

Summary Sheet

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting Improving Lives Select
Commission - 6th November 2018

Report Title Demand Management and Looked After Children (LAC) Sufficiency

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, Head of Service

Ward(s) Affected All

Summary The numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) has increased significantly over the course of the past 2 years from 488 in February 2016 to 640 by September 2018. The LAC and Care Leavers Strategy 2017-21 identified that:-

- There are too many looked after children in the care of Rotherham MBC in comparison with the statistical neighbours. Historically poorly performing services have left a legacy of more complex need as well as a legacy of rising numbers.
- There is a need to ensure that the Local Authority has provision which enables it to manage demand and that preventative provision and early help is in place to minimise the number of children coming into care. For some children, for whom the right decision has been to become looked after, there is insufficient timely access to appropriate specialist support.
- The number of those children in care placed out of borough is too high, closing gaps in the provision of sufficient local placement accommodation, preferably in a family setting, is required so children and young people in care and care leavers are able to continue to live within or close to the Borough.
- There is a need to work with key providers of specialist provision to help us to meet a range of needs and sufficiency of placement provision. More needs to be done to ensure the efficient and effective operation of our

local market. Delivering much better value in terms of quality, price, unit costs and outcomes is essential across all provision.

The outcome of the strategy was designed to safely and appropriately reduce the number of young people requiring care by the local authority whilst responding to the challenges identified.

By 2021 it was anticipated that the interventions would safely reduce the number of LAC. At that time the planned reduction in the number of looked after children was expected to result in a net reduction of 61 placements; 4 in 2017/18; 13 in 2018/19; 22 in 2019/20; and 22 in 2020/21. However, although the rate of admissions to care has slowed it has been a slower process than anticipated to turn the numbers from an ongoing net increase to a net decrease and as a result the numbers of LAC along with all of the inherent budget pressures have continued to increase throughout 2018. Despite the ongoing increase in numbers of LAC CYPS has been successful in sustaining the number of LAC placed within a family based setting at c82%.

This report will set out the strategies currently being implemented to better manage this demand and financial pressure and provide some assessment of their impact. It will also outline some future plans and hopefully provide the necessary re-assurance that there can be no doubt that each and every child in the care of RMBC is looked after because there is no viable alternative at that time and that every opportunity is being taken to support children into leaving care at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendations Improving Lives Select Commission is recommended to note the contents of this report and raise any queries of challenges it deems appropriate.

List of Appendices Included LAC and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy 2017-20

Background Papers None

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

This report is to be considered by Improving Lives Select Commission in October.

Council Approval Required No

Exempt from the Press and Public No

Demand Management and Looked After Children (LAC) Sufficiency

1. Recommendations

1.1. Improving Lives Select Commission is recommended to note the contents of this report and raise any queries of challenges it deems appropriate.

2. Background

2.1. The numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) have increased from 488 at the end of 2016/17 and from 590 in January 2018 to 651 by the end of August. Whilst this is reflective of a national trend of increasing numbers of children in care the rate of increase within Rotherham is even more marked. The reasons for this are well known and include:-

- A legacy of poor practice that led to Ofsted finding CYPS to be an 'Inadequate' service. A senior management review of practice identified that many children had been left in unsafe situations and as a result the number of Care Order applications increased quite significantly over a relatively short period of time.
- As an 'Inadequate' local authority senior managers established a very prescriptive process and structure to ensure that drift was addressed and that plans to remove children from risk were implemented in a much more timely manner. It has been identified that whilst both this culture and the current structure of CYPS was essential in order to support the improvement journey they were very much 'of their time' and both are currently undergoing internal challenge and review.
- The Complex Abuse investigation in respect of one large extended family contributed in itself to c 45 children becoming looked after. There may be some variance in respect of the previously reported figures regarding the Complex Abuse process but this is because the circumstances being experienced by these families is extremely fluid and susceptible to continuous change.

2.2. As a result the provision of placements has not been able to keep pace with this increased demand and the reliance on commissioned placements (Independent Fostering Agencies/IFAs and Out of Authority Children's Homes/ OoAs) has increased from 48.3% (293 of 607 children) in January to 52.2% (340 of 651 children) in August. Of more concern, this has increased from 43% at the end of 2016/17 when only 211 of 488 LAC were in commissioned placements.

2.3. Both the increase in LAC numbers and increased reliance on commissioned placements present the most significant budget pressure currently being faced by CYPS. As at the 28th August 2018 the budget projection for OoAs was £12.3M for 62 placements at an overspend of £3m and for IFAs was £11.5M for 278 placements at an overspend of £3.7M. As a result if current

practice is perpetuated the current £6.7M overspend is likely only to increase over the course of the lifetime of the Sufficiency Strategy.

2.4. Within this, however, there are some grounds for cautious optimism that ‘the tide is beginning to turn’ as based on the following evidence:-

- In the first 5 months of 2018 the average net monthly increase in LAC numbers was 9.4. In the following 4 months this had reduced to 3. Whilst this can give cause to some degree of optimism this has to be tempered with the fact that a couple of large sibling groups being admitted to care can easily reverse this improving trend.
- Over the same period the average age of admission of a child to care reduced from 8.8 years in the first 5 months of the year to 6.5 in the following 4 months. This is relevant as performance data evidences that the younger a child is admitted to care the shorter their time spent in care, the lower their average placement costs and the sooner they are likely to be supported to a permanence placement.
- In 2017/18 the average number of care proceedings instigated per month was 19.5. Thus far in 2018/19 this has reduced to an average of 15.4.

2.5. Whilst it may be a truism, it is clear from this evidence that the best way to achieve better placement sufficiency is by taking a two pronged approach; work strategically to safely reduce the numbers of LAC by reducing admissions and accelerating discharges from care (reduce demand) and work more forensically to increase the availability of in-house placements (increase supply).

3. Key Issues

In respect of reducing demand the following initiatives are being implemented:-

a) Increasing Senior Management Oversight

3.1. Out of the 337 admissions to care between June 2017 and May 2018, 127 were managed by the Duty and Assessment Service which was 38% of the total admissions to care over this period and arguably this is more than one would expect from the ‘front-door’.

3.2. This can be partly attributed to the fact that, in order to satisfy Ofsted that the previously identified practice shortfalls of drift and delay that left too many children at risk, a particular practice was developed in order to evidence better reviews of risk and prompt decision making. However, this practice was very much ‘of its time’ and as a ‘Good’ organisation there has been some recognition that senior managers can now allow teams to intervene more imaginatively to implement more creative solutions to a family’s presenting issues that are outside of the care system. This has had such an impact that over the course of the past 3 months only 7 of the 64 admissions being progressed by the Duty and Assessment Service (10%) and 5 of those

children admitted to care as part of an innovative intervention that led to them being returned home within 2 weeks of admission. In addition to this, the responsibility for ratifying all admissions to care has been delegated to one named Head of Service in order to support greater consistency in the decision making process.

b) Right Child Right Care Project

3.3. The Right Child Right Care (RCRC) work continues to progress with 80 of the initial target 221 children in a work-stream having already been discharged from care which is 36% of the original cohort. In addition a further 55 plans (25% of the work-stream cohort) are deemed to be 'on track', 19 plans are yet to be confirmed (9%) and 67 plans are no longer in scope (30%). These out of scope plans are due to carers not wishing to progress to permanence due to the young person experiencing an unsettled period, them not wanting to offer permanence in this way or them simply wanting to remain part of the fostering community. Despite this the project is on track to achieve its ultimate target given that the court process induced time lag will mean that most plans were always intended for completion towards the end of the year.

3.4. In addition, due to the 'ripple effect' arising from RCRC, a further 21 children not in a work-stream have also been discharged from care.

3.5. Phase 2 of RCRC has been initiated with 365 children being considered in the very broad scope for a future discharge from care. This includes 138 LAC in the same placement for 18 months with a potential for an SGO, 9 children subject of S20 and 43 children subject of Placement with Parents Regulations, Regulation 24 (Family and Friends) foster placements. It is planned that over the next 2 months Team Managers and IROs will review these cases so the cohort can be formalised and RCRC phase 2 launched in January 2019

c) Edge of Care Panel

3.6. The Edge of Care Service has been reporting on its performance since April 2018 and between then and the end of July has supported an average of 62 children each month over an average of 115 days. The Edge of Care Panel meets on a weekly basis and on average discusses 6 families in order to match them to the most appropriate form of available support which can include a referral to the Edge of Care Team, Multi-Systemic Therapy, a referral back to Early Help, Family Group Conferencing or a more bespoke package of support.

3.7. In terms of outcomes, of the 98 cases that have closed thus far 18% have had a positive outcome in that the level of intervention was stepped down for example from a child protection plan to a child in need plan. Conversely 14% of cases had a negative outcome in terms of a 'step-up' case while for 68% there was no change although this in itself is a positive outcome as this meant that the young person was at no more risk of becoming looked after than at the start of the intervention and so cost avoidance had been

achieved. In addition to this the Edge of Care Team has been actively involved in supporting 6 LAC to return to the care of their families or to supported accommodation from OoA placements achieving cost avoidance of £806,000 assuming the cost avoidance (less cost of new provision) would be recurrent until the young peoples' 18th birthday.

d) Coming Home Project

3.8. This project is being jointly implemented between the LAC Service and Leaving Care Service and involves a formal review of the Out of Authority Placements for 16 and 17 year olds in order to assess which of the cohort may be appropriate for a more timely planned and supported step-down to semi-independent living. Of the 63 young people in an OoA at the start of the process 23 have already been stepped down bring a net cost reduction on the Out of Authority placement budget of £2.52M. There remains a further 11 young people in scope who will be subject of a further review of their transition plan over the course of the next 6 months and these plans will be project managed within the RCRC Performance Management clinics.

e) Placement Commissioning

3.9. CYPS Commissioning Service has developed a contractual arrangement whereby it has block booked a 3 bed children's home with a private provider within the RMBC boundary. The cost for these three placements is set at £10k per week at a saving of £800 per week on the standard White Rose contractual cost for this type of children's home with a full year effect of £41,600. However, it is reasonable to anticipate that the placement costs savings will be even more significant than this given that this facility can be utilised for a 'step down' from more expensive OoA placements to semi-independence or foster care. One of the young people placed in this children's home is in fact in the process of stepping down to an IFA from their previous OoA placement that was some distance from Rotherham and cost £4,495 per week bringing a full year cost saving of £60k.

3.10. In addition to this, the Quality Assurance Framework implemented by the Commissioning Service which involves planned visits to placements to assess the quality of provision and to ensure all commissioned services are being provided to the required standard has also had a positive impact on the relationship with providers. This has resulted in a discernible improvement in the quality standards and has enable CYPS to challenge providers in a far more timely manner. It has also led to other block booking arrangements being made, improved the support provided to enable young people to progress more quickly towards a foster placement or semi-independence and has encouraged the providers to more readily engage in profile sharing events with the IFAs in order to encourage and identify foster placement matches for children in OoA placements.

3.11. Whilst the impact of this refined commissioning process is difficult to gauge there can be some degree of confidence that it is having a positive impact on the demand management pressures currently being experienced by CYPS.

f) Increase In-House Foster Care Provision

3.12. The recruitment team is projected to meet, if not surpass its target of approving 25 new foster families for 2018/19. To date, there have been 7 new foster families approved, 2 more assessments with a Panel date booked for consideration and a further 12 assessments ongoing. In addition there are 2 IFA carers currently in the process of transferring to RMBC and 3 more carers who have had a positive initial visit and who will commence their training in November. This means that over the course of the financial year there will be a projected minimum of 26 new foster families recruited.

3.13. In addition to this the Fostering Service are performance managed in respect of the placements that are 'on-hold'. The reasons for these void placements can include illness, bereavement, being in a safeguarding process, lack of bedroom space due to birth children returning home, being on holiday or simply needing a break. At the start of the financial year there were 36 such void placements but by September these had been successfully managed down to 17 placements. The need to maximise the use of available placements has to be continually counterbalanced by the competing need not to over-pressurise foster carers to take additional placements which can impact negatively on retention issues.

3.14. Foster care recruitment continues to be the most significant challenge faced by the LAC Service. The processes within the recruitment team have been significantly improved to ensure that unnecessary delay does not lead to prospective foster carers withdrawing from the process or approaching other agencies. All expressions of interest are followed up on a twice weekly basis until a decision to apply or withdraw is made and all uncommitted applicants are 'kept warm' with them, for example, being included in the distribution list of the Fostering Association 'e' newsletter. A Virtual Team has also been established in order to minimise delays in assessments being progressed which is a cost effective measure given an assessment will cost only £1,900 to commission whereas the average cost of an IFA will be £850 per week. In addition to this the following initiatives have been instigated:-

- Refer a Friend which is available for any Council employee who will receive £250 for every prospective carer referred and a further £250 at the point they are approved.
- Mockingbird – At present two hubs are in place with a third being planned for December. This hub and spoke model of foster care support is designed to improve placement stability, reduce the reliance on IFA or OoA placements and improve foster carer retention by strengthening the sense of a fostering community. There is tangible evidence that can demonstrate the investment into this project is having a real and beneficial impact on placement stability by virtue of the high levels of peer support and planned respite provision available. As the project continues to grow this should also impact positively on the numbers of children requiring IFA foster care or out of authority residential

placements. In addition the feedback from the foster carers involved conveys a positive message about the future impact on foster carer retention.

- Muslim Foster Carer Project – At present there are up to 59 LAC of the Muslim faith but only 3 Muslim foster families which results in less than appropriate matching processes. As a result RMBC has successfully engaged in the Fostering Network Muslim Foster Care Recruitment Scheme with the stated objective of increasing the numbers of foster carers of the Muslim faith. As a direct consequence there are already a couple of local ‘champions’ including an elected member who have facilitated access to Mosques in Rotherham. Following a successful ‘pilot’ for one of particular LAC, it is planned to buddy-up each child of Muslim faith who expresses a wish to be involved with a host family in order to help them celebrate Eid in a more culturally appropriate way. The intended consequence of this is that as these host families encounter a looked after child and recognise what they have to offer they may develop an interest in the general fostering role and that the general awareness of the need for foster carers from the Muslim community will be enhanced.
 - Challenge 63 – in which all elected members are invited to sign the relaunched Challenge 63 Fostering Charter and its three pledges:
 1. Participate in one fostering recruitment activity – leafleting; social media; parish newsletter articles, have fostering conversations.
 2. Leaflet drop – distribute 500 leaflets within their ward – door-to-door or at groups.
 3. Refer one potential foster carer – even if every elected member only made a successful referral every other year the recruitment of foster carers would receive a significant boost.
 - Social Pedagogy (phase 2) - Once registered as a charitable organisation the Fostering Association will be able to apply for funding to secure the Social Pedagogy training for foster carers which will also serve to support better foster care recruitment and placement stability.
- 3.15. These initiatives have yielded an average of 18 enquiries per month so far this year. Enquiries dipped in July and August which is reflective of the usual seasonal trends. The marketing and communications team will continue to work closely with the recruitment manager to review and adjust the marketing plan as required.
- 3.16. In addition, retention is becoming an increasing concern and this is going to be an ongoing pressure given the increasingly aging demography of our foster carers. Over the course of the financial year there have been 11 foster carers who have resigned or have been de-registered with 5 more foster carers pending discussions at Panel in October. However, 3 of these foster

carers had not provided any placement since the summer of 2017 so the impact of their withdrawal from the fostering role will be less significant than would appear on face value. Of this reduced fostering capacity there have been:-

- 6 foster carers who have been resigned due to practice/safeguarding issues. Whilst most of these have resigned when challenged regarding certain aspects of their caring practice that they have been unwilling or unable to address, there have also been some carers for whom de-registration was identified as the likely outcome from the investigation. However, within this there have also been some concerns raised by carers regarding the prolonged nature of the LADO process which has had a significant impact on their family life. As a result the Head of Service and Service Manager responsible have met with the Service Manager responsible for the LADO process in order to expedite the process as much as possible and to establish a better support mechanism for foster carers.
- 1 foster carer who was de-registered as a result of safeguarding concerns.
- 1 foster carer who resigned as a Family and Friends carer following their successful application for an SGO. The potential success of the Right Child Right Care project does present a risk to the number of foster carers within Rotherham as more carers 'convert' to SGO carers and this narrative will have to be factored into future performance reports.
- 3 foster carers who have resigned due to personal issues or a change in their personal circumstances.

3.17. Although the back-story may be clearly understood, the fact that the recruitment of new foster carers is currently only just offsetting 'loss' of existing carers remains a significant concern. As a result, the Fostering Service has successfully secured a place on the Fostering Network Foster Carer Retention Programme which will hopefully support the net increase of foster carers over the coming years.

3.18. As this report has demonstrated, the initiatives put in place to reduce the numbers of LAC appear to be beginning to have some impact. However, the raft of initiatives designed to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers does not, as yet, appear to be having a similar impact. Until this also significantly improves, it is unlikely that RMBC will be successfully ensure that the demand management and placement sufficiency objectives that are key to both better financial management and the better outcomes for our looked after children will be achieved.

4. Options considered and recommended proposal

4.1. Improving Lives Select Commission is recommended to note the comments of this report and agree its submission to the Improving Lives Select Committee subject to any changes or additions it deems appropriate.

5. Consultation

5.1. The strategies outlined in this report have been developed with the consultation and contribution of a range of partners including the Fostering Service, the Commissioning and Placements Team, the Performance and Quality Team and the Communications Team.

6. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

6.1. The Placement and Sufficiency Strategy is currently in the second year of a four year implementation plan. Ian Walker, Head of Service, is responsible for the implementation of this plan.

7. Financial and Procurement Implications

7.1 The original budget for 2018-19 was sufficient to fund 480 looked after children placements, based on reducing reliance on out of authority and independent foster care placements. The budget shown below reflects the investment made in the service for demand and other pressures, as well as the savings reductions that were required as part of the investment bids and medium term financial strategy savings.

7.2 The current Children in Care budget position is as follows (£m):

	Budget	Actual	Variance
Children In Care	29.8	42.3	12.5

8. Legal Implications

8.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

9. Human Resources Implications

9.1. There are no HR implications arising from this report.

10. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

10.1. By implementing better demand management and sufficiency practices more looked after children will be supported to be placed closer to Rotherham and in family based settings which in turn will increase their chances of achieving good outcomes.

11. Equalities and Human Rights Implications

11.1. The Demand Management and Sufficiency Strategy is designed to promote the equalities for looked after children by supporting them to better outcomes. This, in turn, will be established by promoting their right to a family life.

12. Implications for Partners and Other Directorates

12.1. As more children are supported to live within the RMBC boundary there is likely to be an increased demand for school placements and health services including CAMHS (Rotherham Therapeutic Team), GP and dental services. There may also be increased demand on internal partners such as the Virtual School, the Edge of Care Service and on Supervising Social Workers. Partner agencies may also be commissioned to provide enhanced levels of intervention in order to support children stepping down from OoA placements and to more local foster placements.

13. Risks and Mitigation

13.1. There is a risk that the numbers of LAC continue to increase and that the reliance on IFA and OoA placements will also increase accordingly. This will perpetuate the budget pressures being exerted on the service as a whole.

13.2. It is respectfully suggested that the strategies outlined in this report are the most appropriate means of mitigating these risks and that they should be given every opportunity and support to have the desired impact.

14. Accountable Officer(s)

Approvals obtained from:-

	Named Officer	Date
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services	Patricia Philipson	26/9/18
Assistant Director of Legal Services	Neil Concannon	26/9/18
Head of Procurement (if appropriate)	N/a	
Head of Human Resources (if appropriate)	Amy Leech	26/9/18

Ian Walker – Head of Service (LAC, Care Leavers and Edge of Care Service)

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