

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 12 October 2017

Report of the Head of Service: Policy, Information and Commissioning (Start Well)

Part I

Electoral Divisions affected:
All

Lancashire Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020

(Appendices 'A' and 'B' refer)

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Executive Summary

It is a legal requirement for all local authorities to provide a Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy, as set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989. The Strategy sets out how Lancashire County Council intends to meet its Sufficiency Duty for the children we look after, improve the quality and choice of placements, ensure value for money and minimise the likelihood of suitable placements not being available locally.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the provisions of Standing Order No. 25 have been complied with.

Recommendation

The Cabinet is recommended to approve the Lancashire Children Looked After (CLA) Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020, as set out at Appendix 'A'

Background and Advice

The Lancashire CLA Sufficiency Strategy 2017-2020 aims to improve outcomes for our children in care through the provision of a sufficient number and range of high quality placements and accommodation options. It sets out how Lancashire County Council will work with partners to meet the statutory Sufficiency Duty, set out in Section 22G of the Children's Act 1989, which requires local authorities to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for children looked after within their local authority area.

The Strategy sets out our Commissioning Priorities and targets for the next three years which include:

- Working with partners to reduce our children in care, from a rate of 76.7 per 10,000 in July 2017 to 66.7 per 10,000;
- Providing an effective prevention, early help and outreach offer to support families to become more resilient and stay together where it is in the child's best interests to do so;
- Halving the number of placements with parents (or other person with parental responsibility), returning them to the levels they were at in March 2014;
- Increasing the proportion of our fostering placements to become in line with the North West average of 80.5% (excluding placements with parents);
- Working with providers to develop more specialist fostering placements to meet the needs of our more complex CLA;
- Reducing the numbers of young people in residential provision to 136 by March 2019 and improving the ratio of agency: in-house placements to 60:40;
- Developing more specialist residential provision, both internally and with providers to meet the needs of our most complex CLA;
- Prioritising the usage of our block purchased supported accommodation provision for 16+ looked after young people, 16-17 year old homeless and 18-21 year olds who are known to Children's Social Care.

Consultations

The Strategy includes priorities identified locally by providers and children, young people.

Implications

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

Key to ensuring that children looked after have the best start in life is finding the right placement in the right place at the right time to best meet their needs. Failure to address the provision of sufficient local placements will impact on our ability to improve outcomes for our children looked after.

Financial

Rising demand for children's social care is a national trend and unless needs are effectively met there are significant long-term costs of children and families not receiving the right care and support. Lancashire has experienced significant budget pressures not only as a result of increasing numbers of children looked after, but also due to the challenges the Council is facing when sourcing placements, often linked to greater complexity of need. Unit costs have increased, most notably for residential placements commissioned from external providers, such that in 2016/17 spend on agency residential care alone reached £28.123m. This represented an increase of £7.938m compared to the previous year.

In 2017/18 additional demand of circa £23m was added to children's social care related budgets via the medium term financial strategy (MTFS) to address demand pressures, of which circa £16m related to agency residential costs, circa £5m to agency fostering costs and circa £2m to other placement costs. A further circa £16m has been included in the MTFS over the next 4 year period from 2018/19 to 2021/22 (as at quarter 1 2017/18).

The Sufficiency Strategy sets out the Council's commissioning priorities to ensure that the best outcomes are achieved for children and young people in our care. The Strategy will inform the development of a number of proposals that will impact on the Council's budget.

The Council's Residential Strategy - a key priority in addressing sufficiency - was approved by the Cabinet on 15 June 2017. Savings will be phased-in as changes take effect but the plans contained in the Residential Strategy project annual recurrent savings of £3.743m from April 2019 onwards.

Residential Strategy	2017/18 £m	2018/19 £m	2019/20 £m
36 Adolescents Prevented from Coming into Care	0.111	2.144	3.185
1 In-house Foster Placement Breakdown Avoided	0.000	0.121	0.121
8 CYP Returned Home	0.000	0.140	0.253
Increased Utilisation of In-house Provision	0.041	0.747	0.995
Anticipated Savings	0.152	3.152	4.555
Additional Funding Required	0.266	0.811	0.811
Anticipated Net Savings	-0.114	2.341	3.743

The expansion of the Access to Resources Team from October 2017 is expected to deliver annual recurrent savings of £0.733m from April 2019 (based on findings from a pilot) by preventing one residential placement per month by sourcing a 'hard to find' fostering placement.

Expansion of the Access to Resources Team	2017/18 £m	2018/19 £m	2019/20 £m
1 'Hard to Find' Fostering Placement per month	0.358	0.912	0.924
Additional Funding Required	0.076	0.191	0.191
Anticipated Net Savings	0.282	0.721	0.733

It is anticipated that the development of 'step down into fostering' provision in collaboration with independent foster agencies will deliver annual recurrent savings of £0.595m from April 2019.

Step Down into Fostering Provision	2017/18 £m	2018/19 £m	2019/20 £m
Anticipated Savings	0.178	0.582	0.595

There are no placement costs associated with children looked after who are placed with parents and therefore reductions in the number of these placements will not generate financial savings.

Further proposals will be developed and presented to Cabinet for approval in due course including developing a Lancashire 'PAUSE' model, exploring block purchasing complex beds in collaboration with other local authorities and/or further development of internal complex beds, increasing the number of in-house fostering placements, and reviewing usage and commissioning of block purchased supported accommodation provision for 16+ young people.

The achievement of targets set out in the Sufficiency Strategy and thereby achievement of the above savings assumes a steady state in respect of overall demand. However, as outlined earlier in this report Lancashire has experienced significant budget pressures as a result of increasing numbers of children looked after and complexity of need which is expected to continue over the 4 year MTFS period.

Legal

There are no legal issues arising from this Strategy.

Equality and cohesion

The Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy will support the achievement of improved outcomes for our children in care. An Equality Analysis is set out at Appendix 'B'.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
N/A		
Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate		
N/A		