

Corporate Parenting Panel

28 September 2018

Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers 2018-21 Summary of Key Findings and Objectives



Report of Helen Fergusson, Head of Children's Social Care, Durham County Council

Purpose of report

- 1 The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy (2018-21) (Appendix 2) sets out the Local Authority's strategic approach to securing sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our looked after children. This report seeks to provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with a brief summary of the key findings and objectives outlined in the Authority's Strategy.

Background

- 2 The Local Authority has a 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. The 2010 guidance on the 'sufficiency duty' states that local authorities should have embedded plans, as part of their commissioning processes and through partnership working, to meet the duty.
- 3 The Sufficiency Duty must take account of the requirement, under section 22C (5) of the Children Act 1989, that the overriding consideration for placing a child is that the placement must be the most appropriate available to meet the child's needs. Next, preference must be given to a placement with a friend, relative or other person connected with the child and who is a local authority foster carer. Failing that, a placement must be found, as far as is reasonably practicable in all circumstances, that:
 - (a) Is near the child's home;
 - (b) Is within the local authority's area, unless that is not reasonably practicable;
 - (c) Enables the child to live with an accommodated sibling;
 - (d) Where the child is disabled, is suitable to meet the needs of that child; and
 - (e) Does not disrupt his/her education or training.

Durham's Looked After Population

- 4 Durham County Council has seen a 29.82% increase in the number of looked after children since April 2015. This has presented many challenges for services across the Authority, particularly in relation to ensuring a sufficient number and range of placement types to meet the individual needs of children and young people.
- 5 Durham's number of looked after children (March 2018) remain below both the regional (92) and statistical neighbour (87.5) rates for March 2017, however, higher than the national average rate (62).

Placement Mix

- 6 There are a range of placement types that Durham's looked after children and young people are placed in:
 - (a) The majority of our looked after children and young people are in foster care (68%), a total of 51% with in-house foster carers and 17% with independent fostering agencies.
 - (b) The second largest group of children and young people (16%) live with family and friends.
 - (c) 7% of our children and young people are in residential care (3% external provision and 4% in-house provision).
- 7 Placement sufficiency and placement choice are key factors in supporting and improving placement stability. Over the previous 4 years, children and young people with 3 or more placement moves reduced considerably in 2015/16 (4.4%) and has risen gradually to 6.9% in 2017/18. Durham is still performing better than other regional local authorities, statistical neighbours and the England average.

In-house Fostering

- 8 In-house foster care provision provides the majority (51%) of placement provision reaching a maximum 400 mainstream placements during 2017/18.
 - (a) Over the last year, the number of mainstream fostering households has increased by 7.
 - (b) The number of family and friend households have reduced by 18. This includes fully approved as well as temporarily approved foster carers.
 - (c) Short term fostering provision has remained stable over the last 5 years and reached a peak in 2017/18. Permanent fostering provision has also increased in line with the rising number of looked after children and young people.

- 9 The profile of in-house foster carers shows that the majority of foster carers live within County Durham (87%) which means there is less disruption for children/young people in accessing education or health provision and maintaining contact with families.
- 10 A total of 126 foster carers have been recruited over the last 5 years of which a total of 101 foster carers still remain and retention of carers is positive. Support, including financial support available to foster carers is critical to their recruitment and retention. This is evident in the feedback received for both new and long-time serving foster carers.
- 11 Recruitment and retention of foster carers remains a key priority and as 20% of mainstream foster carers are aged 60+ and there is still a dependency on Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) provision, the development of a robust marketing, and recruitment strategy is crucial. Working closely with the Marketing Team to identify both new and proven methods of recruitment and using the information/data captured within this Strategy, will help to determine future target audiences and marketing needs. A focus will be placed on recruitment of foster carers for primarily teenagers, dealing with complex needs and challenging behaviour and providing permanent placements.

Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)

- 12 There has been a 66% increase in the number of IFA placements since April 2015 and even more so, during 2017/18, the demand for placements was high (including across the region). The majority of placements required were for young people aged 10+ with more complex needs and challenging behaviour and for larger sibling groups. As outlined above, the demand for these type of placements is a key focus of our Marketing and Recruitment Strategy.
- 13 Durham continue to play an active role in the current regional NE7 IFA Consortia Framework and in developing a new commissioning solution for purchasing independent fostering placements. This will be operational from April 2019.

Adoption

- 14 The Adoption Service continues to focus on achieving the best outcomes for children and to prevent delay in achieving permanence for the child with a plan of adoption.
- 15 In line with national trends, we have seen a reduction in the number of available adopters with a 17% reduction in the total number of children placed for adoption in 2017/18. There were 137 children in the adoption process during 2016/17 of which 57 were part of a sibling group; during 2017, 136 children were in the adoption process of which 64 were part of a sibling group.

- 16 Fostering for Adoption now plays an integral part of Durham's new Early Permanency Strategy which seeks to increase early planning, increase placement stability, reduce the number of moves for children and achieve permanency as early as possible.
- 17 Working alongside the Marketing Team, a robust marketing strategy is in place to recruit prospective adopters, which targets adopters for children with complex needs, sibling groups and older children and also focuses on Fostering to Adopt.
- 18 Durham continues to be part of the regional adoption agency development, 'Coast to Coast', involving two other local authorities alongside voluntary adoption agency involvement. All functions in relation to the provision of adoption services will be delivered by the new organisation from October 2019.

Residential Provision

- 19 Residential accommodation meets the needs of some of our children and young people with more complex needs and challenging behaviour who cannot live within fostering provision.
- 20 Current in-house residential provision operates at a maximum occupancy of 32 beds with a constant waiting list of referrals, primarily for boys aged 11-15 years and a significant demand for placements for the younger cohort, whereby in-house provision for the younger cohort is currently limited to 3 placements, providing intensive therapeutic support. Park House continues to provide short break/respice provision to disabled children/young people aged 7-17 years.
- 21 Demand for placements in the external market remains volatile with regional authorities all seeking similar placements. The Authority made 28 external residential placements in 2017/18, of which 71% were joint packages for care and education.
- 22 As the demand for residential provision remains high, there is an urgent need to develop capacity to provide a broader and more flexible and accessible range of good quality residential provision, which ensures that the needs of some of our most challenging and complex children/young people are met. A Residential Strategy is now in place, which considers both in-house and external residential provision and identifies options for increasing in-house residential capacity and working with providers to develop more bespoke residential provision in the external market, to meet the needs of our children and young people now and in the future.

Care Leavers Accommodation Options

- 23 As of the 31 March 2018, Durham had 192 care leavers aged 16-25 with active cases, in comparison to 189 active cases in March 2017, which demonstrates that this cohort has been stable over the last 2 years. Care Leavers are able to access a variety of accommodation and support options dependent on their individual needs, with the majority of care leavers living in their own tenancy (37%).
- 24 The second largest group of care leavers have returned home to live with their parents or extended family (22%). There are a growing number of young people moving into Staying Put arrangements when they reach 18 years old (11%) and fewer young people requiring accommodation following a period in custody in 2017/18 (2%), in comparison to 2016/17 (6%).
- 25 There are 21 former relevant young people living in Supported Lodging provision. The number of young people living in this type of provision has steadily increased during 2017/18 and there is an ongoing recruitment campaign to attract new Supported Lodging providers; within this provision we have placed eleven Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Working alongside the North Eastern Migration Partnership a targeted recruitment campaign is underway to recruit further carers to provide placements for UASC.
- 26 Durham continues to work hard to ensure young people are accessing appropriate accommodation that is safe and suitable to their needs and as a result Durham continue to have a high percentage of Care Leavers (89%) in suitable accommodation, in comparison to both the England average and the North East average. The accommodation needs of care leavers are routinely monitored and recorded.
- 27 New legislation in April 2018 means that all Local Authorities have a responsibility to continue offering support and accommodation to Care Leavers post 21 to 25 years, and the likelihood is that this will lead to greater demand for accommodation and support and this has therefore been factored in to future recruitment activity and commissioning plans.

Conclusion

- 28 The aim of this Strategy is to ensure that children and young people in care live in stable, high quality settings, where their needs can be met and their outcomes improved, enabling them to return home where this is in their best interests.
- 29 As corporate parent, the whole Council has a role to play to improve the outcomes for Durham's looked after children and care leavers. This Strategy, setting out a number of key objectives and ensuring the delivery of its outcomes, forms just one part of our overall approach to supporting looked after children and care leavers and those young people on the edge of care and should work in conjunction with other local strategies for children and families in need of support and protection.

Recommendations

30 Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to:

- (a) Note the revised Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2018-21) (Appendix 2), and approve its publication on the Council website in line with statutory requirements.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The financial implications are significant. The outlined expenditure in relation to external placements and individualised packages have impacted massively on the extent of the overspend on the LAC budget as outlined within the report.

Staffing – N/A.

Risk – Corporate Risk Register – risk added - R0659 - Severe financial impact resulting from increasing number of looked after children and the allocation of care provision

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty - None

Accommodation – Young people require suitable and appropriate placement provision when in the care of the Local Authority – see ‘legal implications’ below.

Crime and Disorder - None

Human Rights - None

Consultation - None

Procurement - None

Disability Issues - None

Legal Implications – The Children Act 1989 Section 22G requires Local Authority`s to take steps to secure so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within their area which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare to be provided with accommodation that is in their local area (“sufficiency duty”).

Key Objectives

(Detailed Actions are set out in an Implementation Plan)

No	Objective	Actions
1	Support and strengthen edge of care provision/support	<p>To support young people to remain at home wherever possible and provide support to young people aged 11- 17 years at risk of entering care and work with their families.</p> <p>To provide robust internal systems to record all factors affecting children on the edge of care to provide a better understanding of the needs of children in this cohort, which will help to inform and remodel future support.</p> <p>To conduct financial modelling and in-depth analysis to understand the potential cost benefits and impact on LAC numbers as a result of edge of care interventions.</p>
2	Grow Number of In-house Foster Carers	<p>To place local children with local in-house foster carers.</p> <p>Due to the shortage of in-house provision there is a dependency on IFA provision which is likely to increase, given the current age profile of our foster carers.</p> <p>To develop a robust Marketing & Recruitment Strategy, setting a net target to recruit 25/30 foster carers to reduce the dependency on IFA provision and provide greater choice of in-house foster care provision.</p> <p>To focus on targeted recruit campaigns to recruit foster carers with a preference for the older age group 11-17 years, managing children/young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour and offering permanent placements.</p> <p>Following the recruitment and de-registration during 2017/18 the net total of additional foster carers was 5.</p>

3	Increase Number of Adopters	To develop a robust marketing and recruitment plan with a key focus on seeking adopters for older children, sibling groups and children with disabilities to increase the number of adopters and reduce the need for inter-agency adopters.
4	Develop In-House/External Residential Capacity	<p>To increase in-house residential provision and develop external residential provision in the market.</p> <p>To develop a Residential Strategy which considers both in-house and external residential provision and identifies options for increasing in-house residential capacity and working with providers to develop more bespoke residential provision in the external market, to meet the needs of our children and young people now and in the future.</p>
5	Improve how we commission placements from the market	<p>To work in partnership with external providers to develop and shape the market to ensure the most appropriate and value for money placements are accessible.</p> <p>To continue to play an integral role in both the continued development of the IFA and Residential Frameworks with a focus on the development of Level 2/3 IFA placements to reduce direct progression into residential provision.</p> <p>To revise performance monitoring and outcomes framework for providers within the children's market in addition to existing contractual monitoring arrangements.</p> <p>To monitor the efficiency of placements and to ensure that providers meet agreed outcomes for children and young people, operate in a child-centred way and deliver quality improvements.</p>
6	Develop access to a diverse range of appropriate accommodation for Care Leavers	<p>To work closely with providers to assist in building capacity and sharing expertise to address the long-term accommodation requirements for care leavers.</p> <p>To provide care leavers with the skills to thrive and live independently upon reaching adulthood.</p>