

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 26 February 2019	Meeting Name: Corporate Parenting Committee
Report title:		Brief Report on the 'We Will' Statements in Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2018- 2022 and Draft Sufficiency Dashboard	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Director of Children and Families	

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That committee members note the brief updates on the 'We Will' statements in the sufficiency strategy in this updating report and the development of a sufficiency dashboard addressing some of the 'We Will' statements (**the draft Sufficiency dashboard, Appendix 1 listed to follow**) to monitor progress. For members to have an opportunity to comment on the dashboard and any additional information that would be helpful before a final version is presented to the children and adults board by the end of March 2019.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2. The council's placement sufficiency strategy, 2018 – 2022, for children looked after and care leaver's sets out a number of 'we will' statements for each area of focus that is required to meet the aims of the strategy.
3. The sufficiency strategy group, co chaired by the director of commissioning and director of children and families, has been meeting on a monthly basis since April 2018 to track the progress of the placement sufficiency strategy 2018 – 2022 action plan. Underneath this group is a working group who are working on a thematic basis to progress the aims of the sufficiency strategy and this group has met bi-monthly, and from March 2019 will be meeting monthly. The last update on the strategy was provided to the corporate parenting committee in July 2018.
4. A draft sufficiency dashboard linked to the 'we will' statements has been devised to sit along side the sufficiency action plan in order to track the impact and progress of achieving the 'we will' outcomes. This sufficiency dashboard will be produced monthly and is going to be presented for agreement to the children and adults board by the end of March 2019. The draft of the dashboard will follow and be available to the corporate parenting committee as **Appendix 1**.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

Update to Corporate Parenting Committee on the 'We Will' Statements within the Sufficiency Strategy

5. **We will reduce the need for children to come into care.**

Overall our numbers of looked after children are decreasing gradually. In April 2018 we had 492 looked after children this reduced and in November 2018 was 474 children and in December 2018 the dashboard shows this was 472 children.

We have achieved a reduction in the number of looked after children by a variety of means. The strengthening of the entry to care panel and input of a range of services in particular the keeping families together team and in-house clinical service has supported children to remain at home when safe to do so. The high cost placement panel has ensured rigorous challenge and support for placement requests with a targeted use of the clinical service to stabilise placements.

Southwark's family group conferencing (FGC) was set up in April 2018 providing a service to facilitate families to discuss and devise a plan of support around a child and their parents were safeguarding concerns arise, reducing the need for continued children services involvement. The FGC also serves to identify family members who could care for the child if the family plan is unable to keep the child safe.

A redesign of the services for 16-17 years olds approaching the council for accommodation and support will be undertaken in February 2019. The review will focus on the process of assessment to determine levels of need and ensuring only those who require the need to be looked after are accommodated.

6. **We will grow our own fostering service in each year of this strategy both to decrease reliance on the independent sector, and to create the range and types of fostering placements required for complex needs older children, respite crisis intervention, siblings and parent and child.**

To date in 2018-19 the fostering service has recruited 10 new fostering households all of who live in Southwark. The forward recruitment strategy has a focus on the retention and development of our current foster carers including in 2018 launching a specialist training to become parent child carers, well being days, enhanced training offer and financial incentives linked to training, strengthening the support offer to carers to care for teenagers and exploring larger housing options for experienced foster carers. In December 2019 a new fostering payments policy was agreed by the children and adults board which also introduces a clear payment structure for parent child placements, remand placements and for specialist placements with enhanced support for children coming out of residential care.

In February 2019 the council will launch a foster friendly employer scheme, the scheme provides up to 5 days extra leave to support carers when settling children into their homes, attend training as part of the carers development and meetings relating to the child. We believe the scheme will encourage more council employees to consider fostering.

We are not succeeding in reducing reliance on the independent sector and the dashboard demonstrates that as a percentage the increase of the use of independent fostering agency (IFA) placements has increased very slightly. This continues to be very closely monitored and while it is a clear aim to reduce the reliance of the independent sector the overriding focus of the access to resources team (ART) team is achieving the best possible matched placement for each child.

7. We will maintain and develop the sufficiency of adoption placements through taking leadership within the development of the Regional Adoption Agency in whatever form that takes for London.

From the 1 April 2018 end of December 2018, 11 adoptive households were approved, 3 of whom approved as early permanence carers. This compares to 9 households from the 1 April 2017 to the 31 March 2018. It is anticipated that by the end of March 2019 that this year 14 households will be approved which is a 55% increase on the previous year. Southwark continues to be the host authority for the regional adoption agency which will go live in 2019. The Head of the Regional Adoption Agency for Adopt London South will be appointed by the end of February 2019 following a rigorous recruitment process.

8. We will continue to build the success in developing the option of family and friends' placements for children and young people.

We want more children and young people placed with families when they are unable to live with their parents. In April 2018 Southwark launched our own FGC service to promote family decision making and early identification of family members who can support parents and who in circumstances where children can not safety remain in the care of their parents can offer a placement in the family network.

In 2017-18 a total of 6 family and friends households were approved by the fostering and adoption panel as foster carers and in 2018-19 as at the end of December 2018 9 households have been approved which is a significant increase on the previous year.

All foster carers including family and friends carers now have a direct offer of a family group conference if difficulties occur in the placement that could have an impact on stability.

9. **We will continue to strengthen our approach to supporting Special Guardians**

In July 2018 a restructure of services created a team dedicated to support for friends and family and special guardianship order (SGO) carers and this team now offers preparation training for all carers considering becoming a special guardian. In 2018 Southwark began working with Grandparents Plus with a support worker to support family members caring for children to develop their own resilient systems of peer support through forum meetings and coffee meetings that can be sustained in the community.

10. **We will work with 50 Children in care over the next 3 years, and support them to make lifelong links with extended family members that may include being cared for by those family members.**

To date 22 referrals have been completed to the Lifelong Links project. The process has been fully completed with an FGC for two children. The service has now trained 5 additional FGC co-ordinators and will be now able to accelerate the number of children who are engaged in the project. The impact of this project funded by the Innovation Programme is being independently evaluated.

11. **We will reduce the number of children placed in children's homes from 2018 to 2022 and we began this work in 2017.**

The purpose of the high cost placement panel, set up in 2017 when the council had 47 children placed in residential care, was to review children in residential placements and provided scrutiny and oversight as to the outcomes and progress children are making as well as understanding care plans regarding family based placements where possible. Panel provided challenge and support as to appropriateness of requests for residential care. In December 2018 there were 27 children and young people placed in residential care.

Combined with the new strength based referral form, the placements team quality assurance of placement offers and better multi agency working arrangements has resulted in a reduction of residential placements. This ensures the right placement is identified and monitored appropriately.

The council, in partnership with Coram, held its first fostering activity day in September 2018. Of the 11 children who attended the activity day, 4 were in residential placements. As a result of the activity day, 2 of the 4 children in residential care were matched to foster carers with one child already moved and the remaining with a plan to move in February 2019 following carefully planned introductions which included the young person, foster family and birth family.

12. **We will improve placement stability through a better supply of high quality placements, alongside improvements to practice in relation to assessment, care planning and placement.**

Short term stability is defined by the Department for Education (DfE) as the percentage of looked after children who have had 3 or more placement moves in the year, the national average is 10%. In April 2018 the percentage for children in care in Southwark was 12% as at December 2018 this has improved to 11%.

Long term stability is defined by the DfE as a percentage of looked after children who have been looked after for 2.5 years and have been in the same placement for two years, the national average is 68%. In April 2018 this percentage was at 58% and by December 2018 this had improved to 60%.

In January 2019 the first stability taskforce, chaired by the director of children services, was held to strategically oversee the work required to improve stability for children in care. This meeting will be convened monthly throughout 2019 to drive a focus on improvement in placement stability. Some of the initiatives to drive further improvements in stability include mandatory stability meetings to be undertaken when issues arise in placement that threaten stability, one nominated officer to approve all placement moves and increased robust matching of children to carers.

The contract monitoring team will provide robust contract monitoring of any properties in which young people are placed with providers. The contract team will meet regularly with primary care trust (PCT) commissioners to discuss any issues identified from the monitoring visits concerning the placements and required outcomes and will report and escalate any safeguarding issues as appropriate. Alongside this work we have worked with Speaker box and are working to launch a young inspectors scheme by 1 April 2019 linked to the existing young advisors scheme which will provide opportunities for 8 -10 care leavers to be involved with work to inspect and feedback on placement provision.

13. We will improve placement sufficiency through better matching of such placements to need, and the development of the provision of support to placements to meet need.

The tracking and focus on permanence led to an increase in 2017-18 to 15 children achieving a match which is a 400% increase from the previous year. In 2018-19 to date 16 children have been matched and it is projected by the end of year this will increase to 20 children. In 2019-2020 with the launch of a new policy and the development of a stability focus the aim would be for a further increase and at least 25 children to have their match agreed by the panel and the agency decision maker (ADM).

The new long term fostering policy allows for children and young people aged 14 and above to be matched to their foster carers through the looked after review process, allowing for recommendations to be made to the agency decision maker, outside of the adoption and fostering panel, to formally match a child to their carers. The new policy reinforces the focus on thinking about stability from the start of a placement and putting in early support and utilising a traffic lights system for all carers to consider stability from the outset and talk about difficulties as early as possible.

A review of the current request for placement referral form will be carried out by the end of June 2019. The current referral was introduced when ART placements was formed (2017), it is a strength based approach and has positively impacted on stability as more information on young peoples needs are presented at the start of placement searches which enables better matching. We will consult with social workers and speaker box regarding the improvements as well as leaning from providers, through the South London Commissioning Programme (SLCP), as to what further information they would like when considering appropriate carers.

14. **We will increase the opportunities for placing more children in or near to Southwark**

In December 2018, 20% of children looked after by the council were placed 20+ miles out of the borough, this has significantly reduced from 25% in April 2018.

For those children who are based on their needs placed out of borough then collaborative work with health colleagues including child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and the clinical service has significantly increased the level of contact with and the supports accessed by children outside of the borough.

Alongside the placements team strive to ensure children and young people are placed in or as close to Southwark as possible and strengthening our own fostering service we are working with the SLCP to develop the independent placements market.

15. **We will build on this success and continue to ensure care leavers remain with their former foster carers when this is right for them under Staying Put.**

In December 2018 there were 43 young people (18 – 21 year olds) living with their former foster carers under Staying Put arrangements. We will continue to raise awareness of Staying Put with social workers and personal advisors to ensure this is being considered with young people and their foster carers. As part of the continued drive for matching children to permanent placements long term, social workers are undertaking conversations regarding staying put and carers understanding and availability to undertake these arrangements when the child turns 18 years old. It is positive that 40 of the Staying Put carers were doing so directly for Southwark and only 3 through an IFA agency. This reflects early planning so that when IFA carers want to provide support post 18 we ensure they are set up to be paid directly through Southwark rather than paying the additional fee to the agency which is generally an additional (£100 – 200 per week cost to the LA).

16. **The Southwark Young People 16 + Support and Housing Project sets out a detailed plan in relation to improving sufficiency in this area. We will collaborate with other local authorities so that the council, as a commissioning organisation, improves the leverage in the residential care market so that we can get work with good providers that deliver excellent outcomes at a fair price.**

The South London Commissioning Programme (SLCP) provider network is in place meeting every three months and Southwark is participating. Southwark is one of two boroughs that have opted to test the Integrated Commissioning Solution from March 2019. A financial modelling exercise is taking place next month. Ipsos Mori have been commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the programme which will include an economic evaluation of the impact from the new procurement processes. These steps will provide an opportunity to test the system and get a reliable forecast of benefits and cost savings.

In May 2019 the new framework for 16+ accommodation providers will go live in the authority, the 3 providers selected on basis of the tenders submitted already have an established presence in the authority as well as a range of suitable accommodation options for 16+ year old's.

17. **We will work with the CCG, CAMHS and independent therapeutic providers to improve therapeutic placement support for both children and young people and those that Care for them.**

The ART team have worked closely with Carelink (CAMHS) and the clinical service to consult on ensuring that for all children where looking for a placement there is consultation on the clinical needs of the children and advice is sought on ensuring that the right therapeutic place is in place for the children and the carer when a new placement request is made.

18. **We will further embed the Virtual School in the assessment, planning, and review of children looked after and their placements as well as co-working directly with all educational providers where our looked after children are.**

The virtual school sit on the placement panel and the complex cases panel to consider placement decisions. The virtual school education advisors play an active role in supporting all children in care to achieve their full potential.

19. **We will renew our approach to working with care leavers to improve outcomes and meet the challenges that increased demand places on the sufficiency and suitability of accommodation.**

There has been additional capacity through specialist housing workers linked to ART and housing to support care leavers to access housing via housing supporting them to have the skills and the resources they need to be able to manage their own tenancy.

Future Implementation of the Sufficiency Strategy

20. The council's placement sufficiency strategy, 2018 – 2022, for children looked after and care leaver's is a live and dynamic strategy and the action plan is updated bi-monthly and will be refreshed by 1 April 2019. The work has high priority due to the difference that achieving high quality placements for children in care will make for the outcomes for children in care and this is reflected in the steering group being chaired jointly by the director for children and families and the director for commissioning. Membership of the working group and steering group includes colleagues from commissioning, children's services, education, health, CAMHS, and clinical service.
21. The placement sufficiency dashboard will be monitored by the sufficiency working group monthly and presented bi-monthly to the sufficiency steering group. It is proposed to be presented to the children and adults board by end of March 2019.
22. In order to achieve the best placements for children in care in Southwark it essential to work with the market and this can only successfully be achieved by working together collaboratively with other local authorities. This is happening with The SLCP provider network encompassing 8 South London boroughs, focusing on market development for children looked after, negotiation and commissioning strategies, modelling future demand and sharing best practice. Southwark is one of two boroughs that have opted to test the integrated commissioning solution from March 2019 and the impact and cost saving of this is being independently evaluated.

23. Further work is required over the remainder of 2018-19 and indeed the next three years to 2022 to fully implement the aims and ambitions that have been set out in the sufficiency strategy 2018-2022.

Policy implications

24. None

Community impact statement

25. The decision to note this report has been judged to have no or a very small impact on local people and communities.
26. The work of the sufficiency strategy is intended to improve the placement choice and quality of placements for children and young people in care. The age of entry into care and the quality of the placement for the child are the two key factors that influence the overall outcomes for children in care.

Resource implications

27. Not applicable

Legal implications

28. Not applicable

Financial implications

29. It is anticipated that better sufficiency of placements for children in care will be more cost effective for the council and enable it to better fulfil the fairer future principle about spending money as if it was from our own pocket.

Consultation

30. In developing the sufficiency strategy 2018-2022, consultation took place with children in care and care leavers at a Forum led by Speakerbox and commissioning. This led to the development of 10 "I Statements" which young people felt were the most important factors in the delivery of a successful sufficiency strategy.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Democracy

31. Not applicable

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

32. Not applicable

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Children Looked After and Care Leavers Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2018 -2022	Southwark Document	N/a

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Draft Sufficiency Dashboard (to follow)

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Alasdair Smith, Director, Children & Families,	
Report Author	Kelly Henry, Head of Service and Helen Woolgar, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Care	
Version	Final	
Dated	18 February 2019	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
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