

Summary Sheet

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Corporate Parenting Panel – 22nd August 2017

Report Title

First Review of the Implementation of the Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers Strategy.

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan? No

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report Ian Thomas

Report Author(s) Ian Walker, Head of Service.

Ward(s) Affected All

Summary The LAC and Care Leavers Strategy was signed off for implementation by the Corporate Parenting Panel on the 28th February 2017. This report will provide the Corporate Parenting Panel with the first update of progress/developments 6 months into the planned three year cycle of the Strategy and identify where further work is still required in order to achieve its agreed objectives.

Recommendations The CPP is recommended to note the contents of this report raise any challenge it feels appropriate.

List of Appendices Included The Strategy is attached in full as an appendix.

Background Papers None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel No

Council Approval Required No

Exempt from the Press and Public No

First Review of the Implementation of the Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers Strategy.

1. Recommendations

- 1 The CPP is recommended to note the contents of this report raise any challenge it feels appropriate.

2. Background

- 2.1 The LAC and Care Leavers Strategy was finally approved by Corporate Parenting Panel in February 2017. This Strategy sets out six key strategic objectives as well as five strands of the placement Sufficiency Strategy and this will form the basis of this report.

3. Key Issues

3.1 The strategic objectives were intended to build on the improvements in strengthening the compliance in relation to the service and to ensure there were no longer widespread systemic failures. They defined what key achievements and service improvements will need to be made over the course of the following three years in order to improve the outcomes for looked after children.

3.2 Since October 2016 there have been 3 Ofsted Monitoring Visits and 3 preceding Peer Reviews undertaken in respect of the LAC Service, the Front Door and the Leaving Care Service. To date, and in contrast to the Ofsted Inspection of 2014, these Peer Reviews and Monitoring Visits have reported no systemic failures and identified no children in critically unsafe living arrangements. There will be a further Ofsted Monitoring Visit of the Adoption Pathway in September 2017 with the full Ofsted Single Inspection Framework anticipated to take place in the Spring of 2018. The objectives set out in these strategies were identified as it was clear that success in achieving them would have a significantly positive impact on children during their childhood and improve their ability to lead successful and happy lives as adults.

3.3 Strategic Objective 1-To protect our children and keep them safe from harm.

3.3.1 Rotherham CYPS has maintained its commitment not to place any looked after child (LAC) in a placement that has been rated as Inadequate. This has on occasions brought us into some degree of conflict with the Family Court and Guardians who have proposed a particular placement for a LAC that has not been agreed by RMBC. In addition those existing placements that become Inadequate are subject to far more rigorous review to assess their suitability for our looked after young people. The Placements and Commissioning Team now undertakes regular quality assurance visits to all placement providers working in conjunction with the child's social worker to ensure that all of their needs are best met. Whilst many of these visits are undertaken on a planned basis, such as to placements not previously commissioned prior to the young person moving there, they can also be requested at any time via the Out of Authority Placement Panel. For example it was identified that three of our young people had suffered sexual harm from a member of staff in three separate children's homes but within the same large placement provider organisation. As a result the Commissioning and Placements Team undertook a wholesale review of their safeguarding processes which identified a number of issues and made several recommendations such as in respect of their recruitment and induction processes, the implementation of which is being kept under close review. Until these

issues are resolved to the satisfaction of CYPS there will be no further young people placed within this organisation.

3.3.2 Whilst the Evolve Team has reduced in size and refined its remit to provide more consultation and support to the allocated social workers it continues to ensure that all LAC over the age of 11 have a Trigger Plan and Risk Assessment in place that is regularly updated.

3.3.3 CYPS continues to work in partnership with South Yorkshire Police to ensure that it is the perpetrators of Child Sexual Exploitation who are the focus of their attentions rather than pressure being placed on CYPS to move the victim out of the area. As a result there have been increasingly good examples of co-working to protect our most vulnerable young people. In one recent case by 'pinging' a young person's mobile phone SYP were able to locate and retrieve a young person from a hotel bedroom and arrest the adults before any apparent abusive incidents took place.

3.3.4 There has been something of a spike in incidents of LAC going missing from care. Between January and July 2017 there were 72 LAC who had been reported as being Missing from Care but more concerningly this amounted to 420 missing episodes. This may be at least partly attributable to the ongoing increase in the numbers of LAC admissions. A significant proportion of these incidents involve young people aged 15 and above who have come into care with a pattern of missing behaviours already established. Most of these episodes involved 'curfew breaking' or young people being in the wrong place at the wrong time rather than genuine missing episodes but some episodes did involve young people at risk of harm.

3.3.5 The ongoing development of the Edge of Care provision will ensure that more vulnerable young people are supported to remain with their families and address the spike in numbers of LAC. In addition a learning event is planned for August in which the need to better identify and address the risks of CSE and Missing behaviours in Care Plans will be shared with social workers. Further there will be a full review undertaken of the quality of Return Home Interviews which at present seem to be having minimal impact on missing behaviours at present.

3.4 To improve the timeliness of identifying and securing placement stability and permanence so that children are able to make and sustain safe, nurturing and enduring relationships.

3.4.1 Placement Stability in respect of those LAC who have been in the same placement for 2 years or more is experiencing a slightly downward trend at present from 66.7% in January to 62.1% in June 2017. This may be at least partly due to a statistical anomaly in that over this period the numbers of LAC have increased from 483 to 522 (8%) which means that proportionally less LAC have actually been in care for two years. However, the number of children experiencing three or more placement moves in a 12 month period has improved from 13% to 12.1% over the same timescale. Further to this there are currently 22 young adults (19 at the time of the Strategy) who have been supported to remain in Staying Put arrangements and with the formal financial and support offer having recently been agreed and published it is anticipated that these figures will further increase in the coming months.

3.4.2 In order to support more placement stability the LAC Service is currently implementing an innovative pilot programme whereby a group of young people has been identified as being most vulnerable to a series of placement disruptions. The criteria used includes a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire score of 18+, one

previous placement disruption, disrupted or less than statutory education provision and identified emotional trauma/needs. These young people will have a monthly multi-agency robust Team Around the Placement (TAP) Meeting and a 9-12 month Intensive Intervention Programme provided by the Rotherham Therapeutic Team. The outcomes for these young people in terms of impact on placement stability will then be reviewed against a control group of similarly vulnerable young people with a view to potential roll out of the programme. The main innovation in this project is that a multi-agency group has attempted to predict placement breakdowns and to direct resources to children with greatest need as opposed to reacting when the placement to all intents and purposes has already come to an end.

3.4.2 In terms of adoption there are 62 children who currently have a plan for adoption. Of these children 28 are subject of a Placement Order, 3 children have been matched with prospective adopters but not placed and 23 have been placed. In addition 7 Adoption Orders have been secured meaning that by the end of the financial year at least 33 children are likely to have been adopted and last year's performance of 31 adoptions will be surpassed. In addition to this there are 11 adopters who have been approved and are waiting for a match and a further 13 assessments ongoing. Early Permanence Planning remains a strength whereby a baby/young child is placed with adoptive parents on a fostering basis until the Care Proceedings have been completed so as to ensure strong attachments are developed at the earliest possible opportunity. However, there remains a real need for potential adopters of older children and this is the focus of recruitment activity at present.

3.4.3 Timeliness of adoptions is also strong with the A1 measure (time between becoming LAC and moving to the adoptive placement) currently standing at 275 days as compared to the statistical neighbour average @546 days and national average @ 593 days. For the A2 measure performance currently stands at 101 days with the statistical neighbour average being at 220 days and the national average being at 223 days. However, there has to be some caution exercised in considering this data as given that RMBC perseveres as much as possible in securing adoptive placements for our children one child can have a significant impact on the reported performance. For example one child was adopted last year after 1600 days due to his significantly enhanced needs. Unfortunately despite this perseverance 4 children have had their Placement Orders rescinded this year and their Care Plan changed to one of long-term fostering.

3.4.4 Whilst the regionalisation of adoption remains very much on the agenda RMBC has yet to be provided with a fit for purpose Business case that meets our 3 essential criteria of :-

- No increased cost
- No reduced performance
- No negative impact on the terms and conditions for our staff.

As a result the implementation plan has been deferred until April 2018. This ongoing uncertainty has had an impact on the stability of the team but a recent round of recruitment will bring them back up to full strength other than a part-time family finder post.

3.5 To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children.

3.5.1 There remains an ongoing issue with far too few Initial Health Assessments being completed within the 20 working day timescale (less than 50%). A multi-agency project group of senior managers has recently met to review the process with

a number of developments identified that should assist in improving this performance. At present the timeliness of notifications of admissions to care being sent to the LAC health team and of clinic appointments do seem to be much more appropriate.

3.5.2 In respect of the annual review health assessment 80% of young people have had their check in the past 12 months and 85% of young people have had a dental check. Of the shortfall approximately half involve 16 and 17 year olds who have refused to attend their appointment although the LAC health team continue to work with these young people to better engage them in the process.

3.5.3 As Panel will be aware the CAMHS service has recently implemented a pilot programme whereby LAC were given priority access to CAMHS assessments and interventions. Whilst the numbers involved were small there was some expressed reluctance to formalise this offer on an ongoing basis which the CPP successfully challenged.

3.5.4 The Rotherham Therapeutic Team (RTT) has been expanded as part of the investment process and currently consists of 2 x Consultant Clinical Psychologists, 6 f.t.e Therapeutic Support Workers, 2 x f.t.e Post Adoption Support Workers and 1 x f.t.e Post SGO Support Worker. One of the aims of this last post is to provide existing carers with sufficient confidence in order for them to be encouraged to seek permanence for the children in their care and reduce our numbers of LAC.

3.5.5 The CPP may consider a review of the work undertaken by the RTT at a future meeting.

3.6 To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between the attainment of LAC and their peers.

3.6.1 Performance in respect of Personal Education Plans (PEPs) continues to be strong and all PEPs are quality assured by the Virtual School before being entered onto the case file. In addition RMBC implements the higher standard of a termly rather than the annual PEP that is the target of most local authorities. At the end of the summer term the only children without an up to date PEP were those who had been admitted to care too late in the term for a meeting to be organised and a 97% performance had been achieved. In the LAC Monitoring Visit Ofsted identified that too many PEPS were insufficiently aspirational and this is an ongoing focus of attention.

3.6.2 As at the summer term there were 14 care leavers who were attending Higher Education with two of these having graduated this summer and one of our young people having achieved a first class master's degree in Mechanical Engineering. There are no care leavers predicted to commence Higher Education in the Autumn due to the leaning needs of that particular cohort. One young person is academically capable but will, subject to her 'A' level results, take gap year as she is not felt to be sufficiently emotionally strong to manage this transition at this moment in her life.

3.6.3 At the time of writing it is too early to report on the exam results for LAC but a verbal update will be provided to the CPP on the 22th August. Educational outcomes will be impacted by the fact that at present 92 children are currently subject of an Education, Health Care Plan with a further 11 children currently undergoing the assessment and 32 having a Statement of Educational Needs. As a result 133 of 413 looked after children over the age of 5 have some form of educational needs (31% of the total cohort as compared to a national peer group average of 17% [2016 figures]). Despite this, the Service has taken on board the risk of PEPs being insufficiently aspirational and will continue to challenge and support education

providers and the young people themselves to achieve everything they can in terms of educational outcomes.

3.6.4 On occasions CYPS still encounter some significant barriers in placing LAC placed out of authority in the preferred educational provision. This supports the drive to place more young people within the RMBC area whereby greater control of educational provision can be retained.

3.7 To improve support and opportunities for care leavers to increase the number and proportion who are in Education, Employment or Training (EET).

3.7.1 Performance within the Leaving Care Service continues to be strong with 68% of care leavers being in Education, Training or Employment (EET), 93% being in suitable accommodation (5 young people being in custody) , 92 % of care leavers staying in touch with the service and 95% of them having an up to date Pathway Plan. As a result the service has started to implement its own added value performance measures such as the stability of accommodation achieved by our care leavers and as of July 83% of the 220 young people in the cohort had one or less change to their primary address over the course of the previous 12 months.

3.7.2 Ofsted was immensely impressed with the range and quality of accommodation provided to our care leavers and stated that the quality of support provided by staff at Hollowgate was of the highest order. The accommodation options will be further enhanced by the development of 2 x 2 bedroom social housing development in the Dinnington and East Herringthorpe areas of Rotherham which should be available by early 2019. Chatham Villas has been completed and care leavers regularly access the drop-in facility which is going to be a great source of support to them. Members of the CPP have been invited to visit Chatham Villas on the 26th September 'for tea'.

3.7.3 Transition planning to ensure care leavers receive more timely support and interventions from Adults Services is much improved with a formal and well recognised pathway having been established. This has enabled a number of care leavers to move to dispersed and supported accommodation in order to help them live with some degree of independence. Whilst referrals are no longer made as the young person approaches their 18th further work is required to ensure these referrals are submitted before their 15th birthday in line with the Care Planning Guidance.

3.7.4 One of the most significant developments within the Strategy has been the fact that there are now 4 Care Leavers who have been offered an apprenticeship within the Council, one with the Business Support Team in the Transportation and Highways Department and three with the Grounds Maintenance Team. There remains an issue regarding the entry level requirements being set too high for most of our care leavers but the CPP have given some commitment to challenging this on an ongoing basis.

3.7.5 There remains one unfulfilled commitment in that the Fairy Godparent Scheme has yet to be launched. The Leaving Care Service has scoped the demand from young people although it has to be said that at present there has been no significant take up. However, the Guide and Training for Mentors and the Mentees has been drafted and once the post 16 destination of our looked after young people is more clear this service will be offered in a more targeted manner with training for the volunteering mentors due to take place after the summer holidays.

3.8 To listen to children and young people to ensure that their voices influence their own care plans as well as wider service delivery and development.

3.8.1 The Participation function for LAC was very recently transferred into the LAC Service in order to strengthen the voice of the child in service design and delivery. For the first time the LAC Council has its own budget which will ensure that travelling expenses are no longer a barrier to young people attending. This budget will also enable the LAC Council to offer a range of activities including residential week-ends and attendance at national participation events as a means of attracting new members. This, combined with the greater alignment with the LAC Service has boosted membership up to 12 regular participants. Plans are in place to ensure that a minimum of 10% of the LAC population engage in this process via a group being set up for primary school age children and an activity based group for young teenagers as well as the formal LAC Council. The names of these groups will be decided by the young people themselves in the spirit of 'ethical participation' by which the LAC Council will decide its own priorities and no longer be used simply to 'tick the box' in respect of consultation being undertaken by the wider Council Departments.

3.8.2 Luke Rodgers from Fostering Network has undertaken a full participation Scoping Exercise and led the LAC Service Development Day in July from which a Participation Strategy will be developed. He has also offered to 'Train the Trainers' whereby young people will be skilled up to lead training for elected members and CYPS staff in respect of the experience of being a looked after child. It has been agreed that they will receive a fee for providing this training which will be paid into the LAC Council Budget. The LAC Council have also been involved in the planning of the second Pride of Rotherham event that will take place on the 12th October and have been instrumental in selecting the venue, entertainment and trophies.

3.8.3 The voice of the child is still insufficiently represented in Care Plans although more LAC are undertaking Life-story work with their social workers and carers. These issues continue to be a focus of attention in the fortnightly Performance Clinics.

3.9 Placement Sufficiency

3.9.1 The numbers of looked after children has continued to rise from 457 when the LAC Strategy was drafted to 519 as at the 7th August 2017 with the aspiration being very much to reduce this below the starting figure. Part of the reason for this ongoing rise has been as a direct outcome from the Complex Abuse process. In addition the Edge of Care provision has yet to be implemented in full. Recruitment has been completed for the team but appointees are yet to be in post and the Edge of Care Panel has not yet been established although the Terms of Reference have been agreed. The Family Group Conference team has been established since May and they have already undertaken 6 Conferences to support the return of looked after young people to their birth families. The Pause Project is also in the midst of the approval process.

3.9.2 The Rotherham Therapeutic Team has also recruited to its new posts although once again not all appointees are yet in place. Their increased capacity is however enabling them to better support placement stability. The revised Foster Care Payments Scheme is now fully embedded and the contracts in respect of the implementation of the Mockingbird Family Model have been 'signed off' with the allowance scheme for the hub carers in the process of being approved. The concept of the professionalization of the fostering role continues to develop. A number of foster carers attended the LAC Service development day and they are being supported to make increasing challenges regarding care plans. For example a number of carers have successfully challenged a decision not to change the school

for a young person to one more local to placement. The regionalisation of the Adoption Service has been deferred pending the provision of a fit for purpose business case that meets the needs of RMBC in respect of no reduced performance, no increased cost and no impact of the terms and conditions for employees. Implementation target date has now been set for April 2018. The contract in respect of the Taking Care project was ended after one year due to budget issues and a shortfall in the anticipated outcomes.

3.9.3 In terms of foster carer recruitment there have been 8 new placements approved since April with a further 10 assessments to be presented to Panel before December. This, combined with a performance management approach being taken in respect of void placements, has meant that as at the end of July there were 209 in-house foster placements and 267 in-house placements altogether both of which are best performance figures by the service. An approach has been made to the Fostering Agencies to secure the 74 IFA placements in the RMBC area currently not being utilised by Rotherham children as and when they become available to enable more local placements and this was well received.

3.9.4 However, until the rate of admissions to care begins to slow it is highly unlikely that the Sufficiency Strategy can be deemed to have been successfully implemented and this remains a significant risk for the Service as a whole.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1 There are no options to consider and it is therefore recommended that The CPP note the contents of this report and raise any challenge it deems appropriate.

5. Consultation

5.1 Colleagues from HR, Finance and Legal Services have been consulted regarding the contents of this report.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1 This Strategy will run over a three year cycle and reviews will be presented to the CPP on a regular basis.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report although the financial risk will be significant if the Sufficiency Strategy is not successfully implemented.

8. Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

9. Human Resources Implications

9.1 There are no Human Resource implications arising from this report

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

10.1 The LAC and Care Leavers Strategy and Sufficiency Strategy have been formulated to improve outcomes for looked after children and care leavers.

11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

11.1 These Strategies have been designed to address the inequalities in outcomes that can be experienced by looked after children.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.1 None noted

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1 The most significant risk to the implementation of the Strategies is presented by the ongoing increase in numbers of looked after children. This risk should be mitigated by the successful implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy and, in particular, of the Edge of Care provision.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Approvals Obtained from:-

	Named Officer	Date
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services		
Assistant Director of Legal Services		
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)		
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)		

Ian Walker
Head of Service

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