

NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION
CABINET BOARD**

14th January 2016

**REPORT OF THE HEAD OF CHILDREN AND
YOUNG PEOPLE SERVICES
- A. JARRETT**

MATTER FOR INFORMATION

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

UPDATE ON THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S STRATEGY

1. Purpose of Report

To update Members on the progress of the Looked After Children's Strategy which was approved and implemented in January 2015.

2. Executive Summary

The update to the Looked After Strategy reports progress on:

- Numbers of Looked After Children
- Services to support Looked After children and reduce numbers
- Admissions to care
- Care planning
- Use of Independent foster placements
- Use of in house foster placements
- Next Steps:
 - Financial review
 - Fostering marketing strategy
 - Training and clinical support
- Financial impact of the strategy

3. **Background**

The Looked After Strategy was approved and implemented in January 2015 as a response to introducing strategies to manage the high number of Looked After Children and to place an emphasis on reducing the number of children entering or remaining in Care within Neath Port Talbot. The strategy also introduced the way in which Children's Services intended to improve outcomes for those children who do need to be looked after.

4. **Financial Impact**

Not applicable in relation to the strategy itself although it is intrinsically linked to the savings that have been agreed as a part of the Forward Financial Plan.

5. **Equality Impact Assessment**

After consideration this is not applicable.

6. **Workforce Impacts**

After consideration this is not applicable.

7. **Legal Impacts**

After consideration this is not applicable.

8. **Risk Management**

After consideration this is not applicable.

9. **Consultation**

After consideration this is not applicable.

10. **Recommendation**

That the report be noted.

11. **Reason for Proposed Decision**

After consideration this is not applicable.

12. **Implementation of Decision**

After consideration this is not applicable.

13. **Appendices**

Update on the Looked After Children's Strategy

14. **List of Background Papers**

None

15. **Officer Contract**

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UPDATE ON THE LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN'S STRATEGY
JANUARY 2016

The Looked after Children's strategy was approved and implemented in January 2015. The Strategy set out a number of ways in which the reduction of looked after children and associated costs would be achieved in a safe manner and in accordance with children's needs.

This report is intended to provide an update to the key areas of the strategy:

1. The number of Looked After children has decreased over the past 18 months in line with the targets set by the Looked after Childrens Strategy and the Forward Financial Plan. The number of Looked After Children (LAC) has reduced from 467 on 30th March 2014 to 387 by 21st December 2015. Whilst this is confirmation that the strategy is working it is important to note that further work is required to ensure that the targets set out below continue to be achieved and surpassed.

Financial Year	Projected Number Of LAC	Reduction	Rate Of LAC Per 10,000 Population
2013/14	467 (actual)		168
2014/15	441	-26	158
2015/16	411	-30	148
2016/17	371	-40	133
2017/18	345	-26	124

2. A main element of the Strategy was ensuring that support services for families to enable children to remain at home were both targeted and effective. The Family Support Strategy introduced new opportunities for how commissioned services could support Looked after Children. The Rapid Response Service has successfully intervened in placements where young people were facing a family or placement breakdown, and services provided by Action for Children have been integral to supporting young people to be rehabilitated home to their families. The Family Group

Conferencing service was initially not aimed at children who were looked after, but was able to be responsive to the service need and change its remit to offer support where children were returning from foster carer to their families.

3. The Children's Community teams and the Looked after Children's teams have all benefited from stability across the workforce. Staff have received quality training which has resulted in significant improvements in assessment, care planning and risk management.
4. The Accommodation Panel has been successful in ensuring that only children who need to be accommodated enter the Looked After Children's System. This will be further enhanced in January with the introduction of a Resource Panel, which will consider alternative and holistic mechanisms to further support children remaining within their families. The management of authorising the admission of children and young people into care has been strengthened. Senior Management approval is required prior to any child becoming Looked After, and in an emergency situation authorisation can only be given by the Head of Children's Services.
5. Permanency panel continues to track and ensure that children who are in accommodation do not drift within the care system and have a timely move to a permanent family without the need for statutory intervention whenever this is possible. In the last 12 months of the cases tracked by permanence panel:
 - 12 Special Guardianship orders have been granted, with a further 17 being considered.
 - 7 children who were looked after and living with their parents under Placement with parents regulations have had Care Orders Revoked. There are currently 16 Children currently subject to care orders where the plan is to support rehabilitation to parents or to revoke the Care Order.

APPENDIX

6. There has been a reduction in the use of Independent foster placements for children who are under 10, however, the number of children 11 and over placed with independent carers has on the whole stayed static. It is now essential that this is re-balanced. The average cost of an IFA placement per year is £40,000 with an in house placement averaging £20,000. The more children that can be looked after by Neath Port Talbot foster carers, the greater the savings that can be made and better outcomes can be made for children who can remain within their local community.
7. The contract monitoring arrangements and reviews of commissioned services have been strengthened with the implementation of a central commissioning unit and dedicated support to Children's Services. Alongside the contract monitoring the Placement Coordinator plays a key role in ensuring that providers are held to account and that we are only paying for services that we commission and receive.
8. NPT fostering has a vacancy rate of 35% within its available placements; however with the exception of a small handful of placements where careful matching is required, all of these placements are for Children under the age of 10. We now need to increase the number of foster carers for children over the age of 11 to reduce the reliance on IFA placements. While NPT offers a reasonably competitive financial support package for foster carers looking after children under 10 and over 16, the payments for NPT foster carers looking after children aged 11 – 16 are not comparative to other fostering providers, including neighbouring Local Authorities, with NPT carers for this age range being paid on average £50 less a week per placement. This needs to be addressed in order to attract new carers to look after children in this age range. A plan has been formulated by the Service and will be placed before this Committee once the appropriate consultations have taken place.

APPENDIX

9. A revised fostering marketing strategy is required in order to support the need to recruit new foster carers into the service. The margin between the number of people expressing an interest in applying to NPT as carers and the numbers approved needs to be reduced. Applicants report that a key factor in deciding whether to foster with NPT or another fostering service is whether a retainer is available for times when they have no placement. This is something that needs to be considered as a means of increasing the number of placements that are available with NPT carers for children over the age of 11.
10. A comprehensive training programme continues to be available to foster carers, and NPT will be participating in the Fostering Network's National training programme for carers called 'confidence in care'. The supervising social workers in the fostering team have all received specialist training to help support carers in dealing with attachment and behavioural difficulties.
11. In addition to the existing supports available for young people and carers, consideration is currently being given to exploring the use of clinical supervision and support for foster carers in order to support and maintain placements for children with challenging or complex needs. A plan has been formulated and will be presented to this Committee following appropriate consultation.

By achieving the reduction in the number of LAC within this period the Looked after Strategy was able to support achieving the £700,000 saving required of Children and Young People's Services within 2014/15 and is on target to deliver its committed savings for 2015/16.