

**STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) – PROGRESS REPORT**

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

*Meeting Date:* **12 July 2016**

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

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

*Forward Plan ref:* **Key decision: No**

*Purpose:* **To update the Children and Young People Committee (CYP) Committee on the progress made regarding the Looked After Children (LAC) Strategy and Action Plan**

*Recommendation:* **The Committee is asked note progress and to support the ongoing work that is taking place through the LAC Action Plan.**

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The draft LAC Strategy was presented to and subsequently approved by CYP Committee on the 8 March 2016. The Strategy defines the Council's vision for reducing the budget pressure for LAC Placements. It details the need to ensure that there are effective preventative arrangements to reduce the number of children needing to come into care and to reduce the time spent in placements. It also sets out the required change in the composition of placements so that more placements are made in-house thereby reducing the number of higher cost external placements.
- 1.2 The Strategy includes an Action Plan with savings targets attached to actions. The budget reduction over 5 years will be £6.3m with a total budget of LAC placements of £13,071,809 by 2020; a reduction from £19,371,809. It is important to emphasise that the Strategy does not involve any change to thresholds for children being accommodated.

## 2.0 PROGRESS SO FAR

- 2.1 The Action Plan contains 37 separate workstreams under five outcome areas, which are:
1. **Families are supported to stay together** reducing the need for children to be looked after by ensuring a focus on early intervention and preventative action across Children's Services.
  2. **Risk is managed confidently and intensive support is provided for families at the edge of care** to prevent children coming in to the care system.
  3. **Children remain in education** and engaged in learning, recognising the vital importance of stable and successful education to enable the most vulnerable children to achieve their full potential.
  4. **Placements for children in care are in county and with a family** so that all Looked After Children have a positive experience of care, in sustainable placements, whatever their needs.
  5. **Children are moved through the care system quickly** which enables them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.
- 2.2 Each of the 37 work streams has been given a priority rating: Highest priority work streams were required to have actions completed by April 2016 and Medium priority will have actions completed by April 2017.
- 2.3 There are 20 high priority work streams; the remainder are rated as medium priority. There are a number of high priority actions that have been marginally delayed and are therefore BRAG rated as amber within the Action Plan as detailed below. The table below sets out the high priority actions and progress to them.

<b>Outcome 2: Risk is managed confidently and intensive support is provided for families at the Edge of Care</b>			
Action		Completion Date of final activity	BRAG Rating <sup>1</sup>
2.1	Develop a clear framework of specialist and edge of care services. <b>Actions taken:</b> A group has been established chaired by Tracy Collins Head of Service for Corporate Parenting to co-ordinate current edge of care services. A scope to review this work has been drafted.	September 2016.	Amber – A scope for this work has been drafted but has yet to be agreed which means that this work is amber. A meeting has been set up in the next two weeks to agree the scope of the work.
2.2	Focus of family services on preventing children entering the care system to enable us to offer appropriate services at the appropriate time <b>Actions taken:</b> The new Threshold & Resources Panel (TARP) is now in place. This replaces the s.20/s.31 panel and is responsible for making threshold decisions and agreeing to a child being accommodated. The panel will have an agenda item to consider creative care requests to prevent the need for children to become looked after	May 2016	Amber – This is amber as the new panel system has only recently been implemented and the impact of its decisions has still to be assessed.
2.3	Work to broker family solutions <b>Actions taken:</b> a proposal regarding the future of the Family Group Conferencing Service has now been drafted and a bid for additional funding will be made to Senior Management Team (SMT) and General Purposes Committee (GPC) from transformational fund.	May 2016	Green
2.4	Reduce the number of 16+ Looked after children <b>Actions taken:</b> Work has taken place to analyse the number of 16+ becoming LAC. Rebecca Wilshire, Head of Access, Children in Need	On going	Amber – There is still ongoing work between housing providers and Children's

<sup>1</sup> **BRAG Rating key**

Blue: Action/activity completed/delivered

Red: A deliverable has not started and the risk of not achieving the timescale is high / a deliverable has not been achieved within agreed timescales

Amber: Deliverable has been started but progress is slow, actions remain outstanding, there is a barrier or a risk of it not being completed within the agreed timescales

Green: A deliverable has been started and is achievable within the baseline delivery date and costs

	and Looked After Children in Huntingdonshire and Fenland has led this work. There continues to be actions to reduce the number of 16+ becoming LAC. The work has included closer working with Districts and clear messages to staff around finding alternative solutions for this cohort of children and consistent interpretation of Southwark judgement.		Social Care to embed this work. Further work is taking place with housing providers and district councils.
<i>Total Savings Target for Outcome 2: -£2,319k</i>			

2.5

<b>Outcome 4: Placements for children in care are in county and with a family</b>			
Action		Completion Date of final activity	BRAG Rating
4.1	Family based care (Creative Care) <b>Actions taken:</b> the new Threshold & Resources Panel (TARP) is now in place and incorporates the Creative Care process for those who are LAC as well as those who are not. Cases are being reviewed by the TARP and work takes place to look at alternative arrangements rather than a child becoming LAC. Further work is required to embed this process and ensure positive outcomes.	Ongoing	Green
4.2	Reduce the number of external placements/ increase in-house fostering placements <b>Actions taken:</b> the In-House Fostering Service has significantly increased the number of filled beds from 142 in January 2016 to 170 in May 2016. The target number of placements for 2016/17 is 187 and is on track to deliver	June 2016	Green
4.3	Lowering the cost of the most expensive placements Actions taken: work is ongoing through the weekly placement meetings reviewing each external placement individually on a 5 week rota. This work is being led by Access to Resources Team (ART) in collaboration with the Social Work units and there are a number of positive changes being made. Savings have been identified for permanent placements with Independent Fostering Agencies	June 2016	Green

	<p>(IFA). Disabled children's placement meetings are also taking place as these are the highest cost placements.</p> <p>The emergency solo placement developed at Hawthorns residential home in Cambridge is now fully operational and can offer significant savings where a lone placement is required in an emergency situation.</p>		
4.4	<p>Reducing the cost of external placements</p> <p><b>Actions taken:</b> Work takes place on a monthly basis to review the cost of external placements. The top 50 high cost placements are reviewed to explore reduced fees or alternatives that will deliver desired outcomes Cambridgeshire continues to see a reduction in costs Since the end of March there has been a reduction in the average cost of all weekly placements from £1,163 to £996.55 (as at 23 June 2016).</p>	June 2016	Green
4.5	<p>Develop Assisted Boarding Placements</p> <p><b>Actions taken:</b> A process to procure places in independent boarding schools ,where appropriate ,to avoid children coming in to care is being taken forward through the Royal National Children's Foundation (RNCF) and Assisted Boarding Schools Network. Social Work units have been made aware of this option.</p>	Ongoing	Green
4.6	<p>Cambridgeshire's policy on Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children (UASC) Placements updated.</p> <p><b>Actions taken:</b> A dedicated pathway for UASC to ensure assessments are made quickly and children placed in the most appropriate and cost effective accommodation is being developed.</p>	May 2016	Green
4.7	<p>Develop in county provision for disabled young people</p> <p><b>Actions taken:</b> Links have been made with providers. Ongoing work is being led by Richard Holland, Head Children Disabilities Service. There has been some slippage in</p>	June 2016 (Sept 2016)	Amber – This is amber as timescales have slipped to September 2016.

	this workstream and timescales for completion have moved to September 2016.		
<i>Total Savings Target for Outcome 4: -£2061</i>			

2.6

<b>Outcome 5: Children are moved through the care system in a timely way</b>			
Action		Completion Date of final activity	BRAG Rating
5.1	Reunification process reviewed <b>Actions taken:</b> Tracy Collins Head of Corporate Parenting is leading this work. There has been a delay in starting this work and timescales for completion has moved to September 2016.	June 2016 (Sept 2016)	Amber – This is amber as timescales have moved to September 2016.
5.2	Ensuring adoption is quick where appropriate <b>Actions taken:</b> targets regarding the number of concurrent carers have been agreed and a process for tracking the timeliness of a child's journey through the adoption process has been developed and is being monitored by the Permanency Monitoring Group. This work stream is now complete.	Complete	Blue
5.3	Ensuring cost effectiveness of adoption and special guardianship order arrangements. <b>Actions taken:</b> the majority of actions within this work stream are now complete and all 140 affected carers have been written to with a copy of the revised policy. Each case will now be reviewed with a view to making the required £350k saving.	May 2016	Green
<i>Total Savings Target for Outcome 5: -£350k</i>			

2.7

The saving to be achieved of £5,480k is detailed below. The following savings were agreed through the business planning process and are within the published business plan.

Objective	2016/17	
Reduce the number of children who are looked after*	-2,100	} £1,429k BP saving
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 which is addressed in action plan	-1,700
Proposed budget movement to LAC Placements budget	+950
	<b>-5,480</b>

2.8 The LAC Action Plan was reviewed and updated by Officers at a meeting on the 29 June 2016. The purpose of the meeting was to refresh the actions and identify any additional measurable activities that need to be prioritised going forward that will allow a greater level of scrutiny where there are variations to targets. These will then be added to the Action Plan. Eight workstreams were completed by June 2016. Two remaining actions will be completed by September 2016. The revised action plan and associated savings and progress to delivery of savings will be available at the Committee meeting.

2.9 Full updates regarding all of the actions can be found in the monthly Action Plan Progress Report at appendix 1.

### 3.0 LAC NUMBERS AND FINANCE SUMMARY

3.1 The numbers of the LAC population have continued to rise. This continued growth means that the LAC Placement Budget is projecting a £400k overspend due to this demand. In total the projected overspend is £750k as there remains a pressure carried forward from 15/16 of £350k. This will be addressed through further savings in the Action Plan below, the non-UASC LAC numbers are separated out from the overall LAC population to enable transparency of UASC numbers.

Month	Total LAC Population	Non-UASC LAC	UASC
Jul-15	563	530	33
Aug-15	563	531	32
Sep-15	570	537	33
Oct-15	571	536	35
Nov-15	582	538	44
Dec-15	589	543	46
Jan-16	592	541	51
Feb-16	596	539	57
Mar-16	610	549	61
Apr-16	615	553	62
May 16	631	566	65

3.2 It is anticipated that the number of UASC will continue to rise as part of the Home Office UASC transfer scheme through which Local Authorities are to take a regional approach to support UASC. The aim of the transfer scheme is to provide a fair and equitable distribution of UASC across the country and that no Local Authority would exceed 0.07% UASC and refugee children as a proportion of the total child population in their area by the end of the year. For Cambridgeshire the number of UASC would rise to a

maximum of 92.

## **4.0 ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

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

4.1.1 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 contribute 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) could have a negative impact on those organisations.

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

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

- The strategy targets parental mental and physical health needs, supported within their homes and community. To look after their children 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 Common Assessment (CAF) and appropriate interventions prior to becoming Looked After.

### **4.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people**

- 4.3.1
- Ensuring that child protection remains 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 (EHCP).
  - 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.



## **5.0 SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Resource Implications**

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

- The success of the strategy is in ensuring that we look after the right children, at the right time and in the right placement if we are to meet savings targets. This needs robust and consistent monitoring and reviewing of actions to adapt, re-commission and revise dependent on impact. The monitoring mechanisms includes:
  - A weekly meeting to discuss those children that have become Looked After is chaired by the Executive Director. The purpose is to review all of the cases that resulted in the need for the child to become looked after to elicit themes, practice issues, and to consider what could have been done differently. Agreed actions are progressed and captured within the LAC action plan.
  - A weekly discussion of all children in purchased care currently takes place to consider fragile placements and those where it may be appropriate to move back in county and into in house provision.
  - A weekly 'Threshold and Resources Panel', chaired by the Service Director of Children Social Care considers all cases where there is a request for accommodation (section 20 Children Act), legal proceedings or where an escalation of placement resource is required. This ensures that only the right children become looked after, at the right time and placed in the right placement in order to meet their needs.
  - A weekly CFA performance meeting chaired by the Executive Director, involving senior managers, takes place to track progress on the savings targets.
  - A Monthly multi-service review which targets specifically the top 50 high cost placements, however this has been extended to include all out of county placements, focusing on where there are concerns that a planned transition is imminent
  - Monthly working groups chaired by the project leads take place for all five outcome areas. Updates on progress are reported to the monthly LAC Board meeting which provides oversight.
  - Monthly LAC Board chaired by the Service Director, Strategy and Commissioning reviews all the activity updates on each of the five outcome areas, the financial savings linked with activity and performance data and identifies new themes and activity areas to be included. In addition it reviews all of the transformation bid proposals and gives collective agreement for those which will deliver best outcomes, effective use of resources and deliver savings.
  - External performance management of the Social Impact Bond
- 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.

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

5.2.1 Statutory duties will continue to be met.

## **5.3 Equality and Diversity Implications**

5.3.1 No significant implications have been identified.

## **5.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications**

5.4.1 No significant implications have been identified.

## **5.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement**

5.5.1 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 being updated regarding progress through committee reporting 3 times per year.

## **5.6 Public Health Implications**

5.6.1 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.

<b>Source Documents</b>	<b>Location</b>
Appendix 1: LAC Action Plan Progress Report, June 2016	Meredith Teasdale <b>Box No:</b> SH1210 <b>Room No:</b> 222 Shire Hall Castle Hill Cambridge CB3 0AP <b>email:</b> <a href="mailto:Meredith.Teasdale@cambridgeshire.gov.uk">Meredith.Teasdale@cambridgeshire.gov.uk</a>