

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 14 January 2021

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

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2021 - 2024

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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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 C19 have been complied with.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve the Lancashire Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2021 - 2024, as set out at Appendix 'A'.

Background and Advice

The Lancashire Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2021-2024 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:

- 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;
- Continuing to bring the proportion of placements with parents (or other person with parental responsibility) more in line with the proportions seen regionally and nationally;
- Increasing the proportion of foster care placements to bring them closer to the national average;
- Increasing the number of in-house foster care placements provided;
- Working collaboratively with agency fostering providers to increase the number of local children placed with local carers;
- Continuing to work with providers to develop more specialist fostering placements to meet the needs of our children looked after who need additional levels of support;
- Matching children who have a plan of adoption with the most suitable adopters as quickly as possible;
- Reducing the proportion of young people in children's home provision;
- Ensuring appropriate children's home placements are available for our children in care, particularly those who require additional support and resources;
- Strengthening partnership working with District Housing and social housing providers to ensure good quality supported accommodation/ independent living provision for our young people aged 16+;
- Continuing to prioritise the usage of our block purchased supported accommodation provision for our high priority young people (young people aged 16+ who are in care or who become homeless).

Consultations

The Lancashire Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy 2021-2024 includes priorities identified locally by providers and children and 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 children's home placements commissioned from external providers.

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. This includes the 'Where Our Children Live' proposal, which has been tabled as a separate report on this agenda.

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.

The achievement of targets set out in the Sufficiency Strategy 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.

Following the successful application to request support for the implementation of the Family Group Conferences model as part of the Supporting Families; Investing in Practice programme, Lancashire was awarded £548,279, of which we have spent £7,000 and committed £220,956 in this financial year.

Additional grant funding to support the Fostering Sufficiency and Commissioning programme has to date received £51,000 with a further £84,250 expected in this financial year.

Legal

There are no legal issues arising from this Strategy.

Equality and cohesion

The Children Looked After Sufficiency Strategy impacts the age (children and young people) protected characteristic but also impacts other protected characteristics groups, e.g. sex/gender, ethnicity and disability which are all referenced in the Strategy.

It is anticipated that the Sufficiency Strategy will contribute positively to the Public Sector Equality Duty's general aims. The Strategy will particularly contribute towards advancing equality of opportunity for those children/young people who are looked after and/or those children in families on the edge of becoming looked after and also aims to improve participation in public life for these groups, which is a sub-aim of advancing equality of opportunity.

The Sufficiency Strategy also includes proposals to increase opportunities for foster carers and improve their experience of fostering which will also advance equality of opportunity for this group, who are most likely to be women.

Further Equality Analyses may be required for specific proposals arising from the implementation of this Strategy, if it is felt that there could be an adverse impact on children and young people, parents/ carers or staff.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A