

**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY (BUILDING FAMILY RESILIENCE)**

*To:* **Children and Young People Committee**

*Meeting Date:* **8 March 2016**

*From:* **Adrian Loades, Executive Director: Children, Families and Adults Services**

*Electoral division(s):* **All**

*Forward Plan ref:* **N/A** *Key decision:* **No**

*Purpose:* **To inform the Committee of the final draft of the Looked After Children Strategy (Building Family Resilience) and the current version of the Looked After Children (LAC) Action Plan, following consultation.**

*Recommendation:* **The Committee is asked to review and approve the final version of the Strategy and the current version of the LAC Action Plan.**

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## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 The initial draft of the Looked After Children's Strategy, (Building Family Resilience) and Action Plan were presented to Children and Young People's Committee on the 8 December 2015. The Committee was advised that a period of consultation would follow to secure wider engagement and views regarding the aims of the Strategy and the proposed actions to implement.
- 1.2 The consultation has now closed and we are able to share with the Committee the final draft of the Strategy and the current version of the Action Plan. The Action Plan is a "live" document and as such will continually evolve throughout the life of the Strategy, which will remain in place until 2021. This will ensure account is taken of any future changes in the Looked After Children (LAC) population and new legislation.
- 1.3 The aim of the Strategy and Action Plan is to ensure that we have the right children, being cared for at the right time and that those children remain in care for only as long as is needed, being moved through to permanence or returned home safely, as quickly as possible. The placements that we do make will be suitable and affordable primarily in-house and in county i.e. at the right cost and in the right location.

## **2.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES**

- 2.1 The consultation focussed on the Strategy and the Action Plan. The Action Plan has continued to evolve during this period of consultation. The consultation and documents were available via the Smart Survey website. There were 42 views of the survey and 7 responses. The questions asked were:
- 1) Do you understand what we want to achieve?
  - 2) The Strategy sets out five outcomes, do the outcomes cover all that needs to be included in the Strategy? Should any of them be added to or amended?
  - 3) Are there any areas that have not been included in the Strategy?
  - 4) Does the Action Plan clearly set out the actions that need to be undertaken to achieve the outcomes as described in the Strategy? If no, explain what should be amended.
- 2.2 Consultation Summary
- 2.2.1 The majority of the responses to the consultation were supportive with all but one commenting that they felt the aims of the Strategy and Action Plan were clear. One respondent commented that the concept of families being supported to stay together was not always appropriate. This is addressed in the Strategy by making clear that vulnerable children will still need to be accommodated in certain circumstances.
- 2.2.2 There were no significant changes suggested regarding the five outcomes set out in the Strategy, although some amendments were suggested to a small number of the actions in the Action Plan. One respondent asked that we make it clear that we promote a range of placements as a key outcome of the Strategy and that it is best that all children live with families. The Strategy clearly advocates this concept including the development of "Creative Care"

options where we consider non-traditional placements as a long term sustainable lower cost option.

- 2.2.3 The majority of respondents agreed that the Strategy covers all the areas it should. With regard to the final question around the clarity of the Action Plan, four of the seven respondents felt it could be clearer. The response highlights that the Action Plan is a working document that has changed since the published iteration. Actions have already been revised to improve clarity and focus.
- 2.2.4 Internal Audit provided a response to the consultation, full details of which can be found in Appendix 4 with full summary details and responses to each question.

### **3.0 ACTION PLAN – PROGRESS TO DATE**

- 3.1 The Action Plan sets out how the Council will deliver savings and continue to provide appropriate and sustainable support services and care in Cambridgeshire. The targets that are set are challenging, reflecting the financial pressures facing the Council. Delivering all the actions listed in the action plan would probably exceed the activity and financial targets set out in the Council's Business Plan. However, there are a number of variables that are outside of the Council's control which will impact on the delivery of individual actions and it is appropriate to plan on the basis of over performance in order to increase the likelihood that targets are met. Individual actions will be monitored rigorously.
- 3.2 The Action Plan is a "live" document which will deliver the savings over a five year period and as such will be continually under review. Actions have been prioritised as 'High' and 'Medium' priority. High priority actions are those that we expect to have made significant progress in establishing the activity to deliver on their targets by April 2016. Working Groups bringing together key actions have been established to provide momentum and support progress. Medium priority actions are those that will take longer to scope and deliver but all medium priority actions will be underway or complete by March 2017.
- 3.3 Monitoring needs to be robust, transparent and clearly identify progress and equally highlight where progress has stalled. Monitoring will take place as follows:
- Weekly LAC Meetings review new care placements made each week and associated costs with CFA Directors and relevant Heads of Service.
  - The weekly threshold panel for accommodation (Resource Panel) will ensure that we only look after the right children in the right placements and will challenge high cost placements by looking at creative and lower cost alternatives.
  - The monthly LAC Commissioning Board will review placement data, spend, activity progress, monitor high priority activity and outcomes, identify medium priority activity that is not progressing and look at how to move forward.
  - Quarterly meetings with all leads in the action plan will take place to review all actions in detail, challenge and also to look at how to "unblock" activity that has stalled or revise actions and saving targets if required.
- 3.4 There is a robust Governance structure in place for the Plan, central to which is the LAC Commissioning Board which is responsible for overseeing the

implementation of the Action Plan. The achievement of savings will be monitored through key activity data which details the target budget and the target number of placements to meet budgeted demand, alongside actual activity for each month. This data is monitored by Finance and enables the Action Plan leads to be held to account for delivery of the savings.

- 3.5 The LAC Commissioning Board reports to the CFA Performance Board where delivery against targets set will be monitored through a savings tracker. The tracker will detail savings and monitor progress in achieving these. The LAC Commissioning Board will be accountable to young people who represent Looked After Children through the Children In Care Council, Voices Matter. There will be an annual report summarising progress against the strategy outcomes which will be made available to CYP committee and to Voices Matter.

#### **4.0 CURRENT POSITION AND PLANNED ACTIVITY**

- 4.1 Whilst we have seen our LAC numbers increase this year, we have managed to minimise the possible increase in spend and keep within the predicted forecast despite significant pressure across the year.
- 4.2 The data below highlights this growth and shows the number of children Beginning to be Looked After (BLA) and Ceasing to be Looked After (CLA). The overall total for January of 586 is three lower than the December total. Of the children that became BLA in January, nine were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) and the highest proportion (12 children) were in the 10-15 age range.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Beginning to be LAC (BLA)</b>	<b>Ceasing to Be LAC (CLA)</b>	<b>Total LAC</b>
Sep 2015	+25	-17	570
Oct 2015	+23	-18	571
Nov 2015	+27	-14	582
Dec 2015	+30	-25	589
Jan 2015	+24	-19	586

- 4.3 An update on the “High” priority actions as detailed in the Action Plan is provided below. All actions under Outcome 1: Families Are Supported to Stay Together, are “Medium” priority actions and will be reported on in a future Committee report.

## 4.3.1

Outcome 2: Risk is Managed Confidently and Intensive Support is Provided for Families at the Edge of Care	
Action	Progress
<p>Action 2.1</p> <p>Develop a clear framework of Specialist and Edge of Care Services</p>	<p>These services include Family Intervention Partnership (FIP), Multi Systemic Therapy (MST), Alternatives to Care (AtC), Specialist Family Support Services (SFSS) and Family Group Conferencing (FGC). The services are now meeting monthly to manage cases and ensure that a clear model for Edge of Care Family Support Services is developed and promoted with transparent referral pathways. A single model for monitoring the services is also being considered which will enable them to monitor outcomes and success in a consistent and comparable way.</p>
<p>Action 2.2</p> <p>Focus of Family Services on preventing children entering the care system to enable us to offer appropriate services at the appropriate time</p>	<p>This action will be explored by a working group alongside the Edge of Care Family Support Services (Action 2.1). In addition the action supports the development of a new Resource Panel which replaces the separate S.20 and S.31 panels and also draws together the Creative Care work. These panels allocate placements to children that we consider need to become Looked After. By combining the panels with the Creative Care approach, whereby budgets are used in a more flexible way by social work units, we expect that the number of children entering higher cost placements will be reduced. This is now well underway and will be fully implemented by March.</p>
<p>Action 2.3</p> <p>Work to broker family solutions</p>	<p>This action focuses on a review of the Family Group Conferencing Service. Future options and an associated invest to save proposal will be presented to CFA Management Team in March with implementation of the agreed option following.</p>

<p>Action 2.5</p> <p>Monitoring of Alternatives to Care (AtC) and the Space Project</p>	<p>Monitoring of the Alternatives to Care project (aimed at stabilising the family environment to enable young people in crisis to remain in their family home, preventing them from becoming Looked After) is in place and being reported in line with the KPIs as set out in the service specification. This service has now been fully operational for four months and is successfully diverting young people who would otherwise have become Looked After from the care system. To date the team has worked with 28 young people. Seven of these cases have closed and five were prevented from becoming LAC.</p> <p>The Space project is a one year pilot and monitoring is currently being implemented. The project supports parents who have had children removed from their care to help them to understand the range of issues they face and to make a plan to reduce the risk of future children being taken in to care. The project which began accepting referrals in December, has so far worked with 13 women who had 38 children between them (between one and six children, all removed or living with other relatives). Full capacity of the project is 50 families (per year) and we expect the number of referrals made to the service to increase as it becomes fully established.</p>
<p>Outcome 3: Children access and remain in education</p>	
<p><b>Action</b></p>	<p><b>Progress</b></p>
<p>Action 3.1</p> <p>Analysis of patterns of attendance, exclusions and absence to ensure young people who are LAC do not miss out on education</p>	<p>The Head of the Virtual School meets regularly with the managers of inclusion, attendance and Behaviour and Alternative Provision to ensure a coordinated county wide approach to all issues relating to disadvantaged pupils and LAC in particular.</p>
<p>Action 3.2</p> <p>Establish Effective collaboration and joint working</p>	<p>The Virtual School liaises with a number of services and agencies to ensure that LAC pupils are supported well. This includes SEND and START, admission and school transfer requests. In addition the Virtual School works with peers in the Eastern Region to ensure that all LAC pupils, wherever they are, are receiving the same interventions.</p>

**Outcome 4: Placements for Children are In County and With a Family**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<p><b>Action 4.1</b></p> <p>Review placements and look at creative options to reunify the child with family and reduce cost (Creative Care)</p>	<p>After an initial pilot, this is now fully taking shape and will be implemented alongside the revised Resource Panel. The Resource Panel (previously S.20/ S.31 Panels) is responsible for making threshold decisions and agreeing to a child being accommodated. The panel, which will incorporate Creative Care, should be fully operational by April.</p>
<p><b>Action 4.2</b></p> <p>Reduce the number of external placements and increase In-House Fostering placements</p>	<p>A new action plan has been implemented and, for a short time, support from a fostering consultant to further develop the service is delivering change. The majority of new fostering placements are now being made via the In-House Fostering Service.</p>
<p><b>Action 4.3</b></p> <p>Lowering the cost of the most expensive placements</p>	<p>As a result of the regular review of the top 50 high cost placements, we expect 20 children to have been moved either to a lower cost placement or out of care entirely in the next financial year. Access to Resources Team (ART) has also met with local providers to undertake market shaping and develop further low cost provision.</p> <p>Closer working is taking place between the Safeguarding and Standards Unit, Social Care and Commissioning Enhanced Services to plan for placement moves.</p> <p>ART is also reviewing key transition points in young people's lives when they can potentially move in to sustainable independent accommodation.</p> <p>ART has also been working collectively with other Local Authority partners to minimise fee increases for residential and special schools. Furthermore, progress is being made regarding the creation of emergency solo placements at Hawthorns Residential Home, with works to the building now complete, staffing, Ofsted Registration and the development of a protocol for the use of the placement is also progressing.</p>

<p>Action 4.4</p> <p>Reducing the cost of external placements</p>	<p>As part of the review of the external residential framework contract, high quality, low cost providers of residential provision have been taken to view potential Council owned properties across the county in March, Wisbech and Linton; this is with a view to developing increased in-county provision at lower cost and aimed primarily at developing alternative provision for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) or 16 and 17 year old children.</p>
<p>Action 4.5</p> <p>Develop Assisted Boarding placements</p>	<p>Assisted Boarding, where children are able to access a combined residential/ school place at a boarding school, has been scoped and ART has established a partnership with the Royal National Children's Foundation (RNCF) to locate suitable boarding places when a child that could benefit is identified. We now need to formally launch the scheme to raise awareness and encourage take-up.</p>
<p>Outcome 5: Children Are Moved Through the Care System in a Timely Way</p>	
<b>Action</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<p>Action 5.1</p> <p>Reunification is considered as soon as a child becomes LAC</p>	<p>Well-resourced and coherent reunification plans can lead to better and speedier permanence outcomes through a stable return home to parents. We will use the IRO database to help us monitor the number of children exiting care and develop a new framework and practice guidance to support implementation.</p>
<p>Action 5.2</p> <p>Ensure Adoption is quick where appropriate</p>	<p>We have set a target of ten concurrent carers. We will aim to stretch this target each year and where targets are exceeded we will aim to invest some savings in to Coram Cambridgeshire Adoption (CCA).</p>
<p>Action 5.3</p> <p>Ensure cost effectiveness of Adoption and Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) and Child Arrangement Orders (CAO's)</p>	<p>A review will be undertaken of all allowances that have been in place for in excess of two years. All new carers will be advised that the allowance will be for a two year period and reviewed thereafter. The review and new policy will provide a £350k saving.</p>

## 5.0 BUDGET POSITION

- 5.1 The saving allocated within the Action Plan at £6,789K, is considerably higher than the savings set out in the Business Plan (£1,429K, plus £132K inflation saving). There is a need to take account of the financial pressure which has emerged due to the increase in number of Looked After Children in



Cambridgeshire since the original Business Plan was formulated (£2,059K). There is also the demographic saving required in 16/17 to prevent the Looked After Children population growing (£2,100K) and the invest-to-save budget transfers from the placement budget to other Children's Budget areas for Alternatives to Care (£219K) and in-house disability services (£500K). The savings allocated also include the Adoption services target (£350K) to ensure there is no double counting of this saving. The table below sets out these savings:

<b>Objective</b>	<b>2016/17</b>
Reduce the number of children who are looked after	-2,100
Reduce the unit cost of placements for children in care*	-922
Reduce the length of time children are in care*	-507
Adoption	-350
Share Care provision (4.7)	-500
Alternatives to Care (2.5)	-219
In-house fostering	0
Inflation	-132
Carried forward pressure	-2,059
	<b>-6,789</b>

\*These two lines added together are the £1,429K saving in the Business Planning tables

- 5.2 A number of invest to save proposals are being developed that will support the achievement of this ambitious savings target. Proposals include making adaptations to the properties in Linton, March and Wisbech to provide accommodation to UASC and 16 and 17 year olds (£150k) and expansion of the Family Group Conferencing (FGC) Service to enable it to change its referral criteria so that all appropriate cases are referred to the service prior to or immediately after the initial Child Protection Conference and to create additional capacity (£57.5k).

## **6.0 ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all**

- 6.1.1 The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:
- Future commissioning arrangements are expected to provide additional opportunities for voluntary and partner organisation, particularly within Cambridgeshire to provide support to reduce the number of children becoming LAC and support family resilience.
  - The development of our In House Fostering Service offers opportunities to the people of Cambridgeshire to become employed as foster carers.
  - A reduction in the use of external placements, particularly those supplied by Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's) would have a negative impact on those organisations.
  - We need to ensure children remain in educational placements and are attending school and not excluded.

### **6.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives**

- 6.2.1 The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:
- With fewer children coming into the care system, their mental and physical

health needs will need to be supported in their homes and community potentially placing more pressure on early help services.

- Emotional Health and Well Being Services will need to be aligned to meet this need and discussions continue to take place through the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Joint Commissioning unit to deliver this.
- Better identification of need early on and appropriate support services will continue to be developed, including through ensuring that children have a CAF and appropriate interventions prior to becoming Looked After.

### **6.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

6.3.1 The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Ensuring that child protection is our priority and building on our assessment of risk is key to managing the LAC population.
- There is an emphasis on support for the whole family, particularly through the 'Think Family' approach, thereby ensuring that where possible family issues that can lead to children becoming LAC are resolved early on. Where this is not possible, and children do need to become Looked After, support to the family to resolve its problems remains in place so that the child can be reunified as quickly as possible. Resources will be targeted to this work.
- The expectation will be that more children with disabilities remain at home and in local schools and this may put increased pressure on some families. We will mitigate this risk by ensuring effective use of the Education Health and Care Plan.
- More 16+ young people will be expected to remain within their families. This could result in more young people not in education, employment or training. We need to ensure that the strategy does not increase the number of young people without a fixed home; therefore, specialist services will need to ensure that extended family and community solutions are brokered to mitigate this.

## **7.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 Resource and Performance Implications**

7.1.1 The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The success of the strategy in reducing the number of Looked After Children is vital if we are to meet savings targets. This is a demanding area of work and needs consistent monitoring and reviewing of actions to adapt, re-commission and revise them dependent on impact. Progress reporting for all actions will take place monthly. Closer scrutiny will be undertaken monthly through the LAC Commissioning Board regarding high priority and 'Red' RAG rated actions. Quarterly review of all the activities in the action plan will also be undertaken.
- Greater reliance will be placed on early help services, to harness community and extended family resources and on specialist services offering targeted intervention in order to enable children to remain in their homes and build family resilience. This will place considerable strain on the system requiring us to offer help to the most vulnerable.
- Particular focus will be placed on our in house fostering and residential provision to deliver increased numbers of placements, placing further strain on the system.

## **7.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications**

7.2.1 The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Staff will be managing higher levels of risk with children expected to remain at home for longer periods of time. Our workforce will need to develop to manage these risks through existing training opportunities available through the Workforce Development Strategy.
- There are significant implications to developing new ways of managing risk in deciding whether to take a child in to care. Staff will need to develop strategies to manage real and perceived risk so that only those children who really need to become Looked After do so, this will be developed through training, peer support and case review.
- Where creative care plans are used to enable the child to stay at home, the potential risks need to be balanced with the improved outcomes for the child and family and the best use of the available resources.

## **7.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

7.3.1 The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- No significant implications have been identified.

## **7.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications**

7.4.1 The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Consultation took place between January 2016 and February 2016. Feedback has been incorporated in to the Strategy and Action Plan.

## **7.5 Public Health Implications**

7.5.1 The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- The strategy aims to enable more children to stay within their family homes where it is safe to do so and with the aim of ensuring improved health outcomes for families in particular relating to mental health.
- Conversely, children remaining at home for longer particularly where there are mental health, substance misuse or domestic violence issues could have a negative impact on the mental and physical health of these children. However, we will look into how to manage this risk.

## **7.6 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

7.6.1 The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:

- Members have previously been consulted via the initial draft of the Strategy and are now asked to make further comment prior to final publication.

Source Documents	Location
<p>Appendix 1: Building Family Resilience: Looked After Children Strategy</p> <p>Appendix 2: LAC Action Plan</p> <p>Appendix 3: LAC Strategy Review of Approaches</p> <p>Appendix 4: Summary of Consultation Responses</p>	<p>Meredith Teasdale  <b>Box No:</b> SH1210  <b>Room No:</b>222  Shire Hall  Castle Hill  Cambridge  CB3 0AP</p> <p><b>email:</b>  <a href="mailto:Meredith.Teasdale@cambridge-shire.gov.uk">Meredith.Teasdale@cambridge-shire.gov.uk</a></p>