

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Corporate Parenting Panel
2.	Date:	21st October, 2014
3.	Title:	Sufficiency Strategy Progress Report September 2014
4.	Directorate:	Children and Young People’s Services

5. Summary

5.1 This report aims to provide an update on the progress the Local Authority is making in implementing the strategic recommendations and achieving the goals identified in the Sufficiency Strategy 2014 -17.

6. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Corporate Parenting Panel:

6.1 Note the content of the report and the progress made in implementing the Sufficiency Strategy recommendations and the progress made towards achieving the goals set out in the strategy.

7. Proposals and Details

7.1 Introduction

It is a legislative requirement for local authorities to provide sufficient local accommodation for looked after children. The Sufficiency Strategy 2014 -17 was drafted in January 2014. The strategy sets out a number of strategic recommendations that the Local Authority should implement in Rotherham in order to improve its capacity to provide sufficient accommodation locally and identifies a set of goals it aims to achieve. The Sufficiency Strategy document was considered at Corporate Parenting Panel and the Improving Lives Committee previously. The full strategy document, which has been updated from the original draft, is attached to the progress report as Appendix 1.

7.2 Strategic Recommendations and Progress Made

The strategic recommendations identified in the strategy were as follows:

7.2.1 Recommendation 1:

To develop the Fostering Plus scheme to recruit fee paid and therapeutically supported foster carers for older children and those with complex needs. Develop the scheme so that it caters for a wide range of specialist need, to include, for example, sexualised young people, children at risk of sexual exploitation, young people remanded to local authority care, parent and child placements, disabled children.

Progress Made:

The Fostering Plus scheme has been developed and approved for implementation by the Directorate Leadership Team and the Corporate Parenting Panel. Resources are in place and a dedicated social worker in the Fostering Service is leading the work. One Fostering Plus carer has been approved with three further applications in assessment. Two of these will be presented to the Fostering Panel for approval in October.

7.2.2 Recommendation 2:

To review and revise the existing payment for skills scheme for in-house foster carers so that it more closely rewards carers for caring for children we most need placements for rather than skills payments being determined by experience and training record.

Progress Made:

Work has yet to be completed and approved on this recommendation. Amending the Payment for Skills Scheme will require additional funds to be identified. Work will be ongoing to draft a proposal that will evidently pay for itself through increasing carers capacity to reduce spend on independent agency fostering placements.

7.2.3 Recommendation 3:

To review the remit and size of Silverwood children's home. Options will include a reduction in capacity and maximum duration of stay from 20 to 12 weeks or change of remit to long term.

Progress Made:

A proposal to change the remit of Silverwood Children's Home from offering emergency and short term care to offering long term placements has been developed and approved by the Directorate Leadership Team. The proposal will lead to more appropriate emergency accommodation being provided through in-house and independent agency foster care and provide an additional five long term residential placements local and in borough. There is a demand for more local long term residential placements as evidenced by the high number of young people placed in independent residential care out of borough.

7.2.4 Recommendation 4:

To engage with the market and develop smarter commissioning to ensure independent providers make provision available in or very close to Rotherham. In particular to explore the possibility of residential providers opening new homes for our use in or very close to Rotherham

Progress Made:

Commissioners have communicated the Local Authority's needs for more local independent residential and fostering provision. Since the drafting of the Sufficiency Strategy one new independent residential children's home has opened and been used by Rotherham. However more work and progress is needed in this area.

7.2.5 Recommendation 5:

To establish smarter commissioning of out of borough placements which should involve liaison with multi-agency services in the commissioned placement area, so as to secure suitable therapeutic, health, and education services, and include a location risk assessment in relation to the risk and prevalence of child sexual exploitation.

Progress Made:

Work is currently ongoing to establish more robust processes for consulting with multi-agency services in local authority areas where out of borough placements are being commissioned, in line with recent legislation and guidance. The Virtual School Head is involved in developing new processes for having an involvement in assessing education placements for children placed out of borough.

7.2.6 Recommendation 6:

To maintain investment in the Adoption Service and to recruit an increased number of adoptive families both from within Rotherham and the region, with a view to providing families for our own looked after children and those of other local authorities regionally. To use innovative marketing and recruitment activity to recruit adopters for difficult to place children and continue on-going use of new family finding events such as consortium wide Adoption Activity Days.

Progress Made:

Additional staff employed temporarily for one year in 2013/14 in the Adoption Service and funded by the Adoption Reform Grant have been retained for 2014/15 despite a cut in the Adoption Reform Grant of over £700,000.

The Adoption Service set a target to recruit 42 adoptive families in 2014/15 compared to the 31 approved in 2013/14. As at September 2014 the Service had approved 15 adoptive families in 2014/15 and had a further 20 in assessment. This is currently slightly below being on target for 42 but on target to surpass last year's 31. The service needs to attract 7 or more applications in the next month to be in a position to meet the target for 42. Additional marketing activity to attract interest has been put in place.

7.2.7 Recommendation 7:

To establish a Fostering to Adopt scheme to enable some children to be placed with prospective adoptive families before a court has granted a Placement Order, thereby meaning they will begin living with their forever family at a younger age and begin making attachments earlier.

Progress Made:

A Fostering to Adopt process has been developed, approved and established. Children are identified as suitable for Fostering to Adopt via the legal gateway Multi-Agency Support Panel or in looked after children reviews. The Adoption Service is leading the way on Fostering to Adopt in the Yorkshire and Humberside region and has to date placed three children in Fostering to Adopt placements.

7.2.8 Recommendation 8:

To review and potentially revise the financial and practical support arrangements for Special Guardians and Residence Order holders to ensure that we are doing all that we can to promote these legal forms of permanence.

Progress Made:

Work on this recommendation has yet to commence but will do so in the second half of 2014/15. Development on Fostering, Adoption and Residential Provision at Silverwood has taken priority in the first half of the year

7.2.9 Recommendation 9:

To deliver education and guidance to social workers about the duty to place with extended family members where possible, and explore any other potential reasons for the very low numbers of connected persons/relative foster carers in Rotherham.

Progress Made:

The legal gateway panel, Multi-Agency Support Panel(MASP) has increased the robustness of challenge around extended family member options and the requirement for pro-active identification of and engagement with extended family members and subsequent viability assessments to rule possibilities in or out.

7.2.10 Recommendation 10:

To promote the existing Supported Lodgings scheme to existing foster carers to increase the number of care leavers who can stay with their foster carers after turning 18.

Progress Made:

The Supported Lodging/Staying Put Co-coordinator has been located within the Fostering Team so as to make better links with the service and existing foster carers who may want to convert into Staying Put carers when young people in their care reach 18. More carers have become Staying Put carers over the last six months and there are now 13 young people in Supported Lodgings/Staying Put arrangements.

7.3 Progress Made Against Goals Identified in the Strategy

7.3.1 To provide a sufficient range and number of local placements for Rotherham's looked after children that contribute to improved outcomes and increased value for money.

Progress Made:

- The in-house foster carer pool grew by 19 foster carers in 2013/14 compared to 2012/13. As at September 2014 176 children were placed with in-house foster carers compared to 150 in January 2014.
- The number of in-house adopters approved increased from 18 in 2012/13 to 31 in 2013/14, with a stretch target of 42 set for 2014/15.
- The number of independent residential homes located in Rotherham Borough has increased from none to one.
- Plans have been approved to change Silverwood Local Authority Children's Home from emergency provision to long term provision so as to provide more long term residential placements in borough.
- The number of Supported Lodgings/Staying Put Carers has increased from 5 accommodating 5 care leavers in January 2014 to 13 carers accommodating 13 care leavers as at September 2014.

- Increased in-house fostering and adoption placement resources are contributing to significant cost efficiencies and cost avoidance.
- The plans for using Silverwood as a long term home will increase the occupancy rates in the home and therefore reduce the weekly unit cost per placement.

7.3.2 To reduce the number of children placed outside of the borough and at distance from their families and community.

- Of children placed with in-house foster carers, the percentage placed in borough has increased from 88.5%, that is 133 out of 150 children, in January 2014, to 90%, 158 out of 176 children, as at September 2014.
- At the end of January 2014, 14 out of 134 independent sector placements were in borough. That is 7.5%, compared to an improved 19 out of 137, or 14% that were in borough as at September 2014.

7.3.3 To ensure that where children are placed out of the borough, they are able to access education, health and therapeutic services to meet their needs, via sound and improved commissioning practices.

- In line with recent changes made to care planning, placement and case review guidance, processes and checklists are being developed to ensure that consultation is carried out with children's services in the potential host Authority and key agencies in the area such as the CCG, Virtual Heads, CAMHS etc.. to ensure effective planning, engagement and information sharing takes place with services likely to be required to meet a child's needs.

7.3.4 To increase the proportion of children in family placements and reduce the proportion placed in residential care.

- At the beginning of January 2014 77.2% of the looked after population was placed in a family based (fostering or adoption) placement. At the beginning of September 2014 this had steadily increased to 82.2%, a very positive improvement of 5%.

7.3.5 To increase in-house fostering provision.

- In-house foster carer numbers increased by 19 in 2013/14 compared to 2012/13. This is part of an expansion in foster carer numbers of 50 over three years up April 2014. Numbers have stabilised between April and September.

- The number of foster children placed with in-house foster carers increased from 150 in January 2014 to 176 as at September 2014 with a high of 186 children placed with in-house foster carers in August 2014.
- The percentage of looked after children placed with in-house foster carers increased from 39.2% (146 out of 372 LAC) at end of December 2013 to 46.2%(187 out of 405 children) at its highest in August 2014, a very positive improvement of 7%.

7.3.6 To reduce the number of children placed both in independent residential and independent foster care.

- The number of children placed with independent fostering agency foster carers reduced from 108 at end of December 2013 to 103 as at beginning of September 2014. The service was successful in reducing the numbers further to a low of 97 in June 2014.
- At the same time as numbers of independent fostering agency placements have reduced, the looked after population has increased. The additional capacity needed has largely been provided by the in-house Fostering Service. Of all children in foster placements, the percentage placed with in-house carers, as opposed to independent fostering agency carers, increased from 57.5% at end of December 2013 to 64.5% at end of August 2014. This is a positive improvement of 7%.

7.3.7 To increase placement stability for looked after children.

- Long term placement stability as measured by National Indicator 63 improved in 2013/14 compared to 2012/13. The percentage of children in care for at least 2.5 years who had been in their current placement for at least the last two years increased from 64% in 2012/13 to 67.9% in 2013/14, an increase of 3.9%.

7.3.8 To achieve the most secure form of permanence for children without unnecessary delay in particular through Adoption, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders.

- The Local Authority performs very well in securing adoption for a high number and percentage of children who cannot return home to birth parents or extended family as detailed by the figure below
- Timeliness of adoptions is improving significantly as detailed in the figures below.
- The early permanence initiative, Fostering to Adopt, has been established in Rotherham and three children have so far been placed in Fostering to Adopt placements

- Special guardianship and Child Arrangement Orders are promoted in Rotherham but numbers are lower than in other authorities. Work will be undertaken to explore this and to develop further actions to address it.

7.3.9 To increase the percentage of children adopted from care and to improve the timeliness of such adoptions.

- The number of children adopted from care increased from 35 in 2012/13 to 36 in 2013/14.
- The percentage of children leaving care via adoption increased from 25% in 2012/13 to 26.7% in 2013/14. The 25% achieved in 2012/13 was very significantly higher than the national average and most statistical neighbours and further improvement on this in 2013/14 is excellent performance.
- Timeliness for children adopted and placed for adoption is improving considerably.
- On Adoption Scorecard Measure 1, the number of days between a child becoming looked after and being placed with an adoptive family reduced from 659 days up to 2013 to 634 for children adopted in 2013/14.
- For children adopted between April 2014 and September 2014, 16 out of 21 children met the new Government target for Scorecard Measure 1 of 487 days, which is good and improved performance against an average of 634 days for all children adopted in 2013/14.
- Of the 10 children matched and placed for adoption (but not necessarily adopted) between April and September 2014, all 10 met the 487 day target for measure 1.
- On Adoption Scorecard Measure 2, the number of days between a child being made subject to a Placement Order and the Agency Decision on a match reduced from 309 days up to 2013 to 284 days in 2013/14.
- For children adopted between April 2014 and September 2014, 4 out of 21 met the new Government target of 121 days for Scorecard Measure 2
- For children matched and placed for adoption (but not necessarily adopted) between April and September 2014, 7 out of 10 met the target of 121 days for measure 2. That is an increase from 20% for children adopted this year to 70% for children matched, indicating the Local Authority is succeeding in reducing delay.

7.3.10 To increase the number of care leavers who are offered the opportunity to stay living with their foster carer in a Staying Put/Supported Lodgings arrangement after they turn 18.

- The Leaving Care Accommodation Service came back in-house on April 1st 2014 and the Supported Lodgings/Staying Put Coordinator has been located within the Fostering Service to best promote and facilitate the conversion of existing foster carers into Supported Lodgings/Staying Put carers for looked after children once they turn 18.
- The number of Supported Lodgings/Staying Put arrangements has increased from 5 in January 2014 to 13 as at September 2014.

8. Finance

8.1 Cost efficiencies and cost avoidance is being realised from the increase in the number of approved in-house foster carers and adopters.

8.2 The average weekly unit cost for a foster placement in the independent sector is £795, The average weekly unit cost for an in-house foster placement is below £400. Increasing the proportion of children placed in in-house foster carer compared to independent agency foster care has achieved significant cost avoidance.

8.3. Each adoptive placement commissioned from another local authority or a voluntary adoption agency costs £27,000. Increasing the number of adopters approved in-house means less funds are used commissioning adoptive placements from other agencies. In 2013/14 the Local Authority commissioned 29 adoptive placements from other agencies and provided 2 of its own to other local authorities. The Local Authority has set a target to approve 42 adoptive families in 2014/14 compared to 31 last year, to commission no more than 20 adoptive placements from other agencies and to provide no less than 5 adoptive placements for other local authorities.

The Local Authority is on target to achieve this currently. This will mean a difference in the balance of adoptive placements commissioned and provided of minus 15 in 2014/15 compared to a balance of minus 27 in 2013/14. This will result in reduced spending this year compared to last of £324,000.

8.4 Achieving higher occupancy rates at a Silverwood Children's Home offering long term placements that would otherwise be provided in the independent sector will achieve cost avoidance of £207,000 over a full year.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

9.1 The current financial climate and resource limitations mean that it is more important than ever the spending is justified and best value is achieved. However, continued investment in in-house Fostering and Adoption Services is absolutely essential to achieve compete with independent and voluntary sector placements services as in-house placements can be both high quality and delivered and significantly better value.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

10.1 It is a legislative requirement set out in the 'Sufficiency Duty ' that all local authorities provide sufficient local accommodation for looked after children, and compliance with this is scrutinised through inspection by Ofsted

10.2 The Local Authority is most unlikely to have success in improving outcomes for looked after children if it cannot provide suitable and sufficient accommodation locally for them.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

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