policy**

2.17 Staying Put arrangements allow young people who have been in foster care to remain living with their foster carers after they turn 18. These arrangements provide stability and continuity for care leavers and have been shown to significantly improve their outcomes.

By remaining in a stable home environment, care leavers are more likely to continue their education, find employment, and lead fulfilling lives. Staying Put is an accommodation option available to all young people who have been looked after for a total of 13 weeks after they reach the age of 14, and who remain looked after by Barnet Family Services in a foster care arrangement up to their 18th birthday.

The Staying Put Policy serves as a comprehensive guide that outlines the different types of Staying Put arrangements available, such as long-term and short-term arrangements. It also provides information on the legal framework that governs Staying Put arrangements, including the role of the local authority and the responsibilities of the carer and care leaver.

2.18 **Children and Families Early Help Strategy**

2.19 The public and member consultation took place across November and December 2022 and Early January 2023. In this time, we gathered feedback from:

- Over 90 children and young people through activities completed during the winter BACE programme.
- Members of the 0-19 strategic board
- Focus groups for Members, Family Services staff and Parent Champions.

- Shared the draft strategy at the SENDIAS conference and with the Parents Forum
 - Barnet's public via Engage Barnet survey.
- 2.20 Positively, the young people we engaged with unanimously agreed with the outcomes for their specific age groups, and parent champions reported that the document's chronological layout for each age and stage was a useful guide for what they could expect going forward with their children. Utilising the feedback from the consultation we have made amendments, including ensuring that the outcomes and the way these are presented are as inclusive as possible with regard to children and young people with SEND, provide guidance around how parents and carers may go about accessing the support made available by the Children and Family Early Help hubs and making explicit reference to libraries and the support that they offer.
- 2.21 Following the consultation, a final draft was presented to the 0-19 Early Help Partnership Board for any final comments and the document was then submitted for print. A copy of the strategy is attached as appendix 5.
- 2.22 The members of the 0-19 Early Help Partnership board, through the hub advisory groups, are developing an action plan and measures to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the strategy outcomes which will be reported to the quarterly Early Help Partnership Board meetings.
- 2.23 It is requested that CES approve the Child and Family Early Help Strategy, which subject to approval, will be launched at a series of events across the borough through the Child and Family hubs in April 2023
- 2.24 **Independent Review of Children's Social Care**
- 2.25 The 'Stable Homes Build on Love' government report ([Stable Homes Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation](#)) follows 2022's Independent Review of Children's Social Care, along with the National Panel's report into the tragic deaths of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson, and the Competition and Markets Authority report on the care placement market.
- 2.26 The report is structured around 6 pillars of reform:
1. Family Help provides the right support at the right time so that children can thrive with their families.
 2. A decisive multi-agency child protection system
 3. Unlocking the potential of family networks
 4. Putting love, relationships, and a stable home at the heart of being a child in care
 5. A valued, supported and highly skilled social worker for every child who needs one.
 6. A system that continuously learns and improves, and makes better use of evidence and data.

2.27 These six pillars map onto four short term outcomes:

1. Children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need.
2. Children and young people are supported by their family network.
3. Children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes.
4. Children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.

2.28 Achieving the four short term outcomes should result in the following longer-term outcomes:

- Good child development.
- Good educational attendance, attainment, training and progress.
- Good physical and mental health.
- Family stability, including housing and financial stability.
- Family functioning, including strong family relationships and support networks.
- Preventing and tackling crime.

3. Implications of decision

3.1 Corporate Priorities and Performance

3.1.1 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”.

3.2 Resources (Finance & Value for Money, Procurement, Staffing, IT, Property, Sustainability)

3.2.1 Forecast Financial Outturn at Month 9 (31 December 2022)

3.2.2 Overview

3.2.2.1 Detailed below is the forecast financial outturn position for the 2022-23 financial year as at 31st December 2022 for the services which fall within the Children Education and Safeguarding committee (CES).

3.2.2.2 The Council's revenue and capital forecast outturn for the financial year 2022-23 as at month 9 (31 December 2022) was reported to the Policy and Resources (P&R) committee on 22nd February 2023.

3.2.2.3 At month 9, the revenue forecast outturn for the Children, Education and Safeguarding (CES) committee general fund is:

- Overall, £0.881m forecast overspend against the approved budget of £72.753m, with an adverse movement of £0.651m from the previous CES committee (17.11.22) reported position.

Table 1: Forecast Revenue Outturn at Month 9

Children, Education Safeguarding	2022-23 Budget	Month 9 (Forecast outturn before reserves)	Reserves applied	Month 9 Forecast outturn after reserves	Month 9 variance after reserves	Month 6 variance after reserves	Movement
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Children Social Care (CSC)	56.608	59.368	(1.644)	57.724	1.117	0.482	0.635
Early Intervention & Prevention	10.340	9.962	0.021	9.983	(0.357)	(0.360)	0.003
Family Services Management	(0.888)	(0.798)	-	(0.798)	0.090	0.106	(0.016)
Education and Skills	6.693	6.724	-	6.724	0.031	0.001	0.030
Total Children Education and Safeguarding (General Fund)	72.753	75.256	(1.623)	73.634	0.881	0.230	0.651

3.2.2.4 The movement in variance is mainly due to Children Social Care (CSC), in particular Corporate Parenting and Disability.

3.2.2.5 In December 2022, there have been two court-directed placements that each are forecast to cost the council £0.500m, £1.000m in total, of which £0.250m is reflected in the variance.

3.2.2.6 Additionally, there has been a growth in the cost of placements, driven by provider sufficiency issues across London, evidenced through work by the Association of Directors of Children's Services with Newton Europe. The growth has seen costs for placements increase 60% in the last 3 years which the service has managed in previous years, however growth in court directed assessments and the length of time it is taking to resolve cases in the legal system have contributed to increases in Section 17 and External Family Assessments of £0.240m and £0.126m respectively.

3.2.2.7 At month 9, the current year capital forecast outturn for CES is an underspend of £2.993m to be re-profiled to future years. Further details are provided in Table 3 below.

3.2.3 Reserves

3.2.3.1 The council holds reserves to deal with future pressures where the value or the timing of the pressure is uncertain, or where the funding can only be spent on specific objectives (e.g. grant funding). Reserves are divided into 'earmarked' reserves, where the spending objective is known with some clarity, and 'general' reserves, intended to mitigate the impact of wholly unforeseeable costs. The levels of reserves are set out under Section 25 of the Local Government Act and prudent levels are determined by the Chief Financial Officer. Earmarked reserves are usually held by specific services, while general reserves are held corporately.

3.2.3.2 The use of reserves is not intended to replace savings or income generation opportunities as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). Reserves can only be used once and then they are gone. Any use of reserves to replace savings or income generation opportunities is a delaying action, storing up

pressures into future years. This could be part of investing in transformational service delivery and is the ultimate last resort during budget setting when a gap cannot be bridged despite best efforts.

3.2.3.3 Table 2 below provides detail of the anticipated use of or top up of earmarked service reserves within Children Education and Safeguarding.

Table 2: Reserves Forecast at Month 9

Committee	Forecast (drawdown)/ top-up to reserves £m	Commentary
Children Education and Safeguarding	(1.623)	Earmarked drawdowns: Commissioning - SENDIASS £0.015m, Placements £0.212m, Children with Disabilities £0.612m, COVID funding for Children and Young People Wellbeing Service in BICS £0.260m and Children Social Care £0.314m, Practical Support for young people on pathway to employment (BELS Post 16) £0.250m; top ups: Early Help 0-19 £0.037m.

3.2.4 Capital Programme

3.2.4.1 The Capital budget for 2022- 23, reports an underspend to be re-profiled to future years of £2.993m due to project delays relating to, education projects of £0.711m, social care projects of £1.097m and £1.185m on the secure accommodation project.

Table 3: Current Financial Year Forecast Capital Outturn at Month 9

Service Area	2022-23 Budget	2022-23 Forecast	Variance from Approved Budget	Expenditure to date
	£m	£m	£m	£m
Education	11.830	11.120	(0.711)	8.580
Social Care	1.646	0.548	(1.097)	0.190
Secure Accom	2.798	1.614	(1.185)	0.107
Children's Family Services Sub total	16.274	13.282	(2.993)	8.877

3.3 Legal and Constitutional References

3.3.1 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”.

3.3.2 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

3.3.3 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.’

3.4 Insight

3.4.1 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.

3.5 Social Value

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

3.6 Risk Management

3.6.1 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.

3.7 Equalities and Diversity

3.7.1 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

3.7.2 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

3.7.3 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.

3.8 Corporate Parenting

3.8.1 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.'

3.8.2 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.

3.9 Consultation and Engagement

3.9.1 My Say Matters, the Family Services consultation and participation programme, has been launched and the quarterly updates will report on activity in this programme

3.10 Environmental Impact

3.10.1 N/A

4. Background papers

5.1 [Stable Homes Built on Love: Implementation Strategy and Consultation](#)