

PLACEMENTS STRATEGY FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN: KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

To: **Cabinet**

Date: **25 October 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 provide an update to Cabinet on the development and implementation of Cambridgeshire's Placements Strategy for Looked After Children; the first draft of which was approved by Cabinet in February 2011.**

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.

The updated strategy describes progress and impact to date as well as capturing the ongoing workstreams and priorities looking ahead.

Recommendation: **Cabinet is asked to consider and approve the updated strategy and the associated action plan for this work, a summary of which is provided by this report.**

The full updated strategy document is provided in the information pack for Cabinet members.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The first version of Cambridgeshire's Placements Strategy for Looked After Children was developed from July 2010 in response to a rise in the number of children in care from around 385 in 2007 to over 500 by the middle of 2010. This rising population created a significant pressure on the budget for care placements but more importantly indicated a rising need amongst families in Cambridgeshire for effective support to help them stay together. The focus was therefore on developing a clear, long-term commissioning strategy for care placements but also on reducing the number of children coming into care by helping families turn things around before they reach the point of crisis.

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The strategy provides the framework for a wide range of projects across Children's Services, these workstreams are grouped under the following objectives

Objective 1 - Supporting families to stay together

Objective 2 - Keeping Children in School

Objective 3 - Managing risk confidently and providing support at the edge of care

Objective 4 - Providing an appropriate placement and a good education for all Looked After Children

Objective 5 - Giving children clearly planned journeys through care

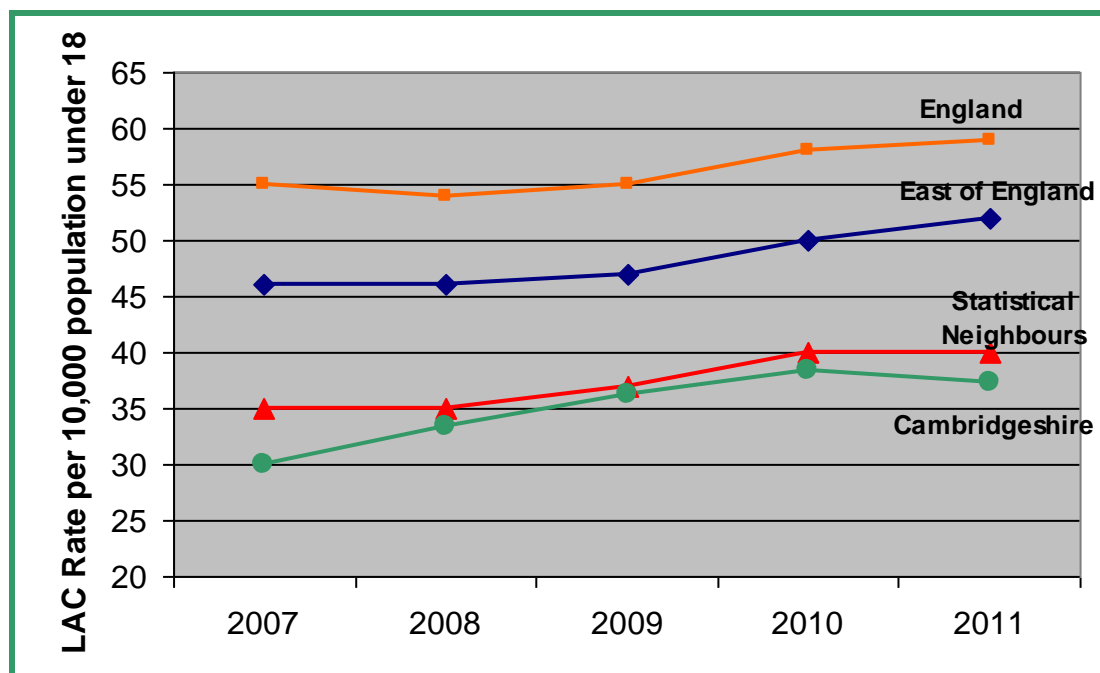
A summary of the progress to date and priorities looking forward under each of these objectives are detailed in section 4. Further details are contained in the full strategy which is available from James Wilson, Change Support Manager, CYPS.

3 IMPACT & PRESSURES

- 3.1 Numbers of Children in Care

The early impact of the strategy has been encouraging. The number of children in care peaked at 508 in September 2010 but the upward trend has subsequently reversed and we have seen a modest but not insignificant reduction in the total looked after population to between 470 and 480 for most of 2011. This reduction has taken place with no change to the threshold for accommodation and has been achieved from a comparatively low starting number of children in care (in comparison to other authorities).

This trend appears to be in contrast to the experience of other local authorities in the nationally and some of our statistical neighbours who have continued to see their care populations rise during 2010/11.



The impact on numbers in care to date is attributed mainly to the work to tighten our care and permanency planning processes and with services working at the edge of care. These workstreams have reduced drift in care planning, achieved safe exits from care for some young people and helped us move children into adoptive and other permanent placements more quickly. We anticipate that the impact of the preventative elements of the strategy will be in the longer term. These workstreams are aimed at identifying need early, preventing long term problems arising and ensuring that the system of universal services works around these vulnerable young people.

3.2 Integrated Plan Savings Targets

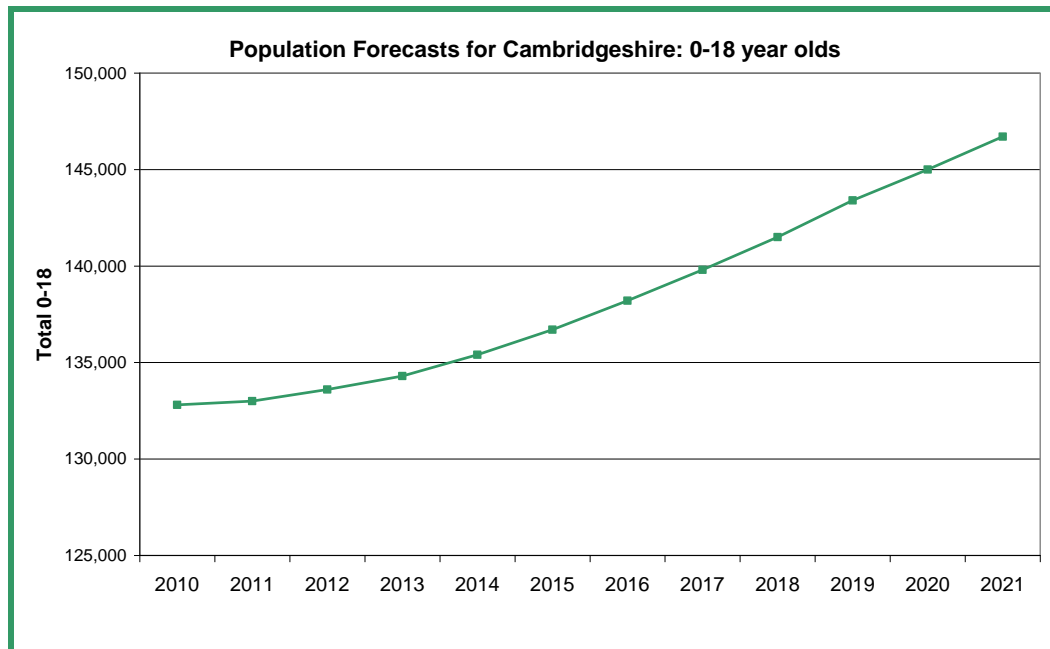
The initial success in reducing the number of children in care and continued efforts to drive out value for money in providing and commissioning placements mean that Children and Young People's Services are on track to achieve the £1.63m Integrated Planning savings target for 2011/12. However there remains a further £6.7m to be saved from the budget for care placements by 2015, this represents a significant challenge, especially in light of forecast demographic pressures (see below)

Savings are planned over the next 4 financial years, as follows.

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

3.3 Demographic Pressures & Risks

The County Council's Research Group are projecting that the overall number of children and young people aged 0-18 in Cambridgeshire will increase by 13,700 from 2011 to 2021 as a result of a higher birth rate and planned housing growth. If we assume that the current rate of children becoming Looked After in Cambridgeshire (38 per 10,000 at present) is maintained then we would expect to see our cohort of Looked After Children increase by 52 purely as a result of overall population growth. Based on current costs, an additional 52 children in care would create an additional budget pressure of over £2.5m per year.



As well as a growing number of children and families in Cambridgeshire, it is possible that we will also see rising levels of need in these families. The current economic climate may put these families under additional pressure and the link between worklessness, economic hardship and familial breakdown is clear. The long term national trend is a gradually increasing rate of Looked After Children and although the intention is to minimise this, we must also be conscious that this trend may be partly a reflection of the increasing success of safeguarding services in identifying vulnerable children and young people.

Government is consulting on proposals that young people with custodial sentences over 13 weeks should be given Looked After status. Should this become law, it would generate a need for the local authority to provide care placements for a small cohort of young people with very challenging behaviour who are likely to require specialist and therefore high-cost placements.

Finally we must recognise that the strategy is being implemented during a period of significant change in Children's Services and especially in Children's Social Care. The social care workforce will be reorganising into the unit model structure over the coming year and although we are convinced that the model will in the long run improve our capacity to support families and reduce the number of children coming into care, we must also recognise the short term impact on teams. We might anticipate a greater caution on the part of social workers in their approach to managing risk during this transition period, which may in turn have an impact on our ability to maintain the current downward trend in the number of Looked After Children.

4 WORKSTREAMS AND PROGRESS

This section sets out what we have done already and what we will do as a result of this second strategy under each of the objectives identified.

4.1 Supporting Families to Stay Together

To date we have;	Looking forward we will;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invested in a new Family Support Workforce• Recruited Social Workers to work with families at an earlier stage• Successfully introduced the Family Intervention Project (FIP) to work with the most challenging families• Redefined the role of Children's Centres to a more targeted approach with a greater focus on those families where there is a risk of escalation towards social care thresholds• Implemented CAF as a single, holistic and consistent approach to assessments of need	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expand the Family Intervention Project Model across Cambridgeshire• Develop the 'Team around the Child and Family' Model – working with adult services and undertaking family-based assessments• Agree a single, evidence based approach to behaviour management for all settings• Exploit opportunities for the Co-location of Services which work with children• Finalise the Integrated Pathway with Mental Health Services to be clear about how children will be identified, assessed and referred for mental health provision

4.2 Keeping Children in Education

To date we have;	Looking forward we will;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devolving alternative education to school partnerships has kept more children in mainstream education and improved alternative provision• Improved collaboration between schools to ensure continuous education when children need to move from one school to another• Undertaken joint projects to tackle complex and challenging behaviour in primary schools• Targeted Mental Health in Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tackle problems at home and at school together by joining up social care processes with sessions focussed on education issues• Address transitions as a key trigger point for school and home life breakdown – especially for Children in Need• Share good practice between schools in working with children at risk of disengagement• Monitor and champion quality education for all and universal access and attendance

4.3 Managing risk confidently and providing support at the edge of care

To date we have;	Looking forward we will;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finalised the new model of systemic practice for social work in Cambridgeshire Improved the operation of the threshold for care (CAM Panel) to ensure that the right children come into care at the right time and in the right placement Secured further investment in the Multi Systemic Therapy (MST) model Used Family Group Meetings successfully to find family based solutions at the edge of care and where young people have presented to social services as homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish an MST Sexualized Behaviour Programme Develop a business case to establish additional shared care for families struggling at the edge of care Explore use of Family Group Meetings or a similar model to engage the wider family in solutions at an earlier stage Confirm our policy and practice to support young people aged 16+ presenting to Social Care as homeless Introduce a Volunteers in Child Protection Scheme

4.4 Providing an appropriate placement and a good education for all Looked After Children

To date we have;	Looking forward we will;
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redefined the role of Residential Child Care in our Placements Strategy Improved Placement Commissioning and Matching Practice Enhanced the Psychology Service supporting the mental health of Looked After Children Jointly commissioned accommodation for children between the ages of 16 and 18 that provides a pathway between care and independence Recruited retained foster carers for emergency situations Established a Looked After Children education disruption fund Supported special schools to meet the needs of more Looked After Children with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide residential placements with on-site education Increase the number and capacity of fostering families Establish emergency / short term accommodation for 16+ young people Develop an alternative approach to securing parent and child assessment placements

4.5 Giving children clearly planned journeys through care

To date we have;	Looking forward we will;
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supported appropriate and safe exits from care through the Going Home Project• Increased our focus on giving children stability and permanence in care as quickly as possible through the new permanence framework• Entered a Partnership with Coram Adoption Agency to minimise delay in the adoption process• Improved transitions into adulthood for Looked After Children – especially those with disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achieve safe exits from care where appropriate among the cohort of 16+ Looked After Children through further 'Going Home' audits• Eliminate any avoidable delay in care planning as a result of legal proceedings• Integrate statutory SEN and LAC review processes• Create a single care plan for Looked After Children to support consistency in care• Introduce the use of concurrent planning in fostering and adoption to reduce placement moves for children under the age of 1

5. ALIGNMENT WITH PRIORITIES AND WAYS OF WORKING

It is considered that the strategy is closely aligned to the strategic priorities of the Council and the desired ways of working. Key points are highlighted below but these will not be exhaustive.

5.1 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people when they need it most

- Looked After Children are one of the most vulnerable groups the County Council works with. The strategy aims to ensure we have sufficient high quality placements to support these children and young people (see 2.5) including, in particular, new provision for our 16+ cohort and children with disabilities, improving our in-house residential homes and our drive to ensure we have sufficient foster carers to give children a safe alternative family.
- Equally the strategy specifically aims to work with children and families who are experiencing problems before they reach the care threshold (see 2.2 and 2.3). The new Family Worker role, projects such as FIP and the recruitment of social worker resource operating in locality teams are all strategies designed to help these vulnerable families.

5.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives in their communities

There are no significant implications for this priority.

5.3 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

There are no significant implications for this priority.

5.4 Investing in prevention

- Through the Integrated Planning Process, members approved a budget re-allocation within Children and Young People's Services of £1m from the care placements budget into preventative services. This has been directly allocated to the new Family Support Workforce and a number of other specific interventions considered to have the best evidence base for prevention. A separate report is provided to cabinet detailing this budget allocation.

5.5 Working together

- Effective joint work is at the heart of this strategy. Specific workstreams relating to working together include the development of the Team Around the Family model with Adult Services, exploiting co-location opportunities within Children and Young People's Services and in particular with health and mental health services and the development of joint working arrangements between Social Care colleagues and preventative services such as children's centres
- The strategy has also been supported by a joint savings plan, with agreed contributions for all CYPS directorates.

5.6 Making sure the right services are provided in the right way

There are no significant implications for this priority.

6. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Resource and Performance Implications

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

- Section 3 provides an overview of the savings targets, pressures and current position in relation to the strategy.
- Members will note that the best use of a number of Children's Services property assets is being considered within the governance of the strategy. Specifically the residential child care workstream will determine the future use of the Norwich Road site in Wisbech and will consider whether the current property portfolio of in-house children homes is the most appropriate one to deliver the proposed residential 'hub' model.
- In addition to the overall reduction in the number of children in care we are encouraged that a number of key LAC placement performance indicators are above target for the 2011/12 year to date, as below; There do however remain a number of performance areas where improvement is required. Notably, too great a percentage of Looked After Children are placed out of Cambridgeshire boundaries.

Performance Measure	Performance	Target
% of LAC aged 10-16 in foster placements or placed for adoption	82.2%	82%
% Under 16 LAC for at least 2.5 years and in the same placement 2 years (measure of placements stability)	76.5%	66%
% of LAC Cases reviewed within the required timescales	98.4%	95%
% of Fostering and Residential LAC placements made outside of CCC boundaries	40.9	29%

6.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

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

- The Local Authority's statutory duties are unchanged and our legal responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children and young people remain as before.
- There is no change to the threshold of accommodation and individual decisions about children and young people coming into care continue to be made exclusively on the basis of the judgement of professionals as to what is in the interests of protecting the wellbeing of each child or young person.

6.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

There are no significant implications within this category

6.4 Engagement and Consultation

There are no significant implications within this category

7. OVERVIEW COMMENTS

7.1 An Overview group of the CYP Overview and Scrutiny Committee met twice with officers leading on the Placement Strategy and consisted of Councillors Batchelor, Gymer, Hoy and West. Officers involved in the process included:

- Service Director for Children's Social Care
- Service Director for Strategy & Commissioning
- Head of Children's Social Care
- CYPS Change Support Manager

7.2 The group were pleased to see progress and evidence of impact in relation to the strategy. Although supportive of the work to-date, the group made comments in the following areas.

7.3 Management of risk in the transition to the Unit Model of social care

The group made the point that any change process involves a degree of risk. This is made more significant by the nature of the work undertaken by social care practitioners, where mismanaged risk can result in severe consequences. The strong governance of the Unit Model project was described as mitigating much of the risk associated with the transition. Specific measures include the involvement of internal audit, the transition plan and risk log. Staff oversight was also described as important in this regard. This risk is recognised on page 6 of the strategy.

7.4 Available resources

The strategy aims to reduce the burden on higher cost services at tier 4 of the Model of Staged Intervention (MOSI) by strengthening preventative measures; members observed that this could increase burdens on lower tier, preventative services. To make this a success, sufficient numbers of workers have to be available to deliver the preventative services. Members made the point that such work could prove to be labour intensive and queried whether available finances would provide the required staffing levels.

7.5 Threshold for accommodation

The group stressed that the first priority should be to keep children and young people safe. Members sought assurance that the measures in the Placement Strategy should in no way impede the process of accommodating in Local Authority care those children and young people that need it. The Service Director for Children's Social Care confirmed that the threshold for accommodation was not altered by the Placement Strategy, which recognises that there will always be children who need to come into care.

7.6 Involvement of partners

Use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) has increased markedly (see strategy page 13). Members welcomed this but queried the extent to which the increase was attributable to the submission of CAFs from non-County Council staff. It was suggested by members that a graph detailing this should be included in the Strategy, as it would indicate the level of partner buy-in to the CAF process. However, if such information cannot be sourced in time for inclusion in the Strategy, the Overview group requests that it be circulated via email to the CYP Overview and Scrutiny Committee and, at its request, Cabinet.

7.7 Involvement of volunteers

An innovation of the Strategy is the use of volunteers to support families with a Child Protection Plan. Members queried whether it was appropriate to use volunteers in this capacity as the work is with high-need families in challenging situations. It was explained that appropriate training and support would be provided to volunteers; members requested that specific reference be made to this in the Strategy (see page 27).

7.8 Economic context

The group pointed out that economic and related pressure facing families may increase demand for social care services, and suggested that that this fact be

reflected more explicitly in the Strategy. This is recognised on page 6 of the strategy.

Source Documents	Location
Keeping Families Together: Placements Strategy for Looked After Children - Update October 2011	James Wilson Box No: CC1114 Room No: B109 Castle Court Shire Hall Castle Hill Cambridge CB3 0AP email: James.Wilson@camb.ridgeshire.gov.uk