



Report of the Director of Children's Services

Executive Board

Date: 2nd September

Subject: The Placement of Children in Care in Leeds – A Strategy for 2008-2010

Electoral Wards Affected:

All wards

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

Executive Summary

1.0 The report details the proposed strategy for the development of improved placements for Looked After Children. It outlines the background to the strategy; the principles that underpin it and the outcomes necessary to achieve the strategic objectives of :

- Creating a wider range of placements that are more personalised to meet the needs of more challenging young people
- Providing these placements cost effectively
- Developing a budget to support placements
- Reducing the number of children looked after by the Local Authority

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 Children in care have told the Government that being in the right placement is the thing that makes the single biggest difference to their lives.¹ This can only be achieved by having a range of high quality placements in the local area that are flexible and responsive to the needs of a changing population of children in care.² The Placement Strategy moves the Local Authority towards this objective.
- 1.2 The Care Matters agenda and key performance indicators³ require that there is a change in approach to the way in which accommodation for looked after children and young people is provided. It requires that the service builds a portfolio of different types of placements and accommodation that meet the needs of all children and young people in care in Leeds. The Strategy outlines the means by which this will be achieved. It signals a move away from group care towards individual placements for children and young people with the most complex needs. Funds released from de-commissioning residential placements will be used to build a budget that supports current placements and allows a small growth of use within the independent sector. It is envisaged that residential placements will reduce by approximately 20-24 in the next 18 months.

2.0 Background Information

- 2.1 Leeds has done extremely well in placing children in in-house and commissioned placements within the city boundaries. The fostering service currently provides placements for about 900 children whilst a further 130 young people are cared for in residential homes. The use of Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) was, until 2007, negligible and placements in external residential placements are exceptional. However the strategy of containing placements within in-house provision, whilst being wholly positive in respect of retaining children and young people within the city, has had unintended negative consequences that need to be addressed. The system has not been flexible enough to cope with sudden upturn or change in demand for placements and consequently is under considerable strain after a period in which the number of children in care has remained consistently high. The effects of this are seen primarily in three areas;
- Pressure on placements
 - Lack of individualised care placements
 - Insufficient support to kinship carers.
- 2.2 Firstly, pressure on the fostering service has built because demand for placements has been high at a time when there has been a small reduction in the number of carers caused by some carers not proceeding through the Payment for Skills assimilation process. Consequently placements come under pressure and have disrupted at an unacceptable rate leading to number of young people moving too often within the system. Furthermore the fostering service has not been able to offer placement choice.
- 2.2 Secondly, the system has not been responsive to the needs of young people who require an individualised approach e.g.

¹ Children's Messages on Care Children's Rights Director OFSTED 2007

² Care Matters: Time to deliver for children in care – an implementation plan HMG 2008

³ CH39, N165, DIS1115, PAF CFC24, PAF CFA4

- young people who are sexually predatory
- children with severe attachment disorders
- those with extremely challenging behaviour

who require single placements with carers trained and supported to adopt a particular approach and therapeutic input specifically designed to challenge the young person's behaviour and support the carer. Carers have been asked to manage high risk placements that break down, and young people have had numerous enforced moves around the system.

- 2.4 Thirdly, Care Matters restates and emphasises the important role of kinship care in an authority's placement strategy and places demands on the service it is not currently equipped to meet. For reasons outlined above the fostering service has struggled to properly support the growing requirements to promote, assess, support and monitor kinship carers and carers are left without an effective service.
- 2.5 Children & Young People's Social Care has recognised and responded to the pressures outlined above and has begun a process whereby a more responsive and flexible service can be provided. Securing funding for the implementation of the residential review in 2006/2007, the introduction of Payment for Skills for foster carers and additional workers for the fostering and adoption service in 2007/2008 and 2008/2009, coupled with the introduction of the framework contract for IFA has laid a strong foundation from which a placement strategy can be developed and the strategic objectives outlined below secured.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE PLACEMENT STRATEGY

- 2.6 The strategy is underpinned by the following principles derived from the documents cited above and the Service Improvement Plan.
- Placements will be within Leeds unless the needs of the child or young person determines otherwise.
 - Placements will be offered on the basis of a thorough assessment that has informed the decision making process.
 - Wherever it is in a child or young person's interest to return to a parent, reunification will be actively pursued and supported.
 - Short breaks will be used pro-actively to support families to care for children with complex needs and/or challenging behaviour
 - The value of family and friends will be recognised by promoting kinship care and keeping siblings together.
 - Personalisation of care will be promoted through offering a range of placements that are responsive to individual need.
 - Residential care will be a positive placement choice for some children and young people.
 - Placement stability (including education placements) will be promoted. Where a return home is not possible a placement that provides the possibility of care and support into adulthood will be sought.
 - The use of adoption, special guardianship and residence orders will be promoted.
 - Care leavers will be supported towards independence through a range of placements and high quality accommodation
 - The strategy is affordable

3.0 Main Issues

3.1 THE ELEMENTS OF THE PLACEMENT STRATEGY

Supporting a return to parents:

3.11 All placements, other than those defined as permanent, must be equipped to actively support the return of a child or young person to either or both parents

This will be achieved by

- Training foster carers and residential workers in promoting working relationships with parents and supporting positive contact for children and their families
- Promoting closer working relationships between Family Resources Centres and carers
- Promoting the role of Family Resource Centres in supporting re-unification
- Developing through Payment for Skills, a mechanism by which foster carers could take on a commissioned, short term role to support reunification
- Developing practice in residential care to support reunification
- Provide inter-agency support to reunification plans
- Ensuring a range of high quality short break placements are available

Promoting Kinship Care

3.12 Wherever possible when children and young people come into care, family members or friends should be supported to care for them. Where it is not in the child's best interest for them to return to either parent, kinship carers should be supported to become their permanent carers in whichever way is most appropriate.

This will be achieved by

- Utilising additional fostering service staff (as provided for within the 2008/09 budget) specifically to support kinship carers
- Devising training and support events specifically designed to meet the needs of kinship carer
- Monitoring performance indicators for children in kinship care to ensure that outcomes are at least as good as for those in other types of foster care.
- Ensuring that kinship carers have access to all the support available to other carers
- Promoting Special Guardianship and Residence Orders as a way of securing permanent placements for children & young people in kinship care placements

Developing the fostering service

3.13 The Leeds Fostering Service will provide placements for the majority of children and young people in care. Payment for Skills provides the basis for the service's development and improvement and has within its framework the capacity to innovate and create personalised care packages. The service needs a large pool of well trained and supported foster carers to enable it to provide an individualised response to children and young people with wide ranging needs up to and where required beyond the age of 18

This will be achieved by

- Agreeing the criteria for the use of PFS Level 3
- Ensuring that the foster care recruitment strategy is robust enough to maintain recruitment at a level that provides for turnover and ensures growth in targeted areas
- Defining the changes to the profile of carers required by the service for the next 2 years and targeting recruitment and foster carer development within PFS accordingly
- Developing the criteria and payment scheme for post 18 placements
- Developing a system to identify and plan for young people who may benefit from extended care
- Training placing Social Workers
- Providing training in line with the Children's Workforce Development Council's Guidance
- Creating a third fostering team to enhanced support to foster carers and the capacity of workers in the service to work more closely with colleagues in the area teams
- Promoting fostering within localities to ensure that children in foster care and their carers are able to benefit from extended services

Commissioning placements from independent providers

- 3.14 **It is recognised that in order to respond flexibly to the exceptional needs of some children and young people the capacity to buy placements from independent providers is required. These children are likely to be those with complex and multiple needs who require specialist care or young people with behaviours or difficulties that make it unsafe for them to be cared for with other children or in placements without intensive supervision. In circumstances where a singleton placement or a placement for siblings cannot be sourced in-house, a placement with an independent fostering agency may be sought.**

This will be achieved by

- Sourcing individual placements from a range of approved Independent providers using the framework contract
- Commissioning providers in the independent sector to develop specialist services for children with severe attachment disorder and young people with sexually predatory behaviour
- Monitoring the demand for these placements and the outcomes they achieve in order to inform the commissioning plan

Promoting adoption

- 3.15 **Adoption provides the placement option with the best outcomes for children in need of permanent alternative care. In line with the increase in the care population in Leeds demand for adoptive homes rose sharply in 2007/2008, leading to longer waiting time before placement. Children from BEM communities and those of dual heritage wait significantly longer than those from a white British background, as do children who are older than the norm and/or in sibling groups of more than two. In order that all children can be**

placed for adoption in a timely manner there is a need to increase the number of people from all backgrounds approved as adopters in Leeds and the region.

This will be achieved by

- Using the additional posts in the adoption teams, provided for in the 2008/09 budget to process more approvals and develop family finding
- Removing the residual fostering work from the adoption teams to allow them to focus on adoption and adoption support
- Developing the recruitment strategy to focus on BEM and dual heritage families
- Taking a lead role in development of the Consortium to provide additional adoption placements on a regional basis

Modernising residential care

- 3.16 **Residential care will remain an important placement option for a minority of children and young people in the care system. The size of the estate will reduce as more children & young people are cared for in foster care but the care provided by each home will be more personalised and targeted at individual need. Residential staff will be supported in this by a range of other professionals offering structured support.**

This will be achieved by

- Reviewing the trends in requests for and making of residential placements and adjusting the provision accordingly
- Defining the role of each of the homes to provide a range of placements able to deal with different needs
- Delivering high quality and targeted training to residential workers
- Negotiating within commissioning groups and in other forums to secure planned and structured support and interventions from a range of professionals
- Learning from the social pedagogy pilots

Supporting young people to achieve independence

- 3.17 **Young people leaving the care system will have available to them a range of high quality placements that offer varying levels of support.**

This will be achieved by

- Putting in place a process by which young people can be supported to remain with their foster carers beyond their 18th birthday.
- Working in partnership with services and agencies with an interest in improving the quantity and quality of housing support on offer to young people to commission a range of provision suitable for their needs.
- Ensuring young people claim all benefits to which they have an entitlement.

4.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 The Implementation of the Placement Strategy would ensure that the Council Policy is in line with the Care Matters Agenda.

5.0 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 The strategy necessitates a redirection of resources. This means that some children's homes will be decommissioned within the next 6 – 18 months so that funding can be released to build a sustainable budget for individual placement options.
- 5.2 The first phase of this strategy will be to target 21 residential placements which currently cost approximately £1,395k per annum at £1,277 per placement per week. It is proposed to re-provide these placements in a more cost effective way, predominantly through the use of IFA
- 5.3 At a typical average weekly cost of £800 per placement with an IFA, it is estimated that this strategy will generate the capacity to re-invest in the order of £520k per annum in more choice, individual placements and longer term stability such as adoption.
- 5.4 The employment rights of all staff affected by the strategy will be protected through the Managing Workforce Change Procedure.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The Strategy will produce additional individualised placements for the hardest to place young people. It will release money to build the budget for placements in the independent sector and will provide the basis for a wider range of placements from a number of providers.

7.0 Recommendations

- 7.1 It is recommended that
- Executive Board approve this strategy.

8.0 Documents Referenced in this report :

Children's Messages on Care - OfSTED 2007

Care Matters : Time to Deliver for Children in Care – an implementation plan
HMC 2008

Children & Young People's Service Improvement Plan 2008 / 2009