

## Summary Sheet

### Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting:

Improving Lives Select Commission – Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2018

**Report Title:** Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy - Update.

**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 Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers Strategy was signed off for implementation by the Corporate Parenting Panel on the 28 February 2017. This report provides an update of progress and developments in the planned three year cycle of the Strategy and identifies where further work is still required in order to achieve its agreed objectives.

### Recommendations

Improving Lives Select Commission is recommended to note the contents of this report.

**List of Appendices Included;** Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2021.

**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

## **Looked After Children Sufficiency Strategy - Update.**

### **1. Recommendations**

- 1 The Improving Lives Select Commission is recommended to note the contents of this report.

### **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers Strategy was approved by Corporate Parenting Panel in February 2017. The Strategy sets out six key strategic objectives as well as five strands of the placement Sufficiency Strategy.

### **3. Key Issues**

- 3.1 The strategic objectives within the strategy 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. The objectives define what key achievements and service improvements will need to be made over the lifecycle of the strategy in order to improve the outcomes for looked after children.

- 3.2 Since October 2016 there have been three, Ofsted Improvement and Monitoring Visits and three preceding Peer Reviews undertaken in respect of the LAC Service, the Front Door, Early Help and the Leaving Care Service. To date, and in contrast to the Ofsted Inspection of 2014, the Peer Reviews and Monitoring Visits have reported no systemic failures and identified no children in critically unsafe living arrangements.

- 3.3 In November 2017 Ofsted completed a Re-inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and the final report will be published on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

#### **3.4 To protect our children and keep them safe from harm.**

- 3.4.1 Rotherham CYPS has maintained its commitment not to place any looked after child (LAC) in a placement that has been rated as Inadequate. 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 undertake 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. Recently the Commissioning and Placements Team undertook a wholesale review of their safeguarding processes which identified a number of issues with a particular provider 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.

- 3.4.2 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.

3.4.3 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.

3.4.4 Between April and December 2017 there were 88 LAC who had been reported as being Missing from Care, which amounted to 661 missing episodes. This may be at least partly attributable to the ongoing increase in the numbers of LAC admissions especially of older adolescents 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.

3.4.5 The recent 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. There has also been a review of undertaken of the quality of Return Home Interviews. As a result there has been some positive impact noted on missing behaviours and especially on those young people who go missing on repeated occasions. This is reflected in the monthly missing episodes data which has reduced from an average of 88 episodes for LAC per month in the first two quarters of the year to a third quarter average of 45 per month.

**3.5 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.**

3.5.1 Following a decline in the early months of 2017/18 the number of long term LAC, (in care for at least 2.5 years), who have lived in the same placement for over two years has increased month-on-month since the summer (90 children in August compared to 96 in December). However, due to the overall numbers increasing, this data as a proportion of the total has reduced from 63% in September to 61.5% in December. This places Rotherham below statistical neighbours (68.2%) and the national average (68%). This has impacted by the increasing number of LAC and our desire to bring children closer to home and into family placements. Due to the timeframes within the definition this is an area of performance which cannot be improved quickly. All but 26 of our long term LAC have been presented for approval of the long-term match at Foster Panel to secure a permanent placement for the child. Remaining cases have been scheduled a Panel date to consider the matching process but in addition conversations will be held with their carers to discuss the potential for a move to permanence via an Special Guardianship Order or Child Arrangement Order.

3.5.2 A forward projection analysis of the current cohort predicts that this measure potentially could reach 66-67% by the end of this reporting year and with further improvements in 2018.

- 3.5.3 The proportion of our total LAC population experiencing multiple placements at the end of December was 11.3% which is an improvement on the previous year and the highs of 13.9% in the summer. 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.
- 3.5.4 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. A recent review has evidenced that that of the 21 children and young people involved in the programme for up to a 9 month period, 15 are evidencing a greater degree of placement stability with no placement moves and of the remaining 6 children none have experienced more than one placement disruption. It is this latter figure that is the most significant as previously young people experiencing similar challenges could have expected to face 5 to 7 placement moves over a similar timescale. 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.
- 3.5.5 In the current reporting year, at the end of December there had been 20 children adopted. In terms of adoption there are 68 children who currently have a plan for adoption. Of these children 5 are awaiting their Placement Order, 37 are subject of a Placement Order but not yet matched, 2 children have been matched with prospective adopters but not placed and 24 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.
- 3.5.6 Performance regarding the timeliness of adoptions is outstanding and places Rotherham within the top quartile nationally. The A1 measure (average time between becoming LAC and moving to the adoptive placement) currently standing at 315 days as compared to the statistical neighbour average of 511.6 days and national average of 558.0 days. For the A2 measure performance currently stands at 137 days with the statistical neighbour average being at 214.7 days and the national average being at 226 days. However, the priority for Rotherham will always be to find adoptive parents for our children no matter how long that may take, and given the low numbers, wide variance can be seen month on month. Service projections are predicting an increase on the number of adoptions to be completed by the end of 2017/18 compared to the 31 achieved in 2016/17.

3.5.7 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.

### **3.6 To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children.**

3.6.1 The situation in respect of Initial Health Assessments being completed within the 20 working day timescale is an improving one with the year to date performance reaching 59% as compared to 18% in 2016/17 and only 8.4% in 2015/16. Furthermore, over the course of the past four months performance has reached more than 80% indicating the year end figure will surpass the year to date figure. RMBC is well placed therefore to achieve even better performance next year indicating that this long-standing issue is close to a permanent resolution.

3.6.2 In respect of the annual review health assessment 80% of young people have had their check in the past 12 months and 70% 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. After a successful pilot programme whereby LAC were given priority access to CAMHS assessments and interventions the Corporate Parenting Panel successfully challenged CAMHS to make this arrangement a permanent one.

3.6.3 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.

### **3.7 To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between the attainment of LAC and their peers.**

3.7.1 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 2017 Summer term 98.9% of LAC had a Personal Education Plan (PEP), and 97.9% of LAC had PEPs that were up to date. This is an improvement on 2016/17 outturn position. Furthermore external quality assurance rated 87% of PEPs as “good or better” standard and 83% of children are educated in a school rated either “Good or Outstanding” by Ofsted. At the end of December 90% of

children had a PEP but it is known that this will improve in the future when the further system input is completed and data is validated.

3.7.2 The quality of PEP and education planning is beginning to have an impact on educational planning with Key Stage 2 outcomes improving in 2017 as compared to 2016 and to a degree significantly above national and regional comparators. In respect of all educational outcomes for 2017:-

- 3 young people achieving 9 A\*-C including English & Maths.
- 1 achieved 8 A\*-C including English but missed maths by 1 grade
- A further 2 achieved 5+ A\*-C including English but missed maths by a grade.
- Another young person achieved 5 A\*-C but missed maths and English by 1 grade.
- 3 young people achieved 4 A\*-C: 1 including English and 1 including Maths.
- 10/30 had an EHCP, EHCP pending or a statement of SEN.
- 10 young people were not in mainstream schools.
- Of the 20 children in mainstream education:
  - 3/20 (15%) achieved 9 A\*-C including English & Maths
  - 6/20 (30%) achieved 5+ A\*-C
  - 9/20 (45%) achieved 4+ A\*-C

3.7.3 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 were no care leavers who commenced Higher Education in the Autumn due to the leaning needs of that particular cohort. One young person is academically capable but preferred to take gap year as she is not felt to be sufficiently emotionally strong to manage this transition at this moment in her life.

3.7.4 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%). 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.

3.7.5 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.

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

3.8.1 Performance within the Leaving Care Service continues to be strong and above national averages with 60% of care leavers being in Education, Training or Employment (EET), 97% being in suitable accommodation (5 young people being in custody) , 92% of care leavers staying in touch with the service and 98% 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 December 84% of the 233 young people in the cohort had one or less change to their primary address over the course of the previous 12 months. In the recent Inspection Ofsted highlighted that Rotherham was one of the very few local authorities that measured tenancy stability.

3.8.2 In addition 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. Rotherham has also successfully applied to be in the second stream of the House Project, a social enterprise initiative in which 3 to 4 young people placed in Out of Authority placements will be trained and supported to refurbish properties which will become their tenancy on completion.

3.8.3 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 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, further work is required to ensure these referrals are submitted before their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday in line with the Care Planning Guidance.

3.8.4 One of the most significant developments within the Strategy has been the fact that there are now four 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. There remains one as yet unfulfilled commitment in that the Fairy Godparent Scheme has yet to be launched although this was delayed somewhat by the Ofsted Inspection. 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 finalized and the scheme will be launched over the course of February.

### **3.9 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.**

3.9.1 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 17 regular participants in the formal LAC Council and a further 20 younger children regularly involved in the more activity based 'Little LAC'. Fostering Focus has been commissioned to help draft

a Participation Strategy which is now being implemented within the spirit of 'ethical participation'. The LAC Council was also involved in the planning of the second Pride of Rotherham event that took place in October and were instrumental in selecting the venue, entertainment and trophies.

- 3.9.2 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. The improved quality of these Life-story books was noted by Ofsted.

### **3.10 Placement Sufficiency**

- 3.10.1 The numbers of looked after children has continued to rise from 457 when the LAC Strategy was drafted to 575 at the end of December but the Edge of Care provision has only been operational for a few months and is yet to make a significant impact. The Family Group Conference team was established in May and routinely undertaken Conferences to support the return of looked after young people to their birth families. The Pause Project is also in the final stages of the approval process.

- 3.10.2 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.

- 3.10.3 In terms of foster carer recruitment there have been 11 new foster families (18 placements) approved since April 2017 with an end of year projection of 19 new foster families or 30 new placements. The Fostering Recruitment Team has been set a target of 35 new placements over the course of 2018/19. This, combined with a performance management approach being taken in respect of void placements, has meant that as at the end of December there were 225 in-house foster placements 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.

- 3.10.4 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



contents of this report are noted.

## **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 The Strategy will run over a three year cycle and updates will be provided at regular intervals.

## **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 careleavers.

### **10.2 Equalities and Human Rights Implications**

- 11.1 The 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)**

Ian Walker Head of Service

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