<div style="text-align: center;">**Improving Lives Summary Report**</div>

1.	Date of meeting:	6th November 2018
2.	Title:	**Demand Management and Placement Sufficiency**
3.	Directorate:	**Children & Young People's Services (CYPS)**

1.   Background

The ongoing increase in numbers of looked after children (LAC) of 116 or 21% over the past 12 months places the most significant financial pressure of the CYPS budget. The reasons for this increase are well researched and well known and include:-

- There is a national trend for the numbers of LAC to increase across the UK and whilst RMBC is at the higher end of this increase it is far from being unique.

- Historical poor social work practice that left many children in unsafe and inappropriate situations. Many of these situations have been re-assessed leading to care proceedings being initiated.

- The Complex Abuse investigation resulting in many children becoming looked after.

- A level of intervention that enabled CYPS to improve its Ofsted rating from 'Inadequate' to 'Good'. Whilst Ofsted and two Peer Reviews have found that no children present as being in care inappropriately it is arguable that CYPS implemented something of a risk averse style of practice. As a 'Good' organisation there is increased scope for CYPS to manage risk in a different manner without necessarily resorting to placing children in care.

- Poor permanence planning that meant many children remained in care for longer than was absolutely necessary.

As a result of this increase in LAC numbers there has been an increased reliance on private sector residential (OoA) and fostering placements which serves only to increase the pressures on the budget. However, the increasing numbers of LAC across the UK has meant that the placement market is increasingly saturated meaning in turn that children from Rotherham are at increasing risk of having to be placed some distance from the local area. In doing so there is a consequential risk of worsening outcomes for these young people due to more distant social work oversight and challenge of placements and a loss of control of educational and therapeutic services.

Because of this, the issue of demand management and placement sufficiency is a significant one that has led to the development of a robust strategy that is beginning to evidence some impact.

2. What's Working Well?

There are some grounds for cautious optimism that 'the tide is beginning to turn' in respect of the increasing numbers of LAC 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.
- 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.

In addition to this there are signs that, taking the lead from senior managers, the culture and practice within the work-force is beginning to change. For example the numbers of children admitted to care by the Duty and Assessment Service has significantly reduced due to far more rigorous senior management oversight and challenge.

3. What are we Worried About?

Whilst there are grounds for cautiuous optimism in respect of the demand for placements there are ongoing concerns regarding the challenge to increase the supply of in-house placements. Whilst recruitment looks likely to surpass the target of 25 new foster families there is an issue regarding retention of foster carers with up to 16 carers resigning or being de-registered over the same period. The demography of the foster carer population within Rotherham reflects that of many local authorities in that many carers will have a limited career left in fostering. In addition more robust safeguarding processes have ensured several inappropriately skilled carers have been de-registered.

Thus, whilst the Fostering Service has become far more able to manage void placements the numbers of children living with in-house carers at 189 has declined in proportion to those living with Independent Foster Agency carers (IFAs) at 277 as of the 1st October 2018.

In addition to this, whilst the Recruitment Team are far more adept at progressing assessments and 'keeping warm' those potential carers not yet fully committed to the fostering role, the expressions of interest being made to the Fostering Service remain stubbornly low. For example, there were only 14 such enquiries in September which is too low given the current conversion rate of 12-15%. As a result there is a concern that the current marketing strategy is not working effectively and this is currently being revised in order to make it significantly more targeted towards the most receptive audience.

4. What are we going to do about it?

In addition to theis there are a number of initiatives and projects being implemented with the intention of both reducing the demand for placements and increasing the supply of in-house foster carers :-

- Right Child Right Care – designed to support more LAC to permanence in a more timely way and thus reduced the period of time spent looked after.

- Edge of Care Service – this is beginning to have an evidenced impact on supporting more young people to remain living with their families and in supporting LAC through plans to return home.
- Coming Home – targeting 16 and 17 year olds to return to RMBC from Out of Authority residential placements to supported/semi-independent accommodation where it is safe to do so.
- Mockingbird – a hub and spoke model of foster care where carers provide enhanced support to achive more placement stability and less call of IFA placements.
- STAR parties (Start Thinking About Recruitment) where existing foster carers host coffe mornings/social events and invite any associates they think may be interested with a view to support them into expressions of interest.
- The Fostering Network Retention policy – from which better retention practices should develop.
- The Muslim Foster Care project – by initiating a process in which people from the local Muslim community are encouraged to 'host' a looked after child during Eid it is anticipated that more foster carers could be recruited from this part of Rotherham's community.
- Challenge 63 – in which elected members will be invited to meet three challenges to support the recruitment of foster carers
- Social Pedagogy – a style of social work intervention designed to support greater placement stability and therefore redice the use of IFA/OoA placements.

As a result it can be seen that there is no 'magic bullet' that will address the dual challenges of market demand and placement sufficiency. However, it is hope that the full suite of service developments and

5. Name and contact details

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