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**PLACEMENT & SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY FOR
CHILDREN IN CARE
2018/2020(revised)**

Document revision control

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Sufficiency is an essential element of delivering our pledge to the children and young people of Barnsley.

Barnsley's Pledge for Children in Care

Children in Care are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. It is the responsibility of the local authority as corporate parents, to support each of them as individuals in order to enable them to achieve their maximum potential.

We take the role of corporate parents very seriously in Barnsley. This is emphasised through Barnsley's Pledge for Children in Care and our local offer to Care Leavers.

Our pledge contains six promises:

- 1. We will look after Children in Care in a safe and caring home**
- 2. We will promote, support, and respect the identity of Children in Care**
- 3. We will ensure that Children in Care receive a good education**
- 4. We will support Children in Care to be healthy**
- 5. We will prepare Children in Care for adulthood**
- 6. We will involve Children in Care in making it happen**

[Our pledge to children in care](https://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/children-families-and-education/children-in-care/our-pledge-to-children-in-care/)

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1 INTRODUCTION

This refreshed version of the strategy is being published despite the 2016-19 strategy having not yet run its full course. Changes in the sector, including the increasing demand and closure of local authority children's homes in neighbouring boroughs, have had a displacing effect on the availability of placements and resulted in greater reliance on the independent residential sector. Although successful, the increase in foster care recruitment locally has not been sufficient to fully mitigate the impact of these changes.

This refreshed strategy has therefore been drawn together in light of what we now know ; to respond to current and emerging challenges in order to ensure that we can meet the accommodation and support needs of children in care in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Commissioners of services for children in the care of Barnsley MBC face a number of challenges over the coming period. The most pressing of these are:

- To ensure accommodation of sufficient quality and volume which satisfies our ambition to improve outcomes for children in care;
- To ensure maximum value for money in providing accommodation and support amid significant resource pressures and national challenges;
- To ensure the needs of children can continue to be met amid the pressures created by more children and young people having very complex needs;
- To develop the local market for accommodation and support of children in care to ensure children can be cared for in line with our ambitions and as near to home as possible.

The Children and Young People's Trust is committed to the continued investment in early intervention, prevention and 'edge of care' services to avoid wherever possible unnecessary admission to care. The priorities identified by all partners are:

- That children and young people are supported to remain with their families and communities wherever possible and enter the care system only when absolutely necessary;
- That children and young people who are admitted to care will receive high quality support to remain in care only for as long as is necessary to ensure successful reintegration to their families and communities and;
- That where children and young people do spend time in care the experience is a positive one which will help them to realise their potential and achieve successful outcomes.

Planning for children in care will continue to be carried out jointly with all relevant partners to ensure we effectively maintain our focus on all aspects of children and young people's lives. We particularly want to improve health and educational attainment outcomes and the numbers of care leavers in education, training and employment.

The Strategy in place to cover the period 2016-2019 has been updated to form this

version covering the period 2018-2020. Since publication of the earlier strategy a number of changes have occurred in both the makeup in the population of children in care and also in the issues presenting at Child in Need (CiN) and Child Protection (CP) levels of intervention.

Work done locally in 2014-15 to re-define and articulate thresholds across the children and young people's workforce has resulted in a stabilising of numbers of families supported through Child Protection Plans (CPP). The period since the publication of the last version of the strategy has also seen a stabilising of numbers of children in care at around 300.

A characteristic of the challenge in meeting needs is the complex nature of caring for older children and adolescents. By definition, this group present with more complex needs and often, very risky behaviours meaning some care arrangements are more intensive and specialist in nature.

This Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care 2018-2020 identifies how the Children and Young People's Trust will meet these challenges to ensure that children in the care of Barnsley MBC experience the highest possible quality of service provided within the context of achieving maximum value for money.

What has changed since we last published our Sufficiency Strategy in May 2016?

- Careful analysis of longer term trends of entry to care and children subject to a child protection plan, accurately predicted that our care population would stabilize around a new norm of 300. One of the objectives of the strategy was to create a system with sufficient resilience to cope with this increase and to continue to invest in preventing entry into care through developing family support, early intervention and prevention.
- The strategy also modelled an increase in the recruitment and use of in-house foster carers, with less reliance on more expensive external fostering-placements. Although absolute numbers of foster carers in Barnsley has increased, the growth of the care population has meant that the overall proportion cared for by BMBC carers has not yet increased in line with the ambitious targets set in the last iteration of the strategy.
- Performance in relation to permanency is strong and improving, including those young people choosing to remain with their foster carers post-18 (Staying Put). This can mean fewer children placed with Barnsley carers but represents a positive outcome for the child.

The current profile of placements has also changed from that envisaged in the previous strategy. As well as an increase in the age profile of the children in care population this is due to the increase in LAC locally, regionally and nationally resulting in authorities competing for limited placement vacancies. This places considerable additional pressures on resources and on the placements market, particularly when trying to secure placements possessing a thorough understanding of adolescent risk. The situation in Barnsley has been exacerbated by decisions in neighbouring authorities to close their own children's homes as well as placing Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in Barnsley placements which has made it more difficult to source independent placements locally. This accounts for a recent increase in the number of residential placements.

Summary of progress 2014-18

The previous version of this strategy listed four key outcomes we were seeking to achieve:-

1. Reduce the reliance on external foster placements

Progress:

- We continue to innovate in our approach to recruiting and retaining local authority foster carers. The number of in-house fostering households has increased from 103 in March 2016 to a projected 154 by March 2018. A 50% increase. This larger internal resource reduces reliance on more expensive external placement options.
- We have worked successfully with Regional partners through the White Rose Commissioning Consortium to manage and in some cases reduce, unit costs for the provision of Independent Fostering Agency and residential placements
- The service has performed well in terms of reducing the length of time children spend in care, consequently producing efficiencies. The proportion of LAC who have been in care for more than 12 months has dropped from 67% in November 2014 to 65.4% in December 2017.

2. Continue to increase the number and choice of internal foster placements

Progress:

- The time taken to carry out foster carer assessments has improved significantly. The national average figure published by the Fostering Network in 2017 was 241 days and at that time Barnsley was operating at an average of 200 days. We are now operating towards a figure closer to 125 days.

Placements (December 2017)				
Age Group	In-House Residential	In-House Fostering	Independent Residential	Independent Fostering
0 – 5	0	53	0	1
6 – 13	0	70	7	45
14+	5	23	14	22
Totals	5	146	21	68

- As the table above demonstrates whilst our recruitment of new foster carers has been good there is still a need for more in-house carers capable and willing to accommodate older teenagers.

3. Maintain placement stability and continue to support the use of SGOs / CAOs as an alternative to care

Progress:

- Stability of placements for Barnsley young people is good with only 3.9% having had 3 or more placements as at the end of Q3 17/18. This compares positively with both statistical neighbour and national benchmarks, from latest available data, at 9.7% and 10.0% respectively. There are a range of strategies and interventions which help to divert children from the care system, thereby maintaining this stability.
- There is evidence of good use of Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders with financial support where required. CAO and SGO numbers have both almost doubled from 2014 to 2017 (26 to 62 and 31 to 50 respectively) and whilst the payment allowances are much less than the costs of keeping a child in public care, they have exceeded the planned budget.
- Despite the increase in numbers, Barnsley's LAC number is still well managed and below both the national and statistical neighbour average. The current statistical neighbour average stands at a LAC population of 425. This is achieved through robust care management and permanency planning for children, exiting them out of the care system where it is appropriate and safe to do so.
- We have excellent levels of performance regarding numbers of children adopted. During 2016/17, 30% of Barnsley LAC leaving care were adopted. This is the third best performance nationally, as well as best performance both regionally and amongst statistical neighbours.

4. Increase independent living provision for care leavers and those aged 16+ on the edge of care

Progress:

- Along with more longstanding interventions, the establishment of the Intensive Adolescent Support Team has helped to prevent young people entering care and /or becoming homeless at age 16 and 17.
- We are currently working with partners and exploring options to develop supported accommodation within the borough to ensure more efficient use of existing resources and improve the offer of support for those preparing to leave care.

2. PRINCIPLES & AIMS

Barnsley Council should be able to demonstrate that it has done all that is reasonably practicable to secure sufficiency for children in care. Barnsley, therefore, has a duty to provide a range of high quality local placements which meet needs.

The underpinning principle of the Barnsley approach is to ensure that the **right** children are admitted to care, at the **right** time in order to secure the **best possible outcomes for children**.

- We share the same aspirations for Children in Care as any other good parent.
- We will listen to and consider the views of children and young people and ensure that their needs are at the centre of our planning and practice.
- Early Help provision, Child in Need services and Child Protection Plans will be the first consideration in meeting assessed needs, and will be promoted to facilitate children remaining within their immediate family network where this is safe.
- Early intervention and family support play an important role in de-escalating family problems, keeping children out of care and we will continue to invest in these services accordingly.
- An underpinning principle of family support is to use strengths-based and restorative approaches that seek to build positive, pro-social relationships in order to develop resilience in families.
- Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, kinship care arrangements will be explored as a preferred alternative arrangement (see Family & Friends Policy).
- Foster care arrangements will be put in place as a first option where family and kinship care arrangements are not possible and this is assessed as being the best option for the child.
- Residential care will only be put in place where family and kinship care arrangements are not possible, where foster care arrangements are not able to meet needs and only when residential care is assessed as being the most suitable option for the child.
- We believe in Barnsley carers for Barnsley children and wherever possible, children will be placed in, or very near to, Barnsley to facilitate the ongoing support of family / kinship networks and local services. We believe that placing with Barnsley carers makes best use of our community assets and produces better outcomes.
- Meaningful support will be provided to facilitate the rehabilitation to family and extended family networks from being in care when this is in the best interest of the child.
- Services to promote permanency for children and young people within their families or alternative substitute care will be promoted at the earliest opportunity (see Permanency Policy).
- We will identify and implement the commissioning actions necessary to ensure that BMBC and children's trust partners can satisfy the duty to provide sufficient accommodation and support to meet the needs of children in the care.

- We will identify the actions necessary to fulfil this ambition in the context of mounting pressures on the resources available across the Children and Young People's Trust (CYPT) and to ensure that resources are allocated in a way that achieves optimum value for money.

3. COSTS & COMPARISONS

Current Children in Care costs vs existing strategy / plan

The scope of the placement & sufficiency strategy covers the following:

- external residential & foster care placements;
- in-house foster carers;
- placements within BMBC owned children's home; and
- other placements such as special guardianship orders (SGOs), adoptions, Child Arrangement Orders etc.
- Accommodation for Care Leavers

The following table compares actual cost / performance against the plan (as per the current refreshed sufficiency strategy).

	Plan	Outturn	Plan	Final Outturn
	2016/17	2016/17	2017/18	2017/18
Average LAC Population	290	292	299	310
Projected Costs:	£M	£M	£M	£M
Fostering	6.022	6.256	5.902	5.895
Residential	2.868	3.395	3.168	3.927
Others – SGO, RO, Adoptions	3.740	3.558	3.837	3.967
Health & DSG Contributions	-0.324	-0.298	-0.298	-0.293
Adoption Grant & Other income	-0.150	-0.209	-0.098	-0.225
Total Care Costs	12.156	12.703	12.511	13.271
Total Care Budget	9.197	9.197	12.621	12.621
Variance	2.959	3.506	-0.110	0.650

Actual net spend on Looked after children placements is £13.271m for 2017/18, against which a financial pressure (i.e. overspend) of £650k has been reported for the year. This financial pressure is mainly attributable to increased Children in Care numbers in external residential placements compared to the target assumed within the placement & sufficiency strategy. LAC numbers have remained reasonably stable over the previous year between 280 and 300, although it currently stands at 310 at the end of March 2018 (297 at 31st December 2017).

There has been a rise in the number of children in care both regionally and nationally, which has resulted in competition amongst LAs for very limited placement vacancies leading to increasing use of residential provision. Also, the difficulty of placing older children with multiple and complex needs with in-house and external foster carers means greater reliance and use of external / more expensive residential care provision.

Unit cost & value for money

The following table compares Barnsley's children looked after unit cost per child per week against statistical neighbours and the LA average.

Unit costs £ per child per week (Gross costs) (Costs per CIPFA children looked after benchmarking)						
	2015-16 (per previous strategy)			2017-18 (current estimates)		
	Barnsley	Stat Neighbours	LA Average	Barnsley	Stat Neighbours	LA Average
LA own children's homes	£2,570	£2,940	£3,043	£2,202	£3,058	£3,308
External residential	£3,441	£3,464	£3,446	£3,488	£3,614	£3,697
LA foster care	£503	£401	£480	£500	£422	£474
External foster care	£836	£884	£911	£802	£865	£909
PAF B8 – overall unit cost	£872	£811	£919	£862	£833	£951

- Measures taken in Barnsley have seen the average gross cost of Children looked after per week fall to £862, whilst over the same two year period averages nationally and for statistical neighbours have risen. Whilst still above the average for statistical neighbours the gap has narrowed from £61 to £29.

The high comparable unit cost (when compared to its statistical neighbours) can be explained by Barnsley's high unit cost on its in-house foster care.

The following table indicates the composition of placements, in percentage terms, of those in either fostering or residential care. This data excludes children and young people who have been placed for adoption or placed with parents / family carers and for whom therefore a foster placement is unnecessary

Composition of placements (%) – children looked after (CIPFA children looked after benchmarking)						
	2015-16			2017-18		
	Barnsley	Stat Neighbours	LA Average	Barnsley	Stat Neighbours	LA Average
LA own children's homes	2%	3%	3%	2%	3%	2%
External residential	7%	7%	9%	8%	8%	9%
LA foster care	59%	65%	58%	56%	67%	58%
External foster care	32%	24%	31%	34%	22%	31%

- Using later data, available at the end of December 2017, we can see that Barnsley's performance in relation to in-house foster care currently stands at 61% of placements and is therefore improving by comparison with the above CIPFA data which is based on a snapshot at 31st March 2017. Given Barnsley's strong performance in terms of adoption and alternative permanence arrangements this represents a positive trend since the last iteration of the strategy.
- The Fostering Stocktake in mid 2017 and ongoing monitoring of demand by the service indicates that we currently have sufficient carers for very young children and especially babies although as carers retire or their circumstances change we will always need to replace some of these carers. However the highest level of need is for long-term placements for children aged 6-13 who need long-term care but where adoption or care by relatives is not possible and the recruitment strategy is directed at potential carers for this group. The second area where there are gaps in placement availability are for young people aged 13+ either coming into care for the first time or where their long-term placement has come to an end. Recruitment in this area is a real challenge for all agencies whether local authority or independent fostering agency and the intention is to develop partnership working with one or two local independent fostering agencies to increase the number of local carers for older children.
- When expressed on a per head of population (aged 0 – 17) basis, Barnsley's unit spend (£212) is comparably lower than both its statistical neighbours (£307) and national average (£244) – mainly due to low LAC numbers per head of population. Barnsley's number of Children Looked After per 1,000 population aged under 18 years for 2017/18 is 5.89, and compares favourably to its statistical neighbour and national average of 8.97 and 6.23 respectively.
- Barnsley's unit cost per child per week is consistently lower than the local authority average across the key type of placements, with the exception of in-house foster care. This is due to comparatively higher allowance payments.

Assessing Future Demand

This strategy assumes that the care population in Barnsley will remain stable at around the 300 figure for the next two years.

Of greater concern are the challenges highlighted regarding the availability of placements for older children and adolescents. This is given the national care crisis which has seen increasing LAC numbers and a resulting demand on suitable care placements which can lead to the only option being the most high cost residential provisions.

Although Barnsley has seen an increase in numbers in care since 2014 it is worth noting that even at this level, Barnsley remains significantly below the level of the statistical neighbour average. We will aim to further close the gap in the gross cost of children looked after per week with our statistical neighbours

As numbers in the care system have increased nationally the best and most plausible means of mitigating costs is to ensure we can respond effectively to local demand by improving how we manage placements to achieve a significant increase in local foster carer capacity and the judicious use of local, independent foster care arrangements. We shall use our comparatively better investment in our in-house carers to produce the placements needed in the right categories.

Projected LAC cost 2018-20

The following table shows projected placements numbers as well as the financial costs for the period 2017/18 to 2019/20:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	Actual	Plan	Plan
Assumed LAC Population	310	300	300
Fostering / Residential placements	244 (84%)	246	246
Other placements*	66 (16%)	54	54

* includes adoptions; placements with parents / other kinship; etc.

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
	Actual spend	Revised Plan	Revised Plan
Projected Costs:	£M	£M	£M
Fostering	5.895	5.742	5.691
Residential	3.927	3.617	3.836
Others – SGO, RO, Stay-put, Adoptions	3.967	4.197	4.391
Health & DSG Contributions	-0.293	-0.293	-0.293
DFE Adoption Grant & Other Income	-0.225	-0.100	-0.100
Total Care Costs	13.271	13.164	13.525
Total Care Budget	12.621	12.621	12.621
Variance	0.650	0.543	0.904

The following are the key assumptions underpinning 2018/19 and 2019/20 spend projections:

1. The current 2017/18 actual spend has been used as the baseline for projecting future year costs. The net cost pressure or variance of £0.6M shown in the above table represents the final outturn (overspend) position (March 2018).
2. The strategy assumes LAC numbers will be managed over the medium term within a range of 290 to 310. A mid-point LAC target of 300 has been assumed for modelling purposes. It

is envisaged that the effective implementation of the proposed actions (outlined on page 12) would ensure that LAC numbers are managed down to the assumed range.

3. The projections assumed that the number of fostering and residential care placements will remain consistent around 250 (82% of total LAC population – same as in the current year).
4. An increase or growth has been applied to other placements types (e.g. adoptions, placements with parents, connected persons, etc.) including the use of special guardianship and child arrangement orders.
5. Current unit cost of placements has been used in calculating future years cost projections, with a 2% uplift applied to fees / allowances. The in-house fostering cost reflects the increased cost of the proposed new fostering payment scheme.
6. Funding contributions (e.g. health funding) and income related to LAC placements has been adjusted accordingly based on latest information. No allowance has made for DfE inter-agency adoption grant or Staying Put funding.
7. The increase in funding (£200k) currently allowed for in the Council's MTFs (in line with the current LAC sufficiency strategy) has been reflected in the above model.

Based on the above assumptions, the LAC cost model shows an increased funding requirement of £0.543m in 2018/19, increasing to £0.904m by 2019/20.

Expenditure on Children in Care and those who have achieved permanence outside of the care system needs to be considered in total. Barnsley has kept the number of children in the care system at relatively low levels for a number of years. This is partly as a result of having achieved permanence by utilising the strengths of wider family networks through child arrangement orders (CGO), special guardianship orders (SGO) and through adoption. This however also comes at a cost with long term CGO and SGO allowance commitments aligned to fostering payments.

4. Outcomes

Meeting the needs of children in care in the current climate will present some very significant challenges to the Council. In response to this, there is a clear need to improve performance in the following ways:

- Develop the local market to ensure the availability of family placements, including for children and young people with complex needs;
- Reverse the recent trend for increased reliance on external residential placements;
- Continue to increase the number and choice of internal foster placements;
- Develop the availability of emergency fostering beds locally;
- Maintain placement stability and continue to support the use of SGOs / CAOs as an alternative to care;

- Increase independent living provision for care leavers and those aged 16+ on the edge of care through increasing access to more supported living and step-down support.

5. Key actions arising from this strategy:

1. Prevent entry into care where appropriate by continuing to develop family support and early intervention and prevention services:
 - a. Revise care pathways and support services for adolescents involved in very risky behaviours through the review and reconfiguration of adolescent support services.
2. Ensure wherever possible Barnsley children are placed with a Barnsley family.
 - a. Increase the numbers of children placed with BMBC foster carers
3. Improve the recruitment and retention of BMBC foster carers to ensure more Barnsley children can be placed and remain with Barnsley carers:
 - a. Revise the payments scheme to incentivise carers to accept older children.
 - b. Review the support available for Barnsley carers.
4. Develop the local market for placements, including by working with Regional partners, to improve the availability and manage the costs of Independent Fostering Agency and residential placements:
 - a. Continue to support and develop regional approaches through active membership of the White Rose Commissioning Consortium and alternative mechanisms.
 - b. In order to ensure we can further shift the balance away from residential provision to family-based placements we will develop the local IFA market through engaging with providers to encourage Barnsley based families to care for Barnsley children.
 - c. Engage more closely and regularly with local independent fostering providers to:-
 - i. identify upcoming vacancies with Barnsley based carers;
 - ii. develop a wider range of local fostering options to complement and enhance the availability of Barnsley foster placements for Barnsley children;
 - iii. identify potential local carers able to accept young people “stepping down” from residential placements;
 - iv. explore possibility of offering emergency placement options at short notice;

- v. review contracting arrangements with a view to developing greater access to Barnsley-based carers;
 - vi. while our aim remains to reduce the numbers of young people placed in residential care, we will continue to work with the independent residential provider market to identify accessible local residential options to avoid placing Barnsley young people outside of the local area;
 - vii. Explore options in relation to outcomes of market engagement with residential care providers and potential for developing arrangements with local providers.
5. Increase the range of 16+ independent living provision to support transition to adulthood for those in long term care.
- a. Develop business case for provision of 16+ accommodation option in partnership with Berneslai Homes.
6. Prioritise investment in restorative practices such as Family Group Conferencing for looked after children in external residential provision with the aim of identifying alternative carers within extended family networks and reintegrating young people to family based placements.

Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016 -19
Sufficiency Outcomes Framework (with targets)

The table below quantifies targets to enable us to deliver our aspiration to further shift the balance away from those placed in external residential or independent fostering placements and into placements with in-house fostering families.

Currently 68% of fostering placements are with in-house carers (Dec 2017) and our target aims to increase this percentage to 76% by March 2020.

NB The cohort is all children in care who require a care placement, excluding children placed with adoptive parents but where an adoption order is still awaited.

Outcome	Impact Measurement	baseline 2015/16	Target 16/17 (Actual 16/17)	Target 17/18 (Figure at Dec 2017)	Target 18/19	Target 19/20
1. Improve permanency planning / make good use of alternatives to care	Children placed for adoption	27	35 (40)	40 (37)	40	40
	Children placed with alternative orders (cost-bearing) - SGOs / CAOs	286	320 (332)	340 (352)	360	390
	Care leavers in 'staying put' and "staying close" arrangements	18	20 (14)	21 (10)	22	23
2. Reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies	Number of children placed in IFAs	79	47 (84)	35 (70)	60	60
	Number of children placed in internal fostering	142	179 (137)	199 (148)	180	195
3. Increase availability of suitable BMBC foster placements	Net increase in numbers of foster carer households (newly recruited less numbers leaving in period)	108	33 (11)	50 (18)	30	30
	Net increase in numbers of available internal foster care placements (PE25)*	133	47 (16)	71 (24)	42	42
4. Maintain low numbers of young people in residential care settings	Number of young people in independent residential	15	15 (15)	15 (21)	15	15
	Number of young people in BMBC residential	5	5 (5)	5 (5)	5	5
	Number of young people in semi-supported accommodation			5(5)	5	8

Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2016 -19
Sufficiency Outcomes Framework (with targets)

The table above shows an overall target of a net increase of 30 new in-house fostering households each year over the next 2 years based on the level of recruitment achieved in 2017/18. However the service will focus on new long-term carers for children aged 6 – 13 and a planned collaboration with local IFAs to increase the number of carers for young people aged 13+.