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**PLACEMENT & SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY FOR
CHILDREN IN CARE
2016/2019(revised)**

Document revision control

Version	Author/editor	Notes	Date Published
2014-2017 version	Richard Lynch / Pete Howell		Final version published May 2014
2016-2019 v1	Richard Lynch (RL)	2014-2017 strategy revised to take account of key changes and emerging risks within looked after population	
v2	RL	Further edit / inclusion of additional information throughout	28 th January 2016
v3	Joshua Amahwe	Revise financial information	9 th February 2016
v4	RL	Revise planning numbers / amend key actions / insert action plan	26 th February 2016
v4.1	JA	Update finance / vfm narrative	4 th March 2016
v4.2	RL	Update narrative	4 th March 2016
	RL	Correct narrative (pg. 11, 12, 13)and updates to outcomes framework (with targets)	8 th March 2016
v4.3	Helen smith	Update targets	9 th March 2016
v5	RL	Updates following discussion with MJ- R & RD	
v5.1	RL	Addition of appendices One & Two	15 th April 2016
		Update targets. Update appendix two following comments from MJ-R	19 th April 2016
v5.2	Paul Dalton/ JA / RL	Update finance	6 th May 2016
		Update narrative	
Final version to SMT			10 th May 2016

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Date of document: 31st January 2016

Date of strategy review: Quarterly – next review July 2016

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 emphasized through Barnsley's Pledge for Children in Care.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

Commissioners of services for children in the care of Barnsley MBC face a number 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 and ;
- To reduce costs of providing accommodation and support in line with reducing budgets across Barnsley MBC and partner organisations.
- To ensure the needs of children can continue to be met during a period where admissions are rising and the complexity of need is increasing.

The Children and Young People's Trust is committed to the continued investment in early intervention, prevention and 'edge of care' strategies and 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 a focus is maintained to improve the full range of outcomes, particularly in improving health and numbers of care leavers in education, training and employment.

The Strategy in place to cover the period 2014 – 2017 has been amended to form this version covering the period 2016- 2019. 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 to re-define and articulate thresholds among social care and partner staff has resulted in an increase in numbers of

families supported through Child Protection Plans (CPP). The period from 1st April 2015 has also seen a relatively small but nevertheless significant increase in the numbers of children in the care of the local authority.

A defining feature of the increase in children in care has been the numbers of adolescents currently looked after by BMBC. Following publication of Prof. Alexis Jay's report into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, there has been a concerted effort among all partners in South Yorkshire to ensure that young people are kept safe from exploitation, including in some cases by recourse to admission to care. By definition, this group present with complex needs and, often, very risky behaviours meaning care arrangements are more intensive and specialist in nature.

In addition, recent months have seen an increase in the numbers of older children (typically between 5 and 12 years old) admitted to care as a result of refreshed and improved working in children's social care. These 'legacy' cases will continue to augment rises in the current care population and although Barnsley has a good track record regarding the adoption of older children, this cohort present with issues that make an outcome leading to adoption less likely. It is reasonable to assume therefore, that our sufficiency planning needs to account for this increase in numbers as a long-term feature of Barnsley's care population.

Building on the information and analysis within this strategy it has been necessary to consider how these challenges might be addressed over the coming three year spending period.

This Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children in Care 2016-2019 therefore identifies how the Children and Young People's Trust will meet these new challenges and 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.

The Sufficiency Duty

The Children Act 1989 (section 22g) requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for children under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in a child's best interest to be accommodated within the local authority's area – for example, in order to stay at the same school or near to other family where contact can easily take place. This is commonly referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'.

Additionally, national guidance clarifies the responsibilities of local authorities under section 20 of The Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of The

Housing Act 1996 with regard to young people aged 16-17 years at risk of homelessness or requiring accommodation. Following the House of Lords judgment in R (G) v Southwark (2009), reference was made in particular, to the function of children's services and housing services when young people seek help from or are referred to local authorities because of homelessness. In these circumstances, the local authority needs to assess the need for, and in certain circumstances provide accommodation under, section 20 (Children Act 1989) to these older young people. In this circumstance the young person becomes a 'looked after child'

This means that Barnsley needs to consider the range of accommodation in our area capable of meeting different needs of our local Children in Care population and ensure that it is sufficient.

What has changed since we last published our Sufficiency Strategy?

- With the exception of the use of Residence Orders /Special Guardianship Orders, the 3 year strategy published previously assumed that numbers of children in care would remain stable. One of the objectives of the strategy was to maintain existing numbers and to continue to invest in preventing entry into care through developing family support, early intervention and prevention.
- The strategy also assumed increased recruitment and use of in-house foster carers, with less reliance on more expensive external placements.
- The current profile of placements has also changed from that envisaged in the previous strategy. We are now seeing an increasing number of older children and adolescents who are often more difficult to place, as opposed to the increasing number of mothers & babies and younger siblings that was a feature of managing placement demand in 2014.
- Whilst the funding position for 2015/16 includes additional investment of £2.6m, it should be noted that the target spend for the year includes an efficiency requirement of £0.7m.
- Performance against the current placement & sufficiency strategy has been impacted by the deep dive review and revision of the Threshold of Need document, which lowered the threshold for referral to Children's Social Care, ensuring that the right children had their needs assessed and safeguarded following the outcome of the 2012 Ofsted inspection.
- **See appendix one - Projecting Short and Medium – term Trends in the Care Population**

Prioritising our approach to Placement and Sufficiency

It is well understood that the needs of children and young people can only be met effectively if they live in care environments that provide the highest quality of care and support. That support must be both physical and emotional. All the research tells us that in the vast majority of cases, care is best provided within a family home setting. It is within family settings that children and young people are able to live most like their non-looked after peers and where they can be best prepared and equipped physically and emotionally for adult life. There will be some occasions when children and young people's needs cannot be met within a family setting and at these times specialist alternatives will be accessed for as long as is required.

We also realise that wherever possible and safe to do so, young people should be placed within Barnsley, allowing them to have regular contact with their birth families, friends and local communities. However, in order to meet the needs of those children who cannot be placed locally we will need access to some external placements outside Barnsley, to accommodate children who may have some very specialist requirements.

Placement stability however, is about much more than having sufficient accommodation for looked after children. Many children who come into the care system have had very traumatic experiences and need immediate support with their emotional wellbeing. A great number also need access to mental health services as well as support throughout their educational career.

All of this, of course, must be achieved in the most cost effective way. Partners must work together through their active participation in new and innovative ways that will maximise sustainable outcomes and service provision within increasingly tighter financial constraints.

Service provision should have a clear focus and be established in order to prioritise the following:

1. The prevention of children entering care by the use of family support and providing services which explore alternatives to entering care
2. Ensuring that planning when children enter care is in place in order to support the potential for children moving out of care as soon as possible
3. Permanency arrangements are made as soon as possible for those children remaining in care

Prevention

In Barnsley, we realise that the child's own family is usually the best place for bringing up children and young people. There are unique

advantages for children experiencing family life in their own birth family and in most circumstances children's needs are best met by being cared for within their immediate or extended families. Barnsley recognises that children should always be supported within their own family, with the assistance of family support services when necessary, unless there are clear reasons why this might not be consistent with their safety and wellbeing.

Preventing entry to care, where appropriate, remains a priority locally and is addressed through a range of services and interventions responding to need as detailed in the Continuum of Need, the Early Help Strategy and other supporting documents.

Resources are tightly focussed on the need to prevent care wherever possible in order to mitigate demand within the care system and to build on the evidence that children's outcomes are generally better when they can be supported within their natural ecology.

Planning for moving out of care as soon as possible

We also understand that there will always be some children and young people for whom being in local authority care offers the best and safest arrangements for their wellbeing and development. Difficult judgements are needed in balancing the right of a child to be with their birth family, and their right to protection from abuse, neglect and potential harm. However, we also know that it has long been recognised, both locally and nationally, that the outcomes for children who are brought up in the care system have not been good and must be improved. We need to make a significant impact upon

- the average rates of children in care having frequent placement moves
- improving their health and education outcomes
- preventing their risk of offending
- reducing the instances of substance and alcohol misuse by children in our care;
- reducing instances of children in care being missing from home,
- reducing the risk of sexual exploitation of children in care.

Additionally, when children leave care we need to make an impact on care leavers who are not in education, employment and training, or in appropriate accommodation.

It is for this reason that we must continue to ensure children leave care as soon as possible once it is safe and appropriate for them to do so.

Permanency

We know that increasing placement stability for children in care is the major driver for much of the improvement activity within looked after children services nationally. Barnsley enjoys high levels of placement stability and, in particular, makes effective use of alternative permanence arrangements such as Special Guardianship Orders

(SGOs).

Barnsley has made effective use of SGOs, Residence Orders (a small, residual number) and Child Arrangement Orders (CAOs). Use of these arrangements will continue locally but is included as part of our sufficiency planning because in the right circumstances they can keep children out of the formal care system, which helps to normalise their experience of growing up. In addition, most of these orders carry a financial commitment from the Council to support the carer in looking after the child.

Children and young people who live in stable homes have a greater opportunity to achieve good outcomes. Where children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, our aim is to find appropriate permanent placements for children and young people, as early as possible, and support them to remain there.

2. PRINCIPLES & AIMS

If challenged the local authority should be able to demonstrate that it has done all that is reasonably practicable to secure sufficiency. 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**.

- 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.
- 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.
- Wherever possible, children will be placed in, or very near to, Barnsley to facilitate the ongoing support of family / kinship

networks and local services.

- 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 share the same aspirations for Children in Care as any other good parent (Children in Care Strategy)
- 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 baseline costs & value for money

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, residence orders (ROs), etc.

It should be noted that the above excludes young people in secured accommodations, care leavers and young people presenting as homeless and associated costs.

Current estimated net expenditure on Looked after children placements is in the region of £11.1m for 2015/16. A financial pressure of £1.9m (Q3 position) is currently anticipated for the full year. This is mainly attributable to increased LAC numbers for the year (across the various placements) compared to the targets assumed within the placement & sufficiency strategy. There has been a significant increase in admissions into care since last year – an 18% increase in the numbers of LAC in 2015/16 (281 LAC population at 31st March 2016). The number of out of authority residential and fostering placements is significantly higher than allowed for in the strategy and has been exacerbated by increased use of SGOs and ROs.

The following table compares Barnsley's children looked after unit cost per child per week against the LA average (source: CIPFA 2015 children looked after benchmarking):

Unit costs £ per child per week (Gross costs) – based on 2015/16 estimated spend			
	Barnsley	Stat Neighbours	LA Average
LA own children's homes	£2,570	£2,940	£3,043
External residential	£3,441	£3,464	£3,446
LA foster care	£503	£401	£480
External foster care	£836	£884	£911
PAF B8 – overall unit cost	£872	£811	£919

- The average gross cost of Children looked after per week for Barnsley is £872, which is lower than the comparable local authority average of £919, although higher than the statistical neighbour average (£811).
- The high comparable unit (when compared to its statistical neighbours) can be explained by Barnsley's high unit cost on its in-house foster care plus its high proportion of placements in external foster care when compared to its stat neighbours. Conversely, Barnsley's proportion of placements in its in-house foster carers is lower than its statistical neighbours. See table below:

Composition of placements (%) – children looked after			
	Barnsley	Stat Neighbours	LA Average
LA own children's homes	2%	3%	3%
External residential	7%	7%	9%
LA foster care	59%	65%	58%
External foster care	32%	24%	31%

- However, when expressed on a head per population (aged 0 – 17) basis, Barnsley's unit spend (£189) is comparably lower than both the statistical neighbours (£262) – mainly due to low LAC numbers per head of population.
- 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 the in-house foster care. This is due to higher allowance payments and fostering team costs.

3 Year LAC growth projections (based on current placements)

The following table shows projected placements numbers / growth as well as the financial costs over the next 3 years to 2018/19:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Assumed Average LAC Population	250	290	299	308
Projected Costs:	£M	£M	£M	£M
Fostering	5.27	6.617	6.815	7.020
Residential	3.047	3.059	3.134	3.212
Others – SGO, RO, Stayput, Adoptions	3.166	3.451	3.54	3.635
Health & DSG Contributions	-0.324	-0.324	-0.324	-0.324
DFE Adoption Grant	-	-0.150	-	-
Total Care Costs	11.159	12.653	13.165	13.543
Total Care Budget	9.197	9.197	9.197	9.197
Variance	1.962	3.456	3.968	4.346

The following are the key assumptions underpinning the above projections:

1. The current financial year (2015/16) is used as the baseline year for projecting future year costs / LAC numbers. The net cost pressure or variance of £1.9M shown in the above table is based on the reported position to SMT/Cabinet in Quarter 3 (December 2015). It should be noted that the 2015-16 year-end variance against the LAC placement budget is **£2.1M**;
2. The recent spike in placements since the Q3 reported position has been considered and formed the basis of the projections for 2016/17. There has been a monthly increase in LAC numbers in the region of 10% since November 2015. The reported LAC numbers - taking into account admissions and those that have ceased to be looked after - has been stabled around 285 between December and March 2016;
3. An annual net growth in LAC numbers of approximately 3% has been assumed for future years, i.e. from 2017/18. This is based on the combined 4-year average growth rate in LAC numbers both nationally (1.1%) and for Barnsley's statistical neighbours (5%). It should be noted that at this assumed rate the estimated numbers shown above is significantly lower than the calculated LAC number of 380 based on the average statistical neighbour figures of 77 per 10,000 head of population – **See appendix 1**.

4. Current unit cost of placements has been used in calculating future years cost projections, with no allowance built in for inflationary increase in costs or potential increase associated with the national living wage;
5. It is expected that funding contributions towards placement costs will continue at current levels e.g. health funding and contributions from the schools DSG budget. Although it should be noted that no allowance has been made for DfE inter-agency adoptions funding (as this is dependent on number of adoption of difficult to place children);

Based on the assumptions on annual growth in LAC numbers and current spend levels on placements, the care cost model shows an increased cost pressure of £3.4m in 2016/17 (an increase of £1.5m on the Q3 reported position) and an average annual increase of £500k per annum thereafter. The above cost projections and numbers for the 3 year period are based on a like for like position as in 2015/16 and therefore do not reflect planned actions to manage the demographic growth.

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 residence orders (RO), special guardianship orders (SGO) and through adoption. This however also comes at a cost with long term RO and SGO allowance commitments aligned to fostering payments.

Assessing Future Demand

Barnsley is currently undergoing a sea-change in the way we screen and assess cases for social care interventions.

While this work is necessary and has been endorsed by all partners of the Safeguarding Children Board, it is necessary to take into account the increase in admissions to care this new approach is generating and will continue to generate, for the foreseeable future. There has however, been a 'levelling off' of demand over the final weeks of 2015/16. Although the care population will continue to increase, expectations are therefore that this will be in line with increases seen elsewhere and as outlined above.

Based on the trend seen in 2015/16 to date and a rate of increase in statistical neighbour and national comparators it is reasonable to assume a care population of around 300 will become the new norm in Barnsley. This compares to a care population that remained steady at between 240 and 250 at the last iteration of this strategy. Although this represents a significant increase in financial planning terms, it is worth noting that even at this level, Barnsley will remain significantly below the level of the statistical neighbour average.

As numbers in the care system increase therefore the best and most plausible means of mitigating costs is to ensure we can respond effectively to demand by

improving how we manage placements by achieving a significant increase in local foster carer capacity. **See appendices one and two.**

Summary of progress 2014-16

- Barnsley maintains stability in the number of young people in the care system but has seen a steady increase in numbers since the last version of the strategy was produced. Numbers of children in care (CIC) increased by 10% since last year; 226 in Q2 2014/15 increasing to 250 in Q2 2015/16. At the end of March 2016 the number stands at 281.
- Despite this increase, Barnsley's LAC number is still well managed and below both the national and statistical neighbour average. Barnsley's number of Children Looked After per 10,000 population aged under 18 years for Q2 2015/16 is 50.9, and compares favourably to its statistical neighbour and national average of 79 and 60 respectively. 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. The increase in costs compared to the target spend is roughly 13% (which is consistent with the 10% rise in placement numbers).
- The current statistical neighbour average stands at a LAC population of 380.
- There are a range of strategies and interventions which help to divert children from the care system, thereby maintaining this stability.
- Along with more longstanding interventions, the establishment of the Intensive Adolescent Support Team is helping to prevent young people entering care and / or becoming homeless at age 16 and 17.
- We have maintained a profile of low numbers of young people placed in residential care. This resulted in the closure in 2014 of one local authority residential home.
- There is evidence of good use of Special Guardianship Orders, Residence Orders and Child Arrangement Orders with financial support where required
- We have maintained good levels of performance regarding numbers of children adopted
- We continue to innovate in our approach to recruiting and retaining local authority foster carers
- 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. For the 12 months to November 2015 the proportion of LAC who have been in care for more than 12 months has dropped from 67% (two-thirds) in November 2014 to 51% (half) of the total LAC population in November 2015. This is partly because of the higher number of admissions to care during the period but also a reduction by 54% of children aged 1-4 in care for more

than 12 months.

- SGO numbers have exceeded those factored in to the previous planning and whilst the payment allowances are much less than the costs of keeping a child in public care, they have exceeded the planned budget.
- CIPFA benchmarking report shows Barnsley to be the highest performer for adoption out of the 37 participating local authorities. The percentage of children adopted 12 months to date is 29.9% compared to Barnsley's statistical neighbours at 21.1% and the national latest average of 17.0%.

Outcomes

The rise in numbers of children in care will present some very significant challenge to the Council. In response to this, there is a clear need to improve performance in the following ways:

- Reduce the reliance on external fostering placements
- Continue to increase the number and choice of internal foster placements (see appendix two)
- 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

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. Review care pathways and support services for adolescents involved in very risky behaviours, including those at risk of sexual exploitation
2. Improve the recruitment and retention of BMBC foster carers (per appendix two):
 - a. Review of Fostering service and support functions; identify key learning from high performing authorities
 - b. Review functions relating to marketing and promotion of foster caring in Barnsley
 - c. Implement findings of Barnsley Leadership Programme project to develop use of MOSAIC consumer data to target potential foster carers and adopters
3. Continue to work 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
 - b. Develop and implement 'Empower & Protect' specialist fostering scheme with South Yorkshire partners to focus on improving outcomes for teenagers presenting very risky behaviours and avoid the use of high-tariff IFA and residential placements
4. Work with Communities colleagues and external providers to increase the range of 16+ independent living provision to support transition to adulthood for those in long term care

Financial Impact of the action plan:

The table below reflects the financial impact on placement costs based on the action plan / targets proposed.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Assumed Average LAC Population	250	290	299	308
Projected Costs:	£M	£M	£M	£M
Fostering	5.270	5.818	5.697	5.669
Residential	3.047	2.868	2.868	2.868
SY E&P Innovation Programme	-	0.205	0.205	0.205
Others – SGO, RO, Stay-put, Adoptions	3.166	3.74	3.837	3.941
Health & DSG Contributions	-0.324	-0.324	-0.324	-0.324
DFE Adoption Grant	-	-0.15	-	-
Total Care Costs	11.159	12.157	12.283	12.359
Total Care Budget	9.197	9.197	9.197	9.197
Variance	1.962	2.960	3.086	3.161

The following underpin the above revised financial forecast of placements costs:

1. Future years' LAC numbers have been kept the same as forecast i.e. based on the annual growth assumptions of 3% circa – see page 10. It is not anticipated that the action plan or strategies would reduce the forecast LAC numbers.
2. Internal fostering costs are assumed to increase significantly over the 3 year period to reflect the increased recruitment and use of in-house foster carers. The annual increase is based on the agreed corporate performance indicator

of the % of children in care placed in internal placements (i.e. 62% in 2016/17; 67% in 2017/18). The associated unit cost of in-house foster care payment has been maintained at 2015/16 levels.

3. It has been assumed that some LAC (x5) that would traditionally have been placed with independent fostering agencies would be placed through the South Yorkshire Empower & Protect Programme. This is a less expensive placement option compared to IFA placements.
4. As a consequence of the above actions, a target reduction in the number of placements with independent fostering agencies has been assumed over the 3 year period.

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

Outcome	Impact Measurement	baseline 2015/16	Target 16/17	Target 17/18	Target 18/19
1. Improve permanency planning / make good use of alternatives to care	Children placed for adoption	27	35	40	40
	Children placed with alternative orders (cost-bearing) - SGOs / CAOs	286	320	340	360
	Care leavers in 'staying put' arrangements	18	20	21	22
2. Reduce reliance on Independent Fostering Agencies	Number of children placed in IFAs	79	47	35	26
	Number of children placed in internal fostering	142	179	199	217
	Number of children placed in the SY Empower & Protect Programme	2	5	5	5
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	50	57
	Net increase in numbers of available internal foster care placements (PE25)*	133	47	71	81
4. Maintain low numbers of young people in residential care settings	Number of young people in independent residential	15	15	15	15
	Number of young people in BMBC residential	5	5	5	5
	Other – eg independent living, placed with parents	9	9	9	9

* 25 additional carers = approx. 35 net increase in placement availability