

Summary Sheet

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting Directorate Leadership team

Report Title Lifelong Links

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

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report Mel Meggs

Report Author(s) Ian Walker

Ward(s) Affected All

Summary Lifelong Links is a DfE pilot project currently being implemented by 7 local authorities including North Yorkshire County Council and Kent County Council. The programme has been introduced from the USA where it was found that the young people involved achieved positive outcomes in terms of placement stability and making and sustaining life-long connections. The DfE want to extend this trial to 12 local authorities and there have recently been awareness raising sessions attended by representatives from the LAC Service where the potential value of the project was recognised.

Recommendations DLT is recommended to endorse the proposal that RMBC become part of the extended pilot project and implement the Lifelong Links scheme for those looked after young people who it is assessed would benefit from it.

List of Appendices Included None

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

Lifelong Links

1. Recommendations

1.1 DLT is recommended to endorse the proposal that RMBC become part of the extended pilot project and implement the Lifelong Links scheme for those looked after young people who it is assessed would benefit from it.

2. Background

2.1 As Isabelle Trowler reported in 'Putting Children First' (2016), "Relationships and long term social connection is the cornerstone to child and family welfare." She has endorsed the Lifelong Links project in April 2018 stating that supporting lifelong connections for LAC was one of the most interesting ideas around. Furthermore, The Care Inquiry (2013) stated, "The greatest failing of the care system: It too often breaks rather than builds relationships for children."

2.2 To address this the aim of Lifelong Links is to create a lifelong support network for children and adolescents in the care system given that young people are likely to benefit from being connected to a supportive adult and that good contact between them and the wider family leads to higher levels of support when they leave care. The project is aimed at LAC who are under the age of 16 who have been in care for less than 3 years and where there is no plan for them to live with their family or to be adopted or achieve permanence. Evidence from the USA demonstrated that 50% of the young people involved in the project had no placement changes as compared to 33% of the control group and that 81% of young people were able to establish long-term connections not previously available to them. Further potential benefits have been identified in the pilot as being:-

- Improved emotional wellbeing
- Reduced likelihood of going missing
- Improved educational and employment opportunities
- Stronger sense of identity
- Greater placement stability
- Stronger relationships
- Reduced risk of risk taking behaviours
- Improved emotional wellbeing

2.3 The Family Rights Group has secured funding to develop the UK model of Lifelong Links for a 3 year trial which will be independently evaluated by the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford. Thus far there are 7 trail sites in England that were set up in April 2017 and the FRG are looking to expand this trail to 5 further local authorities. It is proposed that Rotherham CYPS becomes part of this second wave.

2.4 The process is very much a voluntary one and requires the full consent of the young person themselves. Once a young person has been identified as being involved in the project the first stage is to complete the Mobility Mapping process. This is very much a family finding process that has very close links with the Signs of Safety model of practice and as such Lifelong Links would

dovetail appropriately with the Rotherham Family Approach. This mapping will involve a wide-scale audit of the young person's case file, access to social media and interviews with the young person themselves in order to identify as many adults who have had a positive impact on that young person as possible. These adults could include extended family with whom contact has been lost, teachers, previous carers and social workers, sports or arts coaches, parents of friends, community or youth club workers. This process will lead to the development of a full genogram and young person timeline which will help them reconnect with their history.

- 2.5 Following this mapping process being completed the Co-ordinator will plan a Family Group Conference with the child and the referrer who will usually be the young person's social worker. The Family Group Conference or series of FGCs will then be convened and a plan agreed for the future involvement of the network into the young person's life. This plan is then incorporated into the young person's Care Plan and reviewed through the Statutory Reviewing process. The Family Group Conference service have confirmed that they would be able to assimilate the demand within existing resources for the anticipated additional 10 to 12 Conferences per annum this project will require.
- 2.6 Although the process is a relatively straightforward one it will enable the young person to have a much clearer concept of their life-story and personal history. It has long been recognised that Life story work is an important way of helping a child to integrate their past into the present, in order to help them to move into the future. As a result Lifelong Links should contribute to the positive outcomes being achieved by LAC and Care leavers.

3. Key Issues

- 3.1 There is no financial support to be accessed by being part of the extended pilot but nor are the additional resource requirements prohibitive. The Lifelong project only requires a Family Finder/Co-ordinator and approximately 10 to 12 Family Group Conferences per year. The Edge of Care Service has already stated that it could readily assimilate this additional demand into the current service and the Family Finder/Co-ordinator would be an existing member of CYPS from either the Adoption Service or Early Help Service who will receive the relevant training in order to develop the necessary skills to undertake the Mobility mapping and Family Group Conference process.
- 3.2 The requirements of Rotherham CYPS will be to implement Lifelong Links in accordance with the standards framework developed by the Family Rights Group so that it can meet the accreditation criteria within 18 months of joining the programme. In order to achieve this Rotherham CYPS will have to give the commitment to work with the evaluation team and FRG to ensure model fidelity and assess the impact so the effectiveness of the approach can be assessed as well as sustaining commitment to the approach beyond the trail phase. As a result the quality of performance management processes within applicant authorities is required to be of the highest standard so that they are 'data-ready' from the date of sign up. It would seem clear that RMBC would readily be able to fulfil this criteria there will need to be senior management buy-in including attendance at national Steering Group meetings and the promotion of the

approach internally and championing it externally by mentoring its introduction in another authority.

- 3.3 In return for committing to the project Rotherham would receive specialist training for the Family Finder/Co-ordinator and ongoing mentoring from the first phase trial sites. Staff involved in the project will receive support from the FRG including from a Development Officer who will ensure appropriate guidance and resources are available. There will also be the opportunity to be part of the independent evaluation led by the Rees Centre and to be part of the shared learning from the other local authorities involved across England as part of a national network.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 4.1 Given that the LAC service is already involved in implementing 13 separate practice improvement projects, DLT may consider that this further proposal may be too much of an additional pressure on capacity for it to be a viable option at this stage. However, given that Lifelong Links fits so well with Signs of Safety and would enhance the Rotherham Family Approach it could also be argued that this is too good an opportunity to miss to improve the experience of some looked after children and improve their potential outcomes.
- 4.2 As a result it is recommended that Rotherham CYPS applies to become part of phase two of the Lifelong Links project.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 There is no requirement to undertake any consultation as part of this project. However, any young person who participates in the project will do so on a voluntary basis and so they will be fully consulted prior to the Mobility Mapping stage being initiated.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 6.1 Subject to DLT approval and being accepted onto the next phase of the scheme the relevant training and skills sharing will commence in September 2018 with the first FGCs being planned to take place in the Autumn. It is planned that the full review of the project will be completed by April 2020.
- 6.2 Ian Walker, Head of Service, will be responsible for the implementation of this decision.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

- 7.1 Other than the need for existing staff to be given the additional responsibility to be the Lifelong Links co-ordinator and for the Family Group Conferences to be arranged within existing resource availability there are no additional financial or procurement implications.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 There are no direct legal implications noted. Legal advice has been obtained which confirms that accessing social media sites to trace extended family members and other social contacts may constitute a breach of data protection legislation. However, this is unlikely to be an issue so long as only the public page is accessed and that there is no regular pattern of access that could be classed as excessive.

9. Human Resources Implications

- 9.1 There are no Human Resources implications arising from the Lifelong Links project. The additional responsibility can be absorbed through existing roles

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 10.1 The Lifelong Links project is designed to improve the outcomes for looked after children and Care Leavers and to have an impact on their lives well into their adulthood

11 Equalities and Human Rights Implications

- 11.1 Lifelong Links is designed to promote the equality and Human Rights of looked after children and care leavers.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

- 12.1 Partners and other Directorates may have to give the commitment to give consent for individual members of their workforce to be able to attend the Family Group Conference. Given that only 10 to 12 FGCs are planned to take place every year the implications arising from this should not be too onerous.
- 12.2 Depending on how it is decided the Co-ordinator post will be provided it may be that one Early Help Service worker may be heavily involved in this project.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 There is a risk that Rotherham MBC is not selected to be part of the next phase of the pilot study although it could be argued that Rotherham is in a strong position given the high level of commitment already shown to the regional information sessions that have recently taken place.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Ian Walker, Head of Service

Approvals Obtained from:-

	Named Officer	Date
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services	Mick Wildman	29 th May 2018
Assistant Director of Legal Services	Neil Concannon	24 th May 2018
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)	N/a	
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Amy Leech	23 rd May 2018

Ian Walker
Head of Service

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