

# Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children Looked After and Care Leavers 2022-24

Presentation to Overview and Scrutiny Committee



# Introduction and Context

- Durham's strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our looked after children and care leavers.
- Sufficiency Duty: "as stated in section 22G of the Children Act 1989, to take steps to secure, as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area".
- Covers a 2-year period (2022-2024) focusing on our current offer, challenges, gaps in services / provision and the actions identified to address these.
- Ongoing actions and projects underway and future actions we are proposing to take as a Local Authority – some of which are subject to funding availability
- Not the final version of the strategy – to be reviewed by design team to ensure that it is compliant with corporate requirements

# Local Data and Intelligence

- Number of children in care is increasing in Durham
- Increasing number of teenagers coming into care
- Delayed discharges from tier 4 hospital, due to limited specialist local regulated provision
- Use of external residential provision has increased by 50% between 2020 and 2022
- Need to increase the number of available foster carers to meet demand. Some children moving into children's homes (resource led decisions)
- Increasing number of UASC moving to Durham placing pressure on available resources – in line with the mandated Home Office Scheme
- Placement stability – increasing number of breakdowns and moves
- Increasing number of children being supported on the edge of care with opportunities to broaden the service further
- Gaps in respite services for C/YP with learning disabilities and complex needs, particularly overnight

# Key Achievements

- Developed a new Rapid Response Service preventing admission and readmission to tier 4 mental health inpatient provision
- Improved placement brokerage capacity to support residential home searches
- Durham First – continuing to roll out with providers in Durham and influencing service development
- Re-commissioned the IFA Framework – 18 providers (opens monthly for new providers)
- New Supporting the Provider Market Team – recruitment, training etc
- Opened 2 x new children's homes in 2021; 1 x new children's home for 2 children in 2022; with 2 x smaller homes due to open in the coming months
- Launched new Local Provider Forums to improve communication and collaboration with the provider market
- Secured DfE Staying Close Funding and launched a new Staying Close Programme for our children's homes

# Listening to Children and Young People

- Committed to listening to children and young people; embedded practice across CYPS
- Care experienced young people play an active role in the co-production and shaping of services that directly impact them.
- Work in partnership with a social enterprise – Investing in Children
  - Reference groups, eXtreme group, CiCC, Investing in Children Membership Programme
- Examples include (but are not limited to):
  - Development of new Edge of Care Home
  - Commissioning Process – Independent Fostering households
  - Recruitment of staff
  - Contract management of social care providers

# Providing Stability

- Stability is important so children and young people feel safe and are able to build relationships with their carers
- In Durham it is usual for children to have to move at least once when they come into care – meaning they have lived in at least two homes
- Stability is a key performance indicator for the Local Authority and something that we are monitored on
- 64% of children under 16 years old who have been looked after for a minimum of 2.5 years have been in their current caring arrangement for less than 2.5 years
- 34% of children who have been in care for more than 2.5 years have remained living in the same care arrangement for more than 2 years
- In the last 12 months 58 children have moved 3 times, with 7 children moving more than 7 times
- High number of moves = ongoing work to support children to return to the care of their parents
- Need to be able to offer a wider range of homes with carers that are trained and supported to meet needs

# Out of Area Living Arrangements

- 306 children and young people placed outside of Durham in a range of different care arrangements (29.7%), with 70.3% of children and young people living in county.
- Some children living out of county, have been placed for adoption, are with family members or attending college, making this a positive development for them.
- Most children who live outside of the county live in the region, but this is not the case for all children, with some living in Scotland or as far away as Plymouth
- The Local Authority always seeks to place children locally when it is safe to do so and in their best interests
- A small proportion of children need to live away from their local area due to immediate risks and challenges, however some children live out of area due to limited availability to meet their complex needs within County Durham
- The new Strategy outlines a range of development priorities which will support a greater proportion of children and young people to live locally

# Unregulated Arrangements

- All children and young people with a plan of care and / or under the age of 16, must live in a regulated setting such as foster care or a children's home which is registered with Ofsted
- The majority of our children (99.32%) live in regulated homes
- We have 7 children and young people (0.67%) accommodated in unregulated settings. Only secured when 'all' other options have been completely exhausted. The Local Authority does not endorse these type of arrangements and strives to have all children living in regulated settings
- These occur when a child's previous living arrangement breaks down and they can no longer remain in their regulated setting or at home with parents / family; a young person can't be matched alongside other young people and requires a single occupancy solution for a period of time; and there are no regulated homes that can meet the needs of the child at the time
- Quality assurance framework – quality check of property, regular contact with landlord, daily visit from child's Social Worker, weekly care team meetings and ongoing communication with support agency  
to ensure care is in line with the child's plan and risk assessment



# Unregulated Arrangements (cont.)

- Ofsted are notified and there is a continued focus on moving the child into an alternative regulated setting
- Move on plans developed for 3 of the children, with further work ongoing for the remaining 4 children
- When suitable existing provision can not be identified the Local Authority works with providers to develop bespoke regulated homes
- The Local Authority is committed to developing a suite of new smaller children's homes, both 1 and 2 bedded to meet this ongoing need

# Key Development Priorities

- The local authority has identified **six overarching objectives** within the strategy, which will address current gaps in provision and will seek to broaden and make improvements to our sufficiency offer in Durham. These are:
  1. Grow our number of in-house foster carers, support the retention of carers and work with Independent Fostering Agencies to ensure that children and young people can live with foster carer families when it is in their interests to do so.
  2. Increase the number of adopters
  3. Continue to develop and broaden our children's homes offer and maximise opportunities with external providers when there is a case to do so.
  4. Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers.
  5. Improve our sufficiency offer for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) / Young People and reduce waiting times.
  6. Broaden our short breaks offer for disabled children and their families.

# Key Development Priorities (cont.)

- Under each objective is a series of key priorities, which relate to the development of new services to support our range of needs for children and young people. All **39 priorities** are outlined in Appendix 1 of the Strategy.
- Key areas of development include (but are not limited to):
  - Review the payment for skills (foster care payment model) to improve sufficiency by attracting new carers and retaining existing carers
  - Develop a wrap around support team in fostering to promote stability and prevent breakdown
  - Development of new smaller children's homes to meet the needs of our most complex young people and reduce out of county provision
  - Development of a new Edge of Care Home
  - Develop new accommodation and support options for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people
  - Develop overnight short breaks provision to meet the needs of our most complex children and young people

## **Discussion:**

- (i) Observation or comments from the Committee about the detail within the report.
  
- (ii) Thoughts, ideas or suggestions about the ongoing program of improvements being made / proposed?