

**PLACEMENTS STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN 2011-2015**

**To:** Cabinet

**Date:** 22 February 2011.

**From:** Adrian Loades; Executive Director - Children and Young People's Services

**Electoral division(s):** All

**Forward Plan ref:** Not applicable      **Key decision:** No

**Purpose:** To seek Cabinet approval for the new Children and Young People's Services Placements Strategy for Looked After Children. (Circulated separately as part of a Members Pack due to its size)

The Placements Strategy provides the framework for projects across Children and Young People's Services to deliver a high-quality and sustainable placements model which meets the needs of Looked After Children and delivers the planned £8.3m savings target for placements purchased from independent providers.

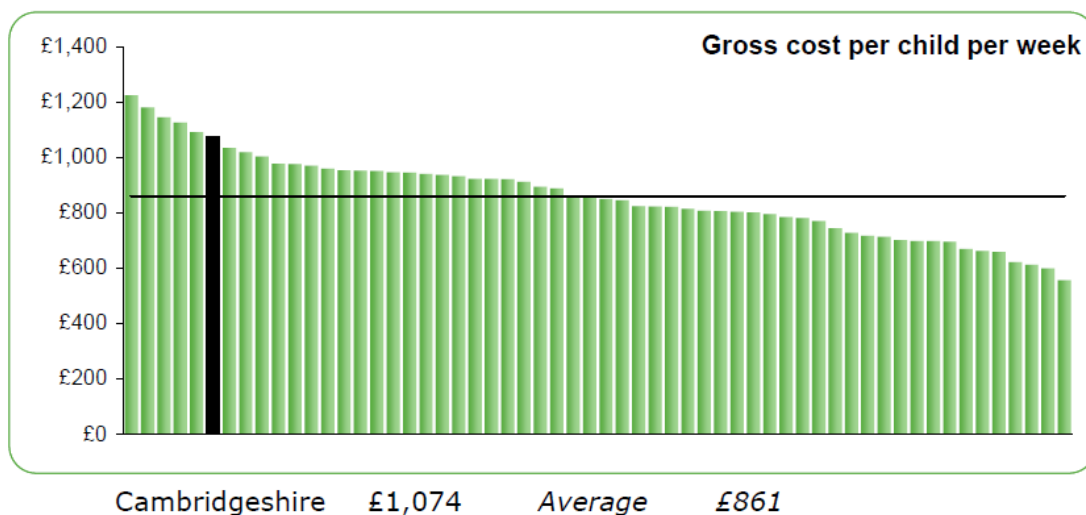
The Strategy has a specific focus on minimising the need for children to become looked after by supporting families to stay together as well as setting out plans to commission and provide placements for children in care.

**Recommendation:** Cabinet is asked to formally approve the strategy.

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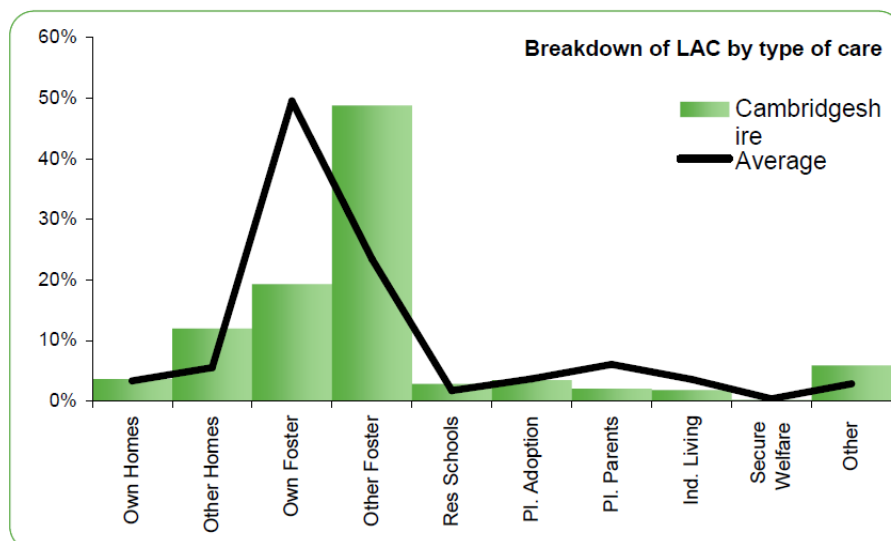
## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Since 2007 the number of Looked After Children in Cambridgeshire has increased by over 25% (or by more than 100 children) to around 500 in 2010/11. Although Cambridgeshire's rate of children in care is still a little below the average for similar authorities, this sharp rise in the number of children in care means it is necessary to more fundamentally consider the services we provide and commission to meet their needs.
- 1.2 In 2010, Cambridgeshire's average spend on placements for Looked After Children per child per week (£1,074) was significantly higher than the average for other comparable authorities (£861).



- 1.3 However, the unit costs for each different type of placement in Cambridgeshire do not differ dramatically from those paid by other authorities and the high overall cost per child can therefore largely be attributed to the mix of placements we buy and provide. Cambridgeshire has more residential placements than most authorities, a higher proportion of placements with external providers and a lower proportion looked after by in-house carers. This is shown in the diagram below.

**Breakdown of Looked After Children by type of care - 31/3/2010**



- 1.4 This combination of an increasing number of Looked After Children and a higher level of spend on placements occurs at a time when Children's Services is seeking to deliver over £40m of savings between 2011 and 2015.

## 2. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 In response to the higher number of children in care and the need to establish a financially sustainable model, Children and Young People's Services has developed a 'whole-system' approach to reducing spend based on tackling the 5 themes identified below.

- **To support families to stay together** and reduce the need for children to be looked after by ensuring a focus on early intervention and preventative action across Children's Services
- **To manage risk confidently and provide support at the edge of care** to make sure the right children come into care at the right time.
- **To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements** to support all children having positive experiences, in care whatever their needs.
- **To ensure all children in care get a good education**, whether this is in mainstream schools or in alternative arrangements.
- **To give children clearly planned journeys through care** which enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.

## 3. PLACEMENTS BUDGET AND SAVINGS

- 3.1 The Placements Strategy and associated workplan aim to deliver savings of £8.3m from the projected budget for Looked After Children with independent and private providers. These savings are planned over the next 4 financial years, as shown below.

**Fig 1 - Savings Requirements**

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Total
£-1,630, 000	£-2,000,000	£-2,500,000	£-2,261,000	-£8,391,000

- 3.2 These savings will be delivered primarily by;

- Reducing the number of children coming into care through a combination of successful and well-targeted preventative services; high quality, family-centred social work and other support at the edge of care; and good care planning that avoids drift and supports children and young people to return home where this is in their interests.
- Altering the mix of placements so that a greater proportion of children and young people are supported by in-house carers rather than private providers and fewer receive high-cost residential or residential school placements.

- 3.3 Alongside these savings, Children and Young People's Services is planning additional investment from demography funding in anticipation of a continuation of the increase in the level of need that has been seen since 2007. These investments are shown below.

**Fig 2 - Demography Investments**

2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Total
£6,115,000	£2,261,000	£2,261,000	£2,261,000	£12,898,000

- 3.4 Although the net effect on the placements budget is therefore a planned increase in spending, these demography investments will not be enough to achieve a sustainable financial position if the savings targets are not also met.

#### **4. MONITORING AND UPDATING THE STRATEGY**

- 4.1 The strategy sets out how, over the next four years, the County Council will deliver its commitment to Looked After Children and supporting families to stay together in children's interests. Children's Services Senior Management Team will be part of a Sponsor Group for the Placements Strategy tasked with overseeing its delivery, monitoring the impact on children and families and driving forward the focus on Looked After Children as a key priority.
- 4.2 Children and Young People's Services will continue to build the evidence base and refine the detail of the workstreams within this strategy over the coming months. An updated version will be published by the end of May 2011 which will include, in particular, further detail of our early intervention model, our investment in preventative programmes and the pathways through the edge of care services. This update will also describe in more depth the role schools and other universal settings can play in supporting our efforts to keep families together.

#### **5. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Resources and Performance Information - A performance framework will be used to monitor the impact of the strategy including tracking the overall number of children in care, a focus on reducing out-of-county placements and crucially measuring impact on outcomes for Looked After Children. We will publish a progress update against this framework every 6 months for the duration of the strategy.
- 5.2 Statutory Duties / Requirements - The Placements Strategy and the savings set against it are not predicated on a reduced service to Looked After Children, any change to the threshold for accommodation or any change to our legal responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and young people. These all remain as before.
- 5.3 Climate Change – It is not anticipated that the Strategy will significantly impact in this area although the focus on reducing out of county placements will contribute to the ongoing efforts to reduce business mileage which are significant when supporting children placed at a distance.
- 5.4 Access and Inclusion – The strategy has a particular focus on meeting the needs of Looked After Children with disability or Special Educational Need, including plans to develop new capacity within Cambridgeshire as an alternative to high-cost out of county placements with independent providers.

- 5.5 Engagement and Consultation – Significant cross Directorate engagement has taken place in the development of the plans and the strategy is scheduled to be launched with partners at the Children’s Trust meeting 28 February. The views of Looked After Children have informed all planning workshops to date and a series of engagement sessions with children in care is taking place throughout February to gather feedback on the proposals. As individual schemes and new provision are developed during the lifespan of the strategy, children and young people and especially those in care will participate actively in the detail of service design.

Source Documents	Location
CIPFA Children Looked After Benchmarking Club Report 2010	<b>James Wilson</b> Box No: CC1114 Room No:B109 Castle Court Shire Hall Castle Hill Cambridge CB3 0AP