

Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Strategy 2017-2020

***‘Quality means doing the right thing when no-one
is looking’***

(Henry Ford)

***‘If you’re not going to make it better, then don’t
bother’***

(Rotherham Looked After Young Person)

Version 10

Date of Publication: November 2016

Date of Review: November 2017

Contents

1. Foreword
2. Vision Statement
3. Introduction and Context
4. The Corporate Parent
5. Strategic Drivers
6. The Needs of our Children
7. Strategic Objectives
8. Key Service Priorities
9. Placement Sufficiency
10. Education and Attainment
11. Economic Wellbeing and Independence
12. Workforce Development
13. Oversight and Governance

Glossary of terms and acronyms

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

CPP – Corporate Parenting Panel

CSE – Child Sexual Exploitation

DfE – Department for Education

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

ePEP – Electronic Personal Education Plan

FGC – Family Group Conference

IFA – Independent Fostering Agencies

LAC – Looked After Children

NEET – Not in Education, Employment or Training

OoA – Out of Authority (residential care)

PEPs – Personal Education Plans

RAA – Regional Adoption Agency

RTT – Rotherham Therapeutic Team

SDQ – Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire

1. Foreword

Sharon Kemp, Chief Executive

As a Council we have a vital role to play – which is to be the “corporate parents” for all of Rotherham’s looked after children – whether this is a child in foster care, residential care or living with other people. We must be able to provide everything a loving parent can, providing the children and young people we’re responsible for with the best possible support and care.

Our role is to not only provide homes for our looked after children, but it is also to encourage people and organisations to do as much as they can to make sure these children and young people feel in control of their lives and able to overcome the barriers they face.

This strategy sets out our vision and ambition towards our looked after children so that we can transform their lives to help them grow and flourish.

Cllr Gordon Watson, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children and Young People’s Services and Chair of the Corporate Parenting Panel

We need to continue to provide an excellent standard of care that places children and young people at the heart of all that we do in order to make sure we fulfil our corporate parenting duties and beyond. That is why despite the budget cuts we are facing, we are prioritising and protecting the services for our looked after children.

We are investing in our social workers; we are making family based placements our preferred choice for those children for whom this is right and this is why we have increased the fees we give to our hardworking foster carers. And we want to encourage more people to be foster carers, especially for our teenage looked after children.

As corporate parents the question we should ask ourselves is - ‘if this child were mine, what would I want for them?’ This is the unique challenge faced by all of us with a responsibility to provide a service for children in our care. We hope that this document will provide you with some insights as to how we aim to fulfil this vital role.

Ian Thomas, Strategic Director Children’s Services

The LAC Council think that having a strategy that recognises and encourages numerous opportunities to have our Voices heard and those Voices to have genuine influence to make positive changes within Social Care, our families, communities, and importantly ourselves is essential to improve our world.

By supporting us in coming together as a group so that we may help design, develop and shape our Services will benefit us as it will improve our lives as we can help create a quality service that better fits us, also, by socially engaging in an empowering environment helps us raise our aspirations, raise our self-esteem, improve our personal skills that helps build our resilience, giving us better outcomes in future.

2. Vision Statement

The highest quality of children's social care can transform the life chances of the most vulnerable children in Rotherham. It can offer every child who has had a difficult start the promise of a brighter future, with every prospect of success.

For the children and young people in or leaving our care we recognise that those who grow up with safe, stable and nurturing relationships form stronger friendships, develop greater resilience, achieve more in school and are more likely to build successful careers and have positive relationships throughout their lives. The right support gives children independence, choice and control as they enter adulthood.

It is the vision of the Looked After Children Service for all of our children and young people to be provided with a safe and dependable foundation from which they can grow and flourish.

If we are not going to 'make it better' then indeed - why bother?

3. Introduction and Context

As a Council striving to become a Child Centred Borough, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council takes its role as Corporate Parent for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers very seriously. Elected members and officers understand that looked after children and care leavers are a more vulnerable group than their peers who are not looked after and that, their life chances and overall outcomes are more likely to be poorer as a result of this. Consequently, Looked after children require higher standards of parenting than their peers and additional levels of support to overcome this disadvantage and reach their full potential. As the largest and most resource rich group of parents in the Borough, RMBC is committed to supporting all looked after children and care leavers to achieve their full potential and make a successful transition to adulthood.

In supporting our children and young people all of our plans and actions will be framed by the rhetorical question;

***“In whatever we do (and whatever that may be)
would this be good enough for my child?”***

This Looked After Children’s Strategy 2017-20 sets out how any legacy issues will be addressed, how the current needs of looked after children will be better met and also how the Looked After Children Service will drive the aspiration for the department to achieve its ambition to become ‘outstanding’.

This strategy also sets out the aspiration for achieving improved outcomes for all our children and young people in care and leaving care and the expectations placed upon all partner agencies and commissioned services in the development and delivery of services for and with looked after children. Whilst the local authority is the lead agency in developing and implementing this strategy, it has been developed in collaboration with a wide range of partners and will be owned and implemented by all professionals working with children, young people, their parents and carers.

This strategy is linked to and informed by the following:

- The Corporate Parenting Strategy.
- The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy.
- The Corporate Parenting Promise to Looked After Children.
- The Pledge to Looked After Children.
- The Rotherham Offer to Care Leavers.
- The Early Help Strategy.

4. The Corporate Parent

When a child comes into care, Rotherham MBC becomes the Corporate Parent. Put simply, the term 'Corporate Parent' means the collective responsibility of the Council, elected members, employees and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for the children who are looked after by the Council. A child in the care of RMBC looks to the whole council to be the best parent it can be to that child. Every member and employee of the Council has the statutory responsibility to act for that child in the same way that any good parent would act for their own child.

Further to this, Section 27 of the Children Act 1989 places a duty on health, housing and education authorities to assist the Children and Young People's Service in carrying out its functions under the Act. This includes assisting in the Corporate Parenting function and to provide joined up services that best meets the needs of the child.

5. Strategic Drivers

The objectives of the Strategy are framed by the following drivers:

- Ensure that the outcomes for LAC/care leavers are as good as those of their peers in all aspects of their lives so that they achieve a successful transition to independence as young adults.
- Have a shared vision and agreed priority objectives for those working with LAC/care leavers.
- Ensure that services meet at least a 'good' judgement within the Ofsted Inspection Framework for Children in Need of Help and Protection, Children Looked After and Care Leavers.
- Ensure that services for LAC and care leavers provide best value for money are evidence based and demonstrate a positive and tangible impact on their lives.
- Deliver the Children in Care and Care Leavers Promise

The Rotherham Children in Care and Care Leaver Promise

- Promise 1 - We will help you to live in a safe place where you are protected from harm
- Promise 2 - We will listen to what you have to say and make sure it makes a difference
- Promise 3 - We will help you to learn and do your best at school and college
- Promise 4 - We will fully involve you in plans and decisions about you and your future
- Promise 5 - We will help you to learn new skills as you grown up and become an adult
- Promise 6 - We will help you take part in activities that you enjoy/are interested in
- Promise 7 - We will help you to be proud of yourself and celebrate your individual beliefs
- Promise 8 - We will help you to be happy and healthy
- Promise 9 - We will help you to explore and be ready for the world of work

6. The Needs of Our Children

The Ofsted Inspection (October 2014) determined that Children's Services in Rotherham were rated as being 'Inadequate'. The inspection report highlighted that there were serious weaknesses caused by delays in initiating proceedings and delays in considering permanency. The LAC Peer Review undertaken in October 2016 highlighted that the legacy issues arising from these delays was likely to have a significant impact on the rate of improvement likely to be achieved within the Looked After Children (LAC) Service. This is because looked after children who are now approaching adolescence are likely to have experienced protracted periods of neglect and harm while living at home leading to them having increased emotional and psychological needs once in our care.

This has been exacerbated by the period of time in care when those emotional and psychological needs were poorly met and this is manifesting itself in a significant number of the looked after children cohort experiencing a series of placement breakdowns and difficulties in school, having to be placed in out of authority placements, not being able to develop consistent and trusting relationships with adults and not engaging in their education or health provision. For too many of our long-term looked after young people there have been long periods of no, or limited, social work contact and no, or limited, consideration of permanence leading to significant drift being experienced. Care plans have not been kept up to date, have been vague and non-specific with no clear targets or timescales set and with minimal input of the young person themselves. Case file recording has been of variable quality making the rationale for decision making and the child's journey difficult to understand.

For many years Rotherham has failed to meet its sufficiency duty leading to too many young people being placed Out of Authority where once again they have been allowed to drift. Those young people vulnerable to CSE have had insufficiently well-developed plans, risk assessments or responses to further incidents and care leavers have not been made aware of their rights and entitlements, have had poor access to emotional support and mental health services and too many of them have not been in education, employment or training.

Historically Rotherham has not been a good corporate parent for its children, for example at the Ofsted 2014 inspection only 21% of children had an up-to-date Health Assessment recorded and only 41% had a recent dental check. In 2014 Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were considered to be poor both in completion rate and quality and therefore not fit for purpose of driving outcomes.

Rotherham has an increasingly high number of children in its care. Part of this is due to the remedial actions necessary to address the legacy of a lack of timely interventions that left children in unsafe circumstances for too long. In addition, Rotherham has had an inadequate 'alternative offer' to support children and families at times of crisis and this has also led to more children coming into care. In conjunction with this the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers has been insufficient to meet demand and the children's residential care homes have been of such poor or inconsistent quality that they have been deemed unviable in their current state. In turn this has led to an over-reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies and private providers of children's residential care homes and too many young people have been placed some distance away from the RMBC boundary. As a result the LAC Service has had less control over the support offered to these children including education and CAMHS provision. These placements are also more likely to disrupt which leads to concerning levels of instability and poorer outcomes being achieved by our young people.

7. Strategic Objectives

The following strategic objectives build on the improvements in strengthening the compliance in relation to the service to ensure there are no longer widespread systemic failures. They define what key achievements and service improvements will need to be made over the course of the next three years in order to improve the outcomes for looked after children. All of the objectives are measurable and they relate to key aspects of children's development. These objectives have been identified as it is clear that success in achieving them will have a significantly positive impact on children during their childhood and improve their ability to lead successful and happily lives as adults.

1. To protect our children and keep them safe from harm.

It is, of course, the first priority of any parent to keep their children safe from harm and this has particular resonance within Rotherham. As a result Rotherham MBC has made the commitment not to place any of its children in a placement provision rated as being 'Inadequate' by Ofsted. Any placement provision that becomes 'Inadequate' subsequent to the young person being placed there will be reviewed by the Head of Service for LAC taking into account the views of the young person and their IRO, the Ofsted Action Plan and any likely impact on the outcomes being achieved by the young person especially in respect of their education.

Rotherham is already evidencing some success in reducing the incidents of young people going missing from care. In 2016 there were 235 incidents involving 66 young people (down from 571 incidents involving 112 young people in 2014) and the average time a young person was reported as being missing was one day. Performance data evidences that young people in stable placements are far less likely to go missing and so the key driver of providing more placement stability as set out below will have the most significant impact on this risk factor.

In addition Rotherham CYPS will work more closely with South Yorkshire Police to ensure that it is those adults who encourage our young people to go missing who face the legal consequences as opposed to the young person being penalized by being moved out of the area. In addition there will be a more forensic review of the Return to Placement Interviews so that the Corporate Parenting Panel can gain a greater understanding of the reasons why our young people go missing. The LAC Service will also ensure that the current shortfall is addressed in respect of Return to Placement Interviews being available for all looked after young people who go missing from out of authority placements.

Those young people who are deemed to be at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation will be allocated a co-worker from the Evolve Team to ensure that the social work interventions to address these risks are informed by best practice. All such vulnerable young people will have a risk assessment and trigger plan inputted onto their case-file and all partner agencies will be actively encouraged to take every possible step to minimise these risks.

2. 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.

All evidence shared by the DfE indicates that the best outcomes are achieved by young people who are helped to remain in a stable and consistent placement that provides them with the opportunity to have a longstanding relationship with an adult carer.

Research ('The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data' – Rees Centre and University of Bristol 2015) suggests that for every placement change after the age of 11 is associated with one-third of a grade less at GCSE; young people in care who change school in Years 10 or 11 score over five grades less than those who do not;

young people living in residential or another form of care at age 16 score over six grades less than those who were in kinship or foster care.

Furthermore, the Virtual School report that every significant change that a young person experiences in their life will result in a reduction in the GCSE attainment by one third of a grade in every exam they sit. As most placement changes also bring a change of school this may result in two thirds of a grade reduction for every placement move.

In September 2016 13.7% of the cohort had, had three or more placement moves over the course of 12 months (62 young people) meaning that they will have lost at least 2 grades on their peers even before they sit their exams. This means almost 30% of our LAC are already likely to be at an increased risk of an unfavourable outcome, with pre-care experiences already having impacted on outcomes.

Further to this, in September 2016 69.7% of the total LAC cohort had been in a stable placement of more than 2 years (311 young people) standing with the trend being slightly downward. This means almost 30% of our LAC are already likely to be at risk of an unfavourable outcome.

Addressing this trend is key to improving outcomes for LAC. This is being addressed by the establishment and regular review of a Permanence Tracker in which the young people who have a permanence plan in place or have been matched on a long-term basis with their current carer are monitored and progressed. Both of these will support young people to greater placement stability.

This work is supported by the Sufficiency Plan which sets out the mechanisms to increase our own placement provision and reduce the reliance on out of authority private providers in both residential and foster care. However, it is acknowledged that IFAs can provide stable long term placements for some young people and a 'one market approach' needs to be implemented to best meet the needs of our young people. There are currently 58 Rotherham young people who have been in the same IFA placement for longer than 2 years (37% of total). However, between February and July 2016 four in-house placements came to an unplanned end where 18 IFA placements were similarly disrupted. It could be argued that this is not surprising given that our older and more challenging looked after young people are more likely to be placed within the IFAs. Placement stability as opposed to the source of that provision is key to good outcomes being achieved with every change of placement and school being assessed at reducing GCSE grades by one third.

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

At the end of September 2016 93.6% of young people had an up-to-date health assessment and 91.6% had a recent dental check-up. Although the vast majority of the shortfall consisted of older adolescents who decided to decline the service, the performance is, nonetheless, below our target. To address this, the LAC Nurse has undertaken a review which evidenced that if a young person is supported to establish a relationship with a health professional early on during their time as a LAC they will be more likely to engage and participate in their health care arrangements throughout their childhood. As a result the LAC Nursing Team are piloting a 'meet and greet' style visit to all LAC within one week of their admission to care to see them in their placement as opposed to in a hospital or clinic setting. The focus of this visit will be to introduce themselves, explain LAC health service provision, discuss their health needs and support them to access future health and dental assessments.

The emotional wellbeing of LAC is supported via the Rotherham Therapeutic Team (RTT) (previously known as the Looked After and Adopted Children Therapeutic Team - LAACCTT). This service is only available to young people placed in or close to the Rotherham MBC area. Those

young people who are placed Out of Authority have to access local CAMHS support which can be problematic for a range of cross border arrangements which conspire to adversely impact on young people. In turn this can be a factor which contributes to out of area placement disruptions and supports the need to grow our in-house provision. As part of the Sufficiency Plan there is therefore a proposal to expand the capacity of the RTT to ensure we are able to improve access to therapeutic services when they are required. In addition the most recent agreement with RDASH in respect of the Statement of Purpose for the CAMHS Service specifies that locally placed LAC will be prioritised for interventions as well as assessment by November 2016.

At present the 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ) is an under-developed and under-used resource, although the RTT do use it to frame their interventions. Although SDQs are completed they are not routinely reported or analysed to inform planning and decision making at a strategic level. The introduction of Liquid Logic will provide more timely performance reports to enable the LAC Service to better identify those children and young people with an SDQ of 18+, ensure a timely consideration of a referral to the RTT or CAMHS, track the intervention and assess the impact of that intervention via a revised SDQ.

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

The Virtual School has taken responsibility for driving the completion rate and quality of PEPs since September 2015. A Rotherham standard of termly PEPs has been introduced to ensure a targeted focus on education that mirrors school practice. An electronic PEP system (ePEP) has been commissioned and is now embedded practice that has streamlined processes leading to a greater focus on the education rather than the paperwork. Schools and social workers have 24/7 access to the ePEP with an increasing number of foster carers accessing the system.

The Virtual School model has LAC advocates that strive to attend every PEP meeting both in and out of borough in order to raise the quality of educational dialogue, support and challenge for all Rotherham LAC. This practice has been well received and is respected by schools.

Every looked after child should have an up to date PEP and as of September 2016, 97.63% of young people had such an up to date plan in place. PEP audits in 2015-16 demonstrated improving quality. All PEPS from September 2016 will be quality assured through the Virtual School with verification from Inclusion Support Services and an external consultant. In terms of 2015-16 GCSE outcomes, of the cohort of young people that had been in care for at least 12 months in March 2016, 4 young people achieved at least 5 A*-C passes including English and Maths out of a total eligible cohort of 32 (10 of whom have special educational needs and a further 12 of whom were in receipt of an SEN support plan in school).

Schools are required to request LAC Pupil Premium funding through the ePEP system which must be linked to SMART targets that address need.

Processes have been developed to reduce drift and delay in securing education at the same time as care placements but systems are not yet rigorous enough. There is a need for Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) assessments to be fast-tracked for LAC to reduce drift and delay. There is also an issue with cross-border SEND delays resulting from other LAs having different priorities, thresholds and processes. The impact of this would be reduced if less LAC were placed out of authority. However there remains a sufficiency issue around SEND specialist provision and Alternative Provision.

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

In respect of care leavers who are in EET the performance of the Leaving Care team compares favourably with national and statistical neighbours. Whilst in September 2016 70.3% of care leavers were EET the latest national average was only 48% and the statistical neighbour average was only 50.4%. However, work continues to support yet more care leavers into EET opportunities.

At present there are no care leavers who have accessed a Modern Apprenticeship that has been provided by RMBC. The reasons for this have been explored and revealed that whilst all apprenticeships require a GCSE A-C grade in Maths and English at entry level the educational data above indicates that this is beyond the attainment of most of our current LAC. In addition many LAC have experienced some degree of disrupted attachments in their lives and this makes it more difficult for them to sustain a prompt and regular attendance record at a work placement and many require additional support to manage within the world of work and training. Barriers resulting from social, emotional or mental health issues have led to a lack of development of appropriate skills for some care leavers to access either college or work placements.

In order to address these factors the Leaving Care Service is developing a project with the Modern Apprentice Programme to:-

- Provide additional support to assist LAC to achieve their A-C in maths and English.
- Agree some form of ring-fencing so that LAC have some priority afforded them in the application process.
- Establish more pre-apprenticeship programmes and work experience opportunities to support LAC into the working environment.
- Broaden the apprenticeship opportunities from the traditional caring and business support professions to more diverse areas of employment.

The Corporate Parenting Panel have acknowledged that RMBC is currently not being as good a parent as it should be in not employing any LAC or care leaver in the 'family firm'. They have therefore agreed to press the council for a greater degree of flexibility in respect of the entry level requirements and to ensure there is a greater degree of ring-fencing of apprenticeship opportunities for our young people.

In respect of the provision of suitable accommodation, the Leaving Care Team and the Commissioning Service continue to work to expand the range of accommodation options for care leavers. This includes working more closely with Adults Services to develop an effective Transition Planning process and to enable vulnerable care leavers who don't meet the mental health or learning disability criteria to access supported accommodation.

A strong partnership approach has been developed over the last 12 months with Housing Strategy and the wider housing market in Rotherham which will aim to expand and enhance the accommodation options available for care leavers. A Strategic Partnership is also being developed with the private sector to establish outstanding residential care provision in Rotherham. Hollowgate currently provides 10 young people with floating support living in dispersed properties provided by the Council's Housing Service. In addition they offer continued support to young people who have moved on from Hollowgate through access to 3 properties shared by 6 young people. In response to identified need and in consultation with the Care Leavers Council 2 newly built 2 bedroom properties will be allocated to care leavers as preparation for applying for a social housing tenancy, this is expected to be available from 2018.

The other measure of the effectiveness of the service is the number of care leavers who remain in meaningful contact with their Personal Adviser from the Leaving Care Team. Although care leavers are adults and this is therefore very much a 'voluntary' arrangement, the team's performance for 2015/16 was good at 91% of care leavers maintaining meaningful contact with their Personal Adviser (8 weekly minimum standard). To further enhance the relationships that care leavers have with their PAs, the team has recently moved to a new site near the town centre at Chatham Villas. Phase 2 of this project will be to develop a 'drop-in' facility in the building to encourage care leavers to maintain even more regular contact and receive input to strengthen their independence skills.

6. 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.

There is an increasingly effective Child in Care Council in place with 12 young people providing regular and meaningful representation on behalf of the wider LAC cohort. These young people support service development by populating interview panels for staff recruitment, by attending and contributing to the Corporate Parenting Panel process and by participating in foster carer training. They are also becoming increasingly involved in the strategic agenda by attending and contributing to regional participation events. There is also a recently established Care Leavers Council now in place which provides direct input into the development of services to support care leavers. For example they recently reframed the plans for the new-build care leavers accommodation in terms of location and size of property.

The Corporate Parenting Panel has as standing agenda items the LAC Council activity updates and Learning from LAC Complaints. This will ensure that the experience of looked after young people is shared directly with their corporate parents. In addition, one of the Corporate Parenting Panels every year from now on will be a LAC 'take-over' session in which the LAC Council will set the agenda, invite reports and presentations, chair the Panel and agree the future actions.

However, this remains an area for further development and the number of young people actively involved in participation processes needs to increase. In particular the voice of the young people placed out of authority needs to be significantly amplified as does the voice of younger children in care and those with disabilities.

The Virtual School has developed the pupil voice within the ePEP which is now captured for most pupils with schools expected to record their response and actions resulting from that pupil voice. The Virtual School requests attendance of pupils at PEP meetings (or part thereof) and asks schools to record within the PEPs the specific contribution of social workers and foster carers to directly support education. Schools, social workers and carers are being asked to raise their aspirations for the children in their care as well as develop and inspire aspirations within our young people.

8. Key Service Priorities

Arising from these strategic objectives, the LAC Service has agreed the following key service priorities: to improve and develop overall service delivery and standards of practice:-

- Stability and Consistency in placements and in workforce.
- Supporting social workers to move from compliance to quality.
- Facilitating increased and enhanced management oversight.

These key service priorities will be reviewed on an annual basis.

9. Placement Sufficiency

Addressing placement sufficiency results in us being able to ensure we are able to place the right children in our care in the right placements at the right time (please refer to the Placement Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children and Care Leavers for 2017-20).

At the inception of this Strategy it has been acknowledged that there are too many looked after children in the care of RMBC. There has been a consistent upward trend in the numbers of looked after children from 424 as of January 2016 to 488 as of the end of December 2016 (9% increase over the course of 2016). If this trend was to continue by November 2019 there would be 604 looked after children in Rotherham. Whilst this trend is reflected across many local authorities in the Yorkshire and Humber region, at a rate of 86.5 per 10,000 children (December figures) this is significantly above the statistical neighbour average of 64 looked after children per 10,000 of population (as at 31st March 2016) which would equate to a figure of 360 looked after children in Rotherham. Through a number of targeted interventions Rotherham aims to safely reduce the number of LAC to around 399 by 2020.

To facilitate this reduction Rotherham has developed an overarching Sufficiency Strategy that dovetails with the LAC Strategy to ensure that we only have the 'right' children in our care and that they are in the 'right' placements at the 'right' time. The evidence based Strategy incorporates some of the best practice identified in "Putting Children First" (2016) and consists of the following 5 strands:

- I. **Enhanced 'Edge of Care' Interventions** to support children and families where there is an immediate risk of family breakdown or to respond to families in crisis. The proposed location of the service in Early Help will ensure that the opportunity to intervene earlier when problems begin to emerge is enhanced by a robust continuum of evidence based practice across the children's workforce
 - a. An **'Edge of Care'** Team – by investing in the recruitment and development of a dedicated team of practitioners offering a range of services to support children to remain living safely with their immediate or extended families they will be given the best chance to thrive without long-term reliance on services. This provision is projected to achieve a net reduction of 69 LAC over the 3 year period of this Strategy.
 - b. **Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST)** – an intensive programme that works within the whole ecology of a young person including parents, family, the community and school at the same time in a solution-focused, strengths-based approach to empower the family to take responsibility for solving problems. It is projected that the implementation of MST will create a net reduction of 12 LAC over the period of this strategy. In the longer-term this strategy will also push demand for placements down from costly high tier services to less expensive early interventions.
 - c. **Family Group Conferencing (FGC)** – FGC is an effective tool for identifying and engaging with wider family members and friends at an early stage of concern regarding a child. It is a child-centred, family-led decision making and planning process which develops existing strengths to build safety for children. Learning from other local authorities indicates that the FGC model is most effective when delivered in-house as part of an early help model. Targeting services at children and young people at an earlier stage of their journey is likely to reduce the number of children subject to a child protection plan and consequently reduce the numbers that escalate to PLO care proceedings and ultimately entering care. It is estimates that a wider FGC offer will reduce the number of LAC by 72 over the 3 year period.

- d. **Pause Project** – It has been determined that over a 7 year period 29% of care applications in the UK involved women who had previously had a child removed from their care and this often related to trans-generational patterns of neglect and/or abuse. The Pause Project aims to engage with mothers on a one to one basis to provide intensive therapeutic activities and practical support to encourage them to think of themselves as individuals, often for the first time in their lives. The programme gives women the chance to ‘pause’ and take control of their lives, breaking the destructive cycle that causes them and their children deep trauma. To support this process they are encouraged to take Long Acting Reversible Contraception (LARC) during the intervention to create the space to reflect, learn and aspire. The first Pause pilot was undertaken in Hackney and is now being rolled out across other local authorities across the country.

Initial data analysis indicates that there are currently 25 women in Rotherham who have experienced the repeat removal of a child or children who could access such a programme. At present the investment has been approved only to assess the need for and potential impact of introducing a similar intervention in Rotherham but over the three year period of this Strategy it is projected that the Pause initiative could contribute to a net reduction of 30 LAC.

- II. **An expanded Rotherham Therapeutic Team (RTT)** to provide enhanced support to the child and carer to reduce the likelihood of a placement breakdown which often results in the use of more expensive placement provision. By breaking the cycle of placement disruptions through intensive provision early in the child’s care journey will lead to increased placement stability and lead to healthier emotional wellbeing and better outcomes for looked after young people. This support will be based on the ‘team around the child’ model where the carer and professionals will be supported to develop their skills, resilience and knowledge to respond in a confident, competent and consistent way to emerging issues by preventing escalation and disruption. It is forecast that the team could support up to 30 looked after children and their carers per year and significantly reduce the number of placement disruptions which was recorded at 20 between March to September 2016. This in turn should support LAC to achieve better outcomes including in respect of their educational attainment.
- III. **Foster Carer Payments Scheme, Support and Development** to ensure that wherever possible children are looked after in Rotherham in a family setting. The aim of this revised scheme is to attract additional foster carers to Rotherham, especially for adolescents and large sibling groups, and to improve the retention and development of existing experienced carers. The current reliance on Independent Fostering Agency placements (IFAs) impacts on the outcomes achieved by young people as once a young person is placed outside of the RMBC area control can be lost in respect of certain aspects of their care package including education, CAMHS and health provision. Recent audits also indicate that an IFA is up to four times more likely to disrupt than an in-house placement. Thus, not only will an expanded, well-trained and supported in-house foster care provision bring significant financial benefits it will also support better outcomes for our children. In September 2016, the Children’s Commissioner approved the revised scheme that had been co-produced in partnership with the local foster carer consultation group. This scheme offers increased and more transparent financial incentives, good quality support and training with a target of 15 or more placements being secured per annum between 2016-18. The LAC Service Peer Review undertaken in October 2016 expressed the opinion that this target was set too low and so it will be subject of a strategic review. However, this initiative will still bring both significant financial benefits and improve the outcomes for looked after children.

In addition, Rotherham will adopt one of the key practice principles set out in ‘Putting Children First’ so that foster carers will be actively involved in decisions about the children they are looking after. These will include decisions in relation to their education, additional

support and decisions about care planning in order to empower foster carers to stand up for the children they look after as any good parent would. This 'professionalisation' of the role will be utilised to support recruitment processes.

- IV. **Regional Adoption Agency** – Despite timescales between an admission to care and a child being placed for adoption in Rotherham being half that of the national average the DfE maintain that too many children still have to wait too long for a permanent family. As a result the Government has directed that adoption services should be regionalised so that local authorities can pool their resources in respect of assessments and availability of adoptive placements. The Secretary of State has reserved the right to enforce this process with any local authority deemed not to be implementing it with a sufficient degree of urgency. Subject to Commissioner and Cabinet approval, Rotherham adoption service will be part of the South Yorkshire Adoption Agency as a joint venture along with Barnsley, Sheffield, Doncaster MBC and Doncaster Children's Services Trust with a planned implementation date for June 2017.
- V. **Taking Care Project** – This is a partnership arrangement with the NSPCC through which up to 30 young people will be considered and formally assessed in respect of the viability of them returning to the care of their birth/extended families over a two year period. It is projected that this aspect of the Sufficiency Plan will lead to a net reduction of 12 LAC. This programme is evidence based and not only strengthens the assessment and decision making process when deciding whether a child should return home but also informs how best to support children and families throughout the reunification process and after they have returned home. The LAC social workers have been fully trained in the process so that the intervention should become embedded practice and self-supporting. This in turn *should* reduce the drift that is a factor within the current care planning processes in the LAC service.

Overall it is anticipated that the cumulative effect of these 5 strands of the Sufficiency Plan will enable RMBC to safely reduce its number of looked after children to around 360 as compared to the current figure of 457 (October 2016). If the current trend of increasing numbers of LAC was allowed to continue unabated, by November 2019 there will be a projected 604 looked after children.

10. Education and Attainment

It is the commitment of RMBC that all LAC:-

- Access the full and appropriate, high-quality educational offer to which they have an entitlement. The percentage of LAC educated in schools with a Good or Outstanding rating has risen from 75% in September 2015 to 88% in authority and 77% out of authority schools in September 2016. The challenge remains to translate these high quality educational placements into improved educational outcomes.
- They receive a planned and stable education which enables them to fulfil their potential supported by professionals who have high expectations of and high aspirations for them.
- They are supported to develop high aspirations and are supported by services and structures that can ensure these are achieved.

The national ambition for children and young people in care is to raise their own ambitions and educational progress so that they are given every possible opportunity to achieve their potential. Children in care have historically achieved poor educational outcomes but these are gradually improving on a national basis.

Within Rotherham our current strengths are:-

- Our priority locally for children and young people in care is to help them have high aspirations and ensure they are well supported in order to be able to raise their educational attainment and help them become successful adults.
- Some of our children and young people have achieved positive results with several achieving 7 or more A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent
- More than 70% of our care leavers are in Education, Training or Employment.
- There are currently 7 care leavers who are attending Higher Education/University.
- All 2 year old LAC engage with the vulnerable two year olds offer with 13 looked after children currently accessing this and two more accessing local toddler groups.
- There have been no LAC formally permanently excluded in 2015/16.
- However, 535 days of education were lost in 2015/16 through fixed term exclusions and there have been 9 school placement moves in order to avoid a permanent exclusion. Furthermore, the percentage of school days lost is higher for LAC than their peers.

Attendance data has not historically been sufficiently reliable to be able to use it to support timely targeted interventions. However, this has now been addressed and the recent commissioning of an external daily attendance/exclusion reporting provider, Welfare Call, has led to improved data that will now be used to address highlighted issues and target timely interventions. In addition, to date there has been no comprehensive overview held of destinations matched with outcomes at either Further or Higher Education levels.

Outcomes generally for children in care in Rotherham are below outcomes for children in care nationally and below outcomes for non-care children both in Rotherham and nationally. However the attainment gap is clearly narrowing at EYFS, KS1 and KS2 but remaining fairly static at KS4.

The new Virtual School model that has been put in place champions the education of children in care. The new electronic PEP system has been further developed since being commissioned and

enables a wider range of professionals to have access to the PEP in order to support children's progress and supports young people in having their voices heard in their education plans. This has contributed to an increase in PEP completion rate from 68% to 94% with PEPs continually improving in quality and with a focus on driving progress. There is a Rotherham standard of termly PEP meetings which aligns with school monitoring processes and ensures a more frequent and intense focus on progress and the Virtual School commit to attend PEP Meetings both within and outside of the RMBC boundary. The provision of PEPs has been extended to include 2 to 18 year olds and the LAC pupil premium funding is directly targeted to support raising attainment. The LAC pupil premium has also been used for the MAST counselling project that supports a number of children in care to address their emotional issues in school. The Virtual School also offers extensive training to support schools, carers, social workers, IROs, governors and other professionals and a Virtual School Governing Body has been established that reports to Corporate Parenting Panel.

In addition to the work with schools the Virtual School is currently working on:

- Ensuring all foster carers have access to the ePEP system.
- The development of foster carer education champions
- Ensuring that foster carers and social workers access a detailed training offer so they are well placed to support education.
- A strategy to analyse impact of LAC pupil premium funding to further improve targeted spend.
- The post-16 agenda to include the development of a training offer to post-16 education providers.
- An Attachment project designed to support and upskill school staff to help address the emotional health and well-being needs of LAC in order to stabilise school and care placements, to improve readiness to learn, and reduce exclusions.
- The development of cross-service strategies and protocols that have a 'golden thread' of prioritising LAC and their education eg the Rotherham Attendance Strategy.
- Supporting plans to develop a sufficiency of appropriate provision to meet specialist educational needs

The educational aim of this strategy is to ensure that Rotherham looked after children (within and out of borough) have:

- improved educational progress and attainment with the gap narrowing year-on-year with outcomes for non-care children
- improved 'readiness to learn' through improved emotional health and well-being
- improved attendance in school
- reduced exclusions
- reduction in school placement moves
- reduced numbers of LAC accessing Alternative Provision
- reduced numbers of LAC on reduced provision timetables
- support through improved skills of professionals that can support them and their education
- foster carer education champions

The impact on outcomes will be measured via national benchmark attainment data, positive destinations, increase in the numbers of care leavers in Education, Employment or Training.

11. Economic Wellbeing and Independence

As previously stated care leavers in Rotherham do achieve reasonably positive outcomes in respect of being in Education, Employment or Training (EET). Further to this 97.1% of them are living in suitable accommodation. However, this data warrants deeper examination. For example, how many of those in suitable accommodation manage to maintain a stability of accommodation? In addition the percentage of care leaver in EET still means that there are approximately 80 care leavers who are NEET. This situation can be much worse for those young people residing outside of the Rotherham area.

To build on the accommodation provision RMBC will undertake a review with St Basil's Housing with the overall objective of improving the range and quality of accommodation and support options for care leavers as they make their transition to adulthood. This review will focus on particular areas of potential concern including accommodation and support for care leavers, mapping current provision and identifying gaps, commissioning of services and targeted housing related support. There will be a specific focus on the accommodation needs for young people with multiple and complex needs who do not necessarily reach the threshold for adult social care.

In order to better support these looked after children and care leavers the LAC Service proposes to introduce a 'fairy godparent's scheme' where a group of Corporate Parents (officers and members) as well as wider partners oversee the progress of children, acting as pushy parents from afar. This isn't about introducing yet another person into the child's life but ensuring that someone is looking out for them - someone who 'has their back' so to speak. With 63 elected members and 20 senior officers all our children placed beyond 20 miles should be able to benefit from this scheme.

The Corporate Parenting Panel have acknowledged that RMBC is currently not being as good a parent as it should be in not employing any LAC or care leaver in the 'family firm'. They have therefore agreed to press the council for a greater degree of flexibility in respect of the entry level requirements and to ensure there is a greater degree of ring-fencing of apprenticeship opportunities for our young people. This will be considered as part of the review of apprenticeships within RMBC, which is driven by the introduction of the apprenticeship levy, and which will aim to broaden the range of opportunities available, including job roles and the required entry level qualifications.

The LAC Service, the Virtual School and the Council will offer an identified cohort of young people currently in Year 11 who are unlikely to access Higher education. From the summer of 2017 they will be offered and incentivised to attend a graduated programme to prepare them for a full apprenticeship starting with one day a week release from school, moving to a 4 week work experience leading to a full apprenticeship. The Leaving Care Team are working in partnership with Brathay to provide a 10 week Future Focus programme which will work with LAC and Care leavers to build on their core employability skills.

Young people will be allowed to take a 'step back' within this programme and move up and down the ladder depending on their presenting needs but we will not give up on them. To support this programme the LAC Service is developing a partnership with the Rotherham Chamber of Commerce to increase the range of placement options for young people. As part of this process Rotherham aim to be an early adopter of the care leaver covenant as set out in 'Putting Children First' that local companies and private organisations can sign up to and make a commitment to support care leavers.

The Leaving Care Service is developing a formal offer to Care Leavers that has had significant input from care leavers themselves. This will include:-

I. Developing a Pledge for care leavers/sign up to the national pledge.

The National Pledge has been shared with a group of Care Leavers who have agreed that the principles within the Charter are what they would want the local authority to sign up to and follow. The Pledge is due to be approved by the Corporate Parenting Panel in December 2016.

Following consultation with The Care Leavers Foundation the LAC Service has given a public to their Care Leavers that they have signed up to the Charter and will ensure that it will be documented that the principles of the Charter will be adhered to in full by RMBC. The Corporate Parenting Panel will 'sign off' this commitment.

This will be formally recognised on the Care Leavers Foundation website and they will notify the Department for Education of our commitment. This is also the forum to share any 'good news' or communications about activity for Care Leavers and they will make sure it is recognised.

II. Celebration event for care leavers

The Leaving Care Service will work with care leavers to ensure that the achievements and successes of our care leavers are formally acknowledged and celebrated on an annual basis.

III. Phase 2 of Chatham Villas

The Leaving Care Service has relocated to Chatham Villas. This is the new dedicated support 'hub' for care leavers, and is somewhere that young people can come to when in need or to 'drop in' to have contact with staff.

The second phase of the hub is in development. Plans have been drawn up and approved. The specification of work and costs have gone out to tender with an expected completion date of February 2017.

The Hub will offer a range of facilities including a breakfast club, drop in space, group work targeted around themes relevant to young people such as health, education and employability, a learning space, relaxation/recreation area and access to life-skills areas including a kitchen and laundry. Workshops are being carried out with young people to co-design the service.

IV. Development of a 'Rights and Entitlement' leaflet for care leavers

Consultation events have been with care leavers to formalise the Rights and Entitlements for Care Leavers within Rotherham. A leaflet is in draft and will be ratified by the start of 2017. The formal offer includes the Leaving Care Allowance, the Health Passport, Driving License and lessons, HE Bursary, set up TV License along with the offer in respect of support into EET and accommodation. The policy demonstrates a significant financial commitment from the Local Authority to Care Leavers. Once approved, the offer will be made available to care leavers via the website and in leaflet form.

V. The revised accommodation team

The accommodation team has changed somewhat widening the remit of the Level 3 workers to assume delegated responsibility for the PA role with young people who they are key working with. The Leaving Care Accommodation Team also provides tenancy support to young people

in their own accommodation and dispersed properties. Stronger links have been developed between the Accommodation Team and the Leaving Care Teams and links developed with Housing to improve the process for young people's access to appropriate accommodation. At present Care Leavers are awarded Band 2 status meaning that they can bid for properties after those who are deemed to be emergency cases such as families who are homeless due to fire and flood.

However, there are still some particular vulnerabilities faced by Care Leavers such as the rent allowance cap. As a result the Leaving Care Team and Rotherham Housing and Neighbourhood Services will develop a joint protocol to ensure that more care leavers are supported into appropriate and stable accommodation. This will include plans to increase the numbers of dispersed properties available to Care Leavers.

Structured activities have been developed within the Accommodation team at Hollowgate and are open to all young people residing at Hollowgate and those receiving floating/tenancy support in the community. Examples of these activities include:

- Breakfast club 08.00-10.00 Wednesday mornings
- Cooking workshop 18.00-20.00 every Thursday
- Drop in sessions held monthly by Barnardo's & Know the Score (Substance Misuse Service)
- Monthly Residents meetings held at the beginning of every month
- Move on toolkit group workshops held every two weeks

VI. Closer partnership with Adults Services

Historically the transitional planning in Rotherham has been inadequate leading to too young adults being placed in inappropriate accommodation leading to unstable tenancies. Partnership working with Adults Services has been poor, especially for those vulnerable young people with no diagnosed mental health or learning disability. However, an 'in principle' agreement has been given for the transitional planning for these vulnerable young people to commence from their 14th birthday via a presentation to the Adults Transitions Panel. An Adults Services representative is also a standing member of the Joint Complex Planning and Placement Panel which ensures that they are best placed to identify those young people who are likely to need the support of Adults Services and contribute to the care and placement planning decision making processes. As a result there will be much closer collaboration in developing accommodation and support packages.

12. Workforce Development

At present the Workforce Offer is inadequate as it is not based on any assessment of the developmental needs of the social workers and managers. This strategy recognises that the inconsistency in line management available to social workers over the past few years has impeded the required improvements in social work practice. In turn the inconsistency in social worker has impeded the drive for improved outcomes for looked after children. As a result this Strategy will be supported by the departmental recruitment strategy.

In addition the existing practice model, Strengthening Families, has been inconsistently rolled out and this has tended to focus on the Child Protection Case Conference processes. In terms of more general social work development there is nothing in place that is consistent or sustainable other than the generic LSCB offer and short-term training programmes.

The plan to address this has yet to be approved by the service's management team but the proposal is to move the Workforce Development function from the Commissioning Service to Safeguarding and Quality Assurance.

The infrastructure will be split into two streams – Recruitment/Retention and Learning/Development.

In respect of Learning/Development there will be a 3 stage process:-

1. An assessment of current development needs aimed to support the move from Inadequate to Requires Improvement. This will include basic social work learning from audits, complaints and Restorative Practice (first 6-12 months of plan).
2. Implementation of the Strengthening Families and Signs of Safety across the organisation including an embedding of this intervention model across case file structures and single assessment formats (12 months to 2 years).
3. Development of the Centre of Excellence to provide a high quality learning and development offer for the sw staff and the provision of training by our own staff who have been supported to become experts in practice. The sources of the support required to get staff to this position may come from the South Yorkshire Teaching Partnership or Research in Practice but it is likely to involve 'on the job' academic research (2 to 3 years).

13. Oversight and Governance

The implementation of this Strategy will be provided by the Corporate Parenting Panel where it will be a standing agenda item. The Strategy will be formally reviewed on an annual basis and any updates and amendments being agreed by the Panel.

Author: Ian Walker
Title: Head of Service - Looked After Children