

Strategy for Children in Care and Care Leavers

2021 – 2022

DRAFT 31

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Foreword

Welcome to Bradford Council's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2020.

This document sets out our vision, ambitions and plans for our children in care and for our care leavers.

- **Our vision** is to ensure that children are given the best start in life to be safe, healthy, happy and resilient.
- **Our aim** is to consistently deliver services with care and compassion to strengthen families through a positive working relationship.
- **Our mission** is to always put children at the heart of all we do.

As Corporate Parents for over 1300 children Bradford Council has a unique and very special responsibility. Looking after these very diverse and highly vulnerable children and young people is one of the most important things that we do. We want our children and young people to be happy and healthy, both physically and emotionally, to be safe and protected from harm and exploitation, and to be supported to achieve their potential.

We have to be ambitious for our children. Children in care and care leavers face challenges that their peers do not and life is often harder for them as a result of their experiences. All of them have experienced adverse experiences during their early lives and many have experienced trauma. We need to champion their rights and ensure that ourselves and all of our partners understand them and work together to help them to achieve their potential.

We also need to ensure that they have the chance to influence the plans that we make for them as individuals, but that they also have a voice on how our services are developed. Without this we cannot possibly know if the work we are doing is good enough.

Above all we need to provide them with the best possible care.

Our strategy sets out what we have done already but also acknowledges that we still have much to do. It invites us to work together to achieve our key priorities and to always put the care of our children in care and care leavers at the heart of everything we do.

Strategic Director of Children's Services Mark Douglas and Lead Member Councillor Adrian Farley

Foreword by CICC and CLC Members

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What our children and young people are telling us

I want to know my social worker and have their direct phone number and I know who to contact if they are not in work

Encourage and support me to bet the best that I can be and help me reach my dreams

I need to know that I can trust you with my private information

I want a social worker who will stick with me and not be changed

My behaviour is because of the situation I am in. It is not me as a person

Support me to take part in meetings about me and help me understand what is happening and why

When I leave care don't just cut off contact. Some workers have been important people in my life for a long time.

If we have to meet in school, please do not make it obvious that I am in care

What our carers are telling us

Rachel works in one of our own children's homes and has this to say about the importance of children's homes for some children and young people:

For many young people who are looked after, living within their own family isn't safe - they don't need a foster family. They have a family. They don't need another one.

For these young people, living in a children's home means they have access to a wide range of adults who have very different personalities and life experiences. They come from a range of ethnic backgrounds and hold a range of beliefs. This allows the young people greater access to the menu of life. They are blessed with a team of people who care for and about them.

If relationships with one adult are hard, there is still someone who the young person can access for support.

The young people we care for, have, more often than not, had a number of placements moves - each of which has added to their sense of loss and impacted on their self-esteem. Many of these are foster placements which have broken down or extended family members who have been unable to meet their needs. With change of placement often comes change of education provider and loss of friends.

Our young people are amazing human beings. They are resilient, they are used to blending in the background, pushing people away, keeping them at arms-length. Expecting loss.

They test you and challenge you. They remember the smallest detail and live their lives on high alert. They show their feelings through their behaviour. And we have the amazing job of seeing past it and reaching the young person hiding behind their protective layer.

As the staff team around them, we have to be tenacious enough to see the chinks in their armour and find a way in. Children who have experienced adverse experiences have built in radars - they know who is genuine, who is on their side. Our work is about building and maintaining safe relationships - so our young people can grow and thrive. They learn to trust again. Slowly.

Through play, empathy, honesty, acceptance we see the young person in a way the rest of the world doesn't. As residential practitioners we are properly blessed to be a significant part of their journey.

Wendy and Michael are foster carers for Bradford Council:

All foster children are unique individuals, but in some ways they are alike too. There are common threads for children in care, so you have to be true to yourself as a carer and know what you can handle.

So many children who are fostered have struggles with anxiety or anger and it is common for them to find friendships difficult. You have to be able to put the work in to build children's self-esteem. Our younger three children all have some degree of special needs. We have needed to build up good relationships with their school and daily contact with one teacher or another. It is certainly never dull being a foster carer!

1. Introduction to Bradford

Our vision is to ensure that children are given the best start in life to be safe, healthy, happy and resilient.

Our aim is to consistently deliver services with care and compassion to strengthen families through a positive working relationship.

Our mission is to always put children at the heart of all we do.

Bradford is a dynamic city with a rich cultural heritage. In terms of population size, we are the fifth largest local authority in England with over half a million people living in the district. We are also a young city, with a higher proportion of children and young people than average for the rest of England and over a quarter of Bradford's people are under eighteen. We are also an ethnically diverse district with more than a quarter of our residents describing themselves as Asian or Asian British.

In common with the rest of England, we have seen a rise in demand for children's social care services and an increase in the number of children in need of help and protection. We too have seen a significant increase in the number of children who need to enter care. Alongside this in September 2018 we were inspected by Ofsted and our services for children in need of help and protection were assessed to be inadequate leading to an overall inadequate rating. All of these factors present significant challenges in the context of increasing demand alongside an improvement process.

This strategy sets out our plans for children in care and care leavers under six priority areas:

- A strong culture of Corporate Parenting
- Helping children to stay within their families
- Ensuring that our children and young people have a voice
- Having a safe and secure home
- Having the right support to be safe, healthy, happy and to achieve
- Having a positive transition to adulthood.

We believe that everything we have done and everything that we still need to do can be captured within one of these priorities.

The strategy sets out the things we have achieved already but acknowledges that there is still a great deal to do both for the council and our partners. There are a number of other key strategies that link either directly or indirectly to this one including our Placement Sufficiency Strategy, our Participation Strategy and our Early Help Strategy.

The strategy is supported by a comprehensive action plan that is reviewed regularly and scrutinised by a number of forums including the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategic Partnership and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

This strategy is written in the context of a considerable challenge caused by the increasing numbers of children in care, the national shortage of placements and also the practice improvements that are necessary following our Ofsted inspection in 2018. The strategy follows six months of the Covid-19 pandemic which has had a huge impact on our children, communities and services. The strategy is ambitious and rightly so, and it can only be achieved with the full support of our leaders, our staff and our partners.

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2. Priority – a strong culture of corporate parenting

2.1 What we know:

What is Corporate Parenting?

The concept of Corporate Parenting is defined in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and in statutory guidance published by the Department for Education in February 2018. This guidance is for local authorities and their “relevant partners” and others who contribute to the services provided for children in care and young people who have left care.

A strong corporate parenting culture means that a sense of vision and responsibility towards the children we look after and our care leavers is a priority for all of us. Across the Local Authority and the partnership, we must recognise that children in care have the same needs as other children but that they face unique challenges that their peers do not. Many have experienced trauma arising from abuse or neglect and all of them have experienced instability in their lives.

As corporate parents we must recognise that the care system is not just about keeping children safe from harm. It is also about promoting all aspects of well-being, in the way that we would do for our own children.

A strong corporate parenting culture means that everyone from the Local Authority Chief Executive to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are as concerned about those children and care leavers as they would be about their own children. Although children’s services are key, this responsibility extends to all parts of the council.

Corporate parenting is an important part of the Ofsted inspection framework however it is vital that *all* parts of a local authority beyond those directly responsible for care and pathway planning recognise they have a key role too.

We have seven key responsibilities as corporate parents:

- Promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of children in care and care leavers
- Encouraging them to express their views, wishes and feelings
- Seeking and taking into account their views, wishes and feelings
- Helping them gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the council and our partners
- Promoting high aspirations and securing the best outcomes
- Helping children and young people in care and care leavers to be safe, and to have stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work
- Preparing them for adulthood and independent living.

The role of elected members and the Corporate Parenting Panel

Councillors have particular responsibilities as corporate parents. It is every councillor's responsibility to make sure that the council is meeting their duties towards children in care and care leavers. Every councillor and officer within a council has a responsibility to act for those children and young people as a parent would for their own child. Lead members, members of the Corporate Parenting Panels and members of Overview and Scrutiny Committees may have particular responsibilities, but for all councillors their role as the eyes and ears of the community is particularly important. As corporate parents, all councillors need to "champion" our children in care and care leavers, recognise the uniqueness of the children in their care, and make sure each child is getting what they need to do their best.

The role of partner agencies and services

Although the corporate parenting principles defined in the guidance apply only to local authorities, Directors of Children's Services and Lead Members for Children nevertheless need to ensure that relevant partners understand how they can assist us to apply the principles. This includes all of our key partners. The Local Authority has a legal duty to make arrangements for cooperation between partners in relation to children in care and care leavers, and our partners have a legal duty to co-operate in the making of these arrangements.

Partners in health services, education, the police and the voluntary sector all have a role to play in promoting the rights and needs of our children in care and care leavers and without their cooperation we cannot fully discharge our responsibilities. It is therefore essential that our partners understand their own responsibilities and prioritise the needs of children in care and are able to contribute fully to strategies and plans.

2.2. What we have done so far?

- We have established a Corporate Parenting Panel chaired by Councillor Carol Thirkill. This is to provide a forum for regular, detailed discussion of issues, and a positive link with services and with children in care. Members of our corporate parenting panel can use their position to "champion" children in care and care leavers and to raise awareness of the role amongst colleagues. Senior officers from the Local Authority and our partners also attend the panel to provide information.
- The Bradford Corporate Parenting Panel aims to achieve the seven key corporate parenting goals by:
 - Talking to children in care and care leavers and listening to what they tell us about the help and support they receive and their experience in care
 - Scrutinising the reports from all services for children in care and from our Independent Reviewing Officers
 - Monitoring the performance and quality of services delivered by Children's Social Care and partners

- Reviewing the performance of the council and its partners in relation to education and health outcomes of our children in care and care leavers
- Scrutinising the key strategic plans for children in care and care leavers including the Sufficiency Strategy and Participation Strategy.
- Promoting a partnership approach to the delivery and development of services for children in care and care leavers
- Celebrating the individual and collective success of our children in care and care leavers, championing their rights and showing our pride in their achievements.
- We have implemented a multi-agency Children in Care Strategic Group that includes senior managers and leaders from across the partnership whose role is to bring multi-agency challenge and support to the action plans arising from this strategy and to ensure that the needs of children in care and young people who have left care remain a focus of their organisation.

2.3 What do we still need to do?

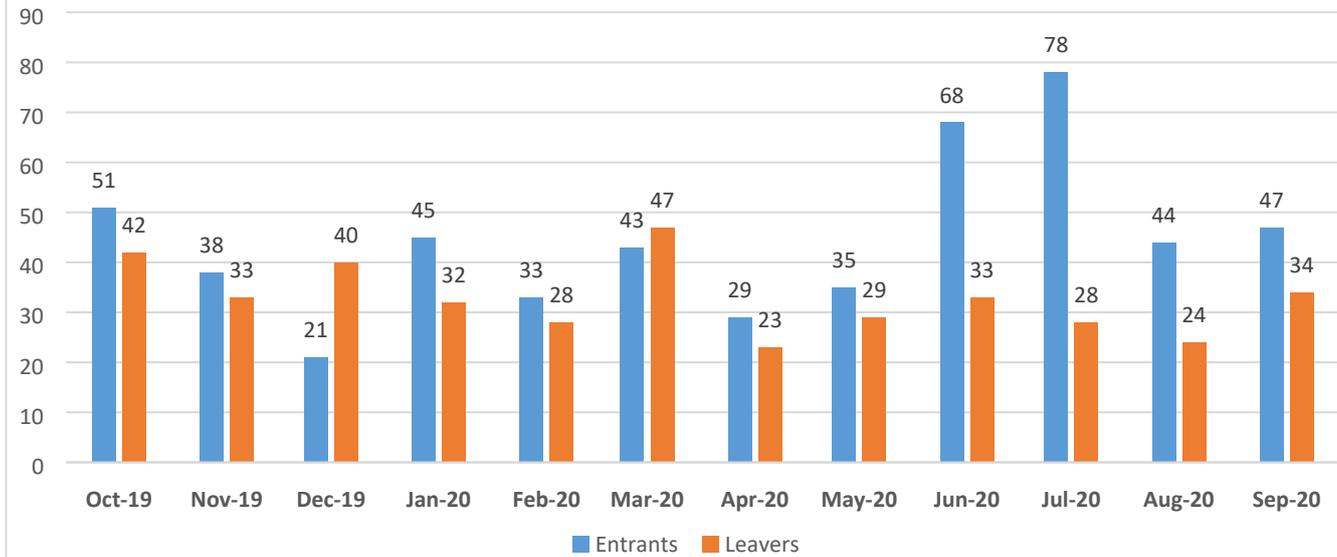
- We need to increase the extent to which the Corporate Parenting Panel hears from and is influenced by our children in care and care – experienced young people. This will involve working with the Children in Care Council to identify creative ways to enable the group to contribute to the work of the panel.
- However, we also want to extend this beyond the membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel to *all* elected members in all wards. The first stage of this process will be to identify a cohort of “champions” from the wider cohort of members who can receive additional input and use their role and influence to raise awareness of the needs of our children in care.
- We need to take further steps to ensure that corporate parenting responsibility is understood and owned by all areas of the council not just in Children’s Services, to ensure that the needs and rights of children in care are taken into account in any decisions that could affect them either directly or indirectly.

3. Priority – Helping children to stay within their families

3.1 What we know:

- In the last twelve months 525 children have entered care in Bradford. For some children this was a short period in care however for others it is a medium or long term arrangement. Some will remain in care for the remainder of their childhood.
- In the same period 388 children left care. This was for a variety of reasons. A significant number reached the age of eighteen, however other children left care due to rehabilitation or as a result of permanent arrangements such as adoption or Special Guardianship.
- These figures mean that on average 44 children enter care in Bradford every month and 32 leave care (see Table 1).
- As a result, the total number of children in care has continued to grow and in the last twelve months the overall number has grown by 137.
- This presents enormous challenges to all services that support children in care. The rising children in care numbers have presented challenges to the Council in terms of our ability to secure placements and in terms of the case-loads of our social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers. For partner agencies, the rising number has created challenges in terms of statutory health assessments, Personal Education Plans and other services specifically focussed on children in care.
- It is acknowledged that for the vast majority of children, living with their parents or extended families will give them the best chance in life. We know that for some children who enter care, their outcomes are poorer than for their peers. For this reason, our first priority is to provide the right support at the right time, to help children to safely remain with their parents or if this is not possible, within their extended families, close to their friends, schools and communities.
- Key to this aim is the expansion of the early help offer across Bradford and the need for us to support all practitioners who work with children, young people and families to implement their duty to provide support at an early stage when additional needs are identified.

Table 1: Care entrants & leavers 2020



3.2. What we have done so far?

- In order to reduce the need for children to enter care we have needed to strengthen our support offer.
- We have recently developed and launched our Early Help Strategy and Improvement Plan and are working with partner agencies to support them to take on the role of Lead Professional. It is anticipated that this will enable needs to be addressed early with families, and thus avoid escalation into statutory protective services.
- In 2017 we adopted the No Wrong Door programme as part of “B Positive Pathways” (BPP). This programme has been partially funded via the Department of Education’s Innovation Programme. BPP is a large, multi-disciplinary service that provides both residential care, outreach support and therapeutic input to families in crisis where this is a high risk of a child coming into care or where a child has already entered care. Evaluation of this programme by the DfE identifies that more than 90% of children and young people worked with were able to either remain with, or return to, their families. In the past twelve months alone, the service has worked with 120 young people and just eight have remained in care. Therefore, BPP remains key to our provision of support to young people at the “edge of care” and also to those who do need to enter the care system.
- In addition, our Intensive Family Support and Family Group Conferencing Teams have worked with large numbers of families with the primary aim of preventing escalation of concern and also engaging support from the child’s wider network.
- Our Problem Solving Court Team has worked intensively with families in care proceedings as a means of achieving sufficient change during the proceedings to allow the child to either remain at, or return home at the end of the court process.

- Our commissioned Positive Behaviour Service continues to provide intensive support to families with children aged 8 to 14 who have learning disability and who display challenging behaviour. The service continues to see good outcomes in terms of preventing the need for these children to enter full time care.
- We have introduced stronger mechanisms to track cases that are in the pre-proceedings stage of Public Law Outline (PLO). This process provides families with a final chance to work with us to make changes in order to avoid the need for us to make an application to court. The tracking process is designed to help ensure that agreed tasks are undertaken promptly, to avoid drift which has been a problem for us in the past. In the past twelve months 116 children who have entered pre-proceedings PLO have been able to remain with their families due to the work completed.
- When a child has needed to enter care, we have continued to prioritise the need for them to remain within their extended network if this can be safely achieved. As a result, more than 20% of children who entered care in the last twelve months have been placed with extended family such as grandparents, aunts and uncles or older brothers and sisters.
- We have ensured that our Family and Friends foster carers have had access to the same support as our mainstream foster carers.
- At present more than 40% of all of our children in care are placed in a regulated arrangement with a member of their family and the majority of these family members have been approved as foster carers either temporarily under Regulation 24 (which can last for a maximum of 24 weeks) or permanently following full approval by the Foster Care Panel and Agency Decision Maker.
- Many of these children no longer need the protection of the care system and could easily progress to permanence with their relatives outside of the care system via Special Guardianship. For some families there are barriers to this. These barriers can be financial or related to the support that the carers will receive if they cease to be foster carers. We have strengthened our support offer to Special Guardians via our Special Guardianship Support Team and we are in the process of amending our allowances policy so that there is no financial disadvantage to a carer taking on Special Guardianship. We hope that this will enable an increasing number of children to safely leave care whilst remaining with their families.
- In addition, of the children who left care in the previous twelve months more than 80 were able to return home to their parents or carers.

3.3 What do we still need to do?

- Our new Early Help Strategy is in its infancy and we need to support our partners to develop the confidence to provide targeted and coordinated early help to families as a means of avoiding escalation into statutory protective services. We need to see a subsequent reduction in the number of families who need to be referred to statutory social care services.
- We are currently planning to strengthen services for families in crisis by expanding our BPP service in order to be able to support more families with an even more diverse range of support. This will involve the realignment of a number of existing services within the Local

Authority but in addition to this the continued involvement and commitment of partners to this successful approach is crucial.

- We need to do further work on our payments scheme in order to remove the financial barriers that prevent some children moving to permanence with relatives via Special Guardianship. Many of these children do not need to remain in the care system and to do so can result in them standing out from their peers and also being the victims of conscious or unconscious discrimination.
- We are also reviewing our fee payments to Family and Friends foster carers to ensure parity with mainstream foster carers in order to remove the financial barrier to relatives putting themselves forward as substitute carers.

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4. Priority – Ensuring that our children and young people have a voice

4.1 What we know

- Our children must be at the heart of everything we do. This includes supporting them to have an active voice in decisions made about their lives. All decisions made about the way in which we run our service should be informed by the views of our children. We cannot know whether the services offered by social care and our partners are working unless we hear directly from the children and young people who need and use them.
- This is a key aspect of our statutory corporate parenting duties.
- We are proud of our children, young people and young adults and should publicly celebrate their many achievements, which are all the more remarkable given the adversity that many of them have experienced. By doing this we can promote wider understanding of the challenges that many of our children have faced and overcome.

4.2 What have we done?

- We have a Children in Care Council that meets regularly although the pandemic has had an impact on this. We have made the decision to separate this group into two to enable the younger and older age groups to focus more specifically on the things that are important to them.
- We have now established a Care Leavers Council and the role of Care Leavers Ambassador.
- Our case audit programme has a specific focus on the extent to which the child's voice has been sought and considered in our work.
- We have recently launched a suite of new forms within our LCS system all of which have a greater focus on the child's voice.
- We have now started a Participation and Voice Themed Group which includes representation from all areas of our service and which aims to share good practice and support the development of a Participation Strategy and Action Plan.
- Young people have continued to be part of the selection process for foster carers and some staff groups.
- Within our children's homes, children's meetings are held frequently and young people have the opportunity to have some influence over their lives.
- We commission National Youth Advisory Service to provide advocacy support to help children contribute to Child Protection Conferences and Child in Care Reviews. As a result, the extent to which children and young people participate in these meetings has increased. For example, in the past 6 months we have held over 1800 statutory reviews and the child or young person's views were only not shared in eleven.

- We have continued to offer children the chance to use Viewpoint but we are currently considering other mechanisms to enable children and young people to engage and share their views online.

4.3 What do we still need to?

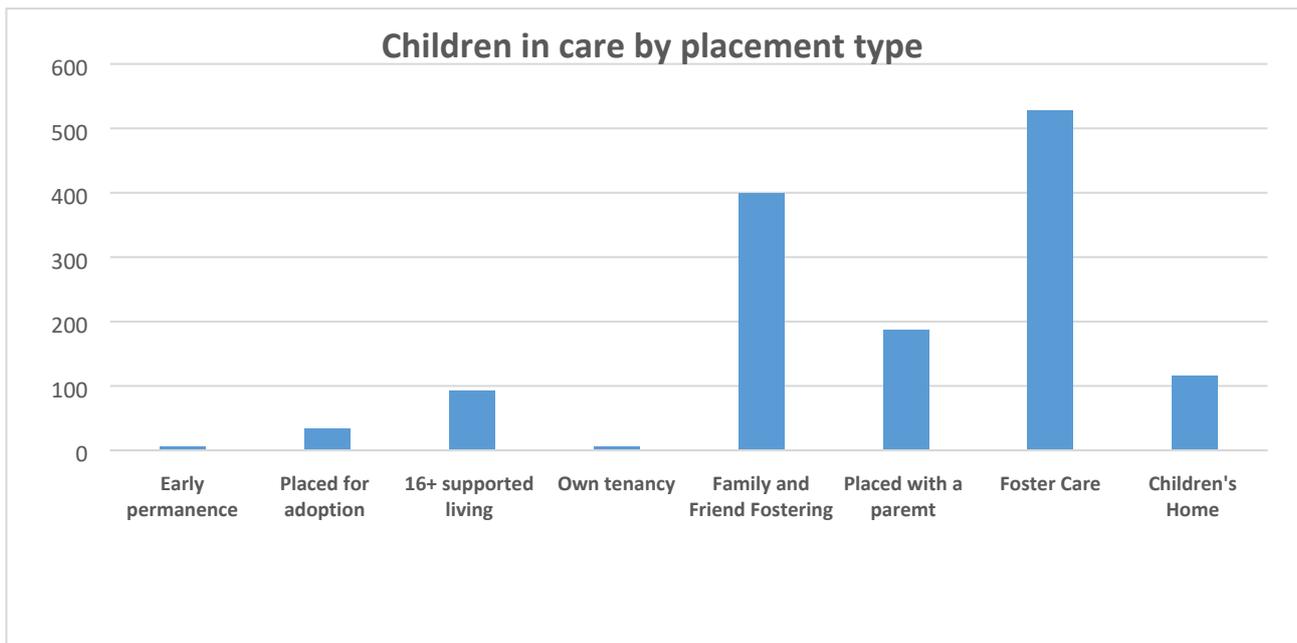
- We need to expand the role and influence of the Children in Care Council and the Care Leavers Council so that these become highly influential bodies that are listened to when we are considering changes to service delivery.
- We need to undertake further work to enable young people to contribute to the work of the Corporate Parenting Panel in a way that they will find interesting, fun and useful. We need to explore new ways in which children in care and those who have left care can share their experiences with the people who can influence the development of services.
- We need to use the Participation and Voice Group to develop a Participation Strategy and Action Plan.
- We need to get better at capturing the direct work we do with children and young people in their case files and showing how this has influenced the outcome of assessments and plans.
- We need to get better at capturing feedback from young people about our services and collating this in one place so that we can share it but also learn from it.

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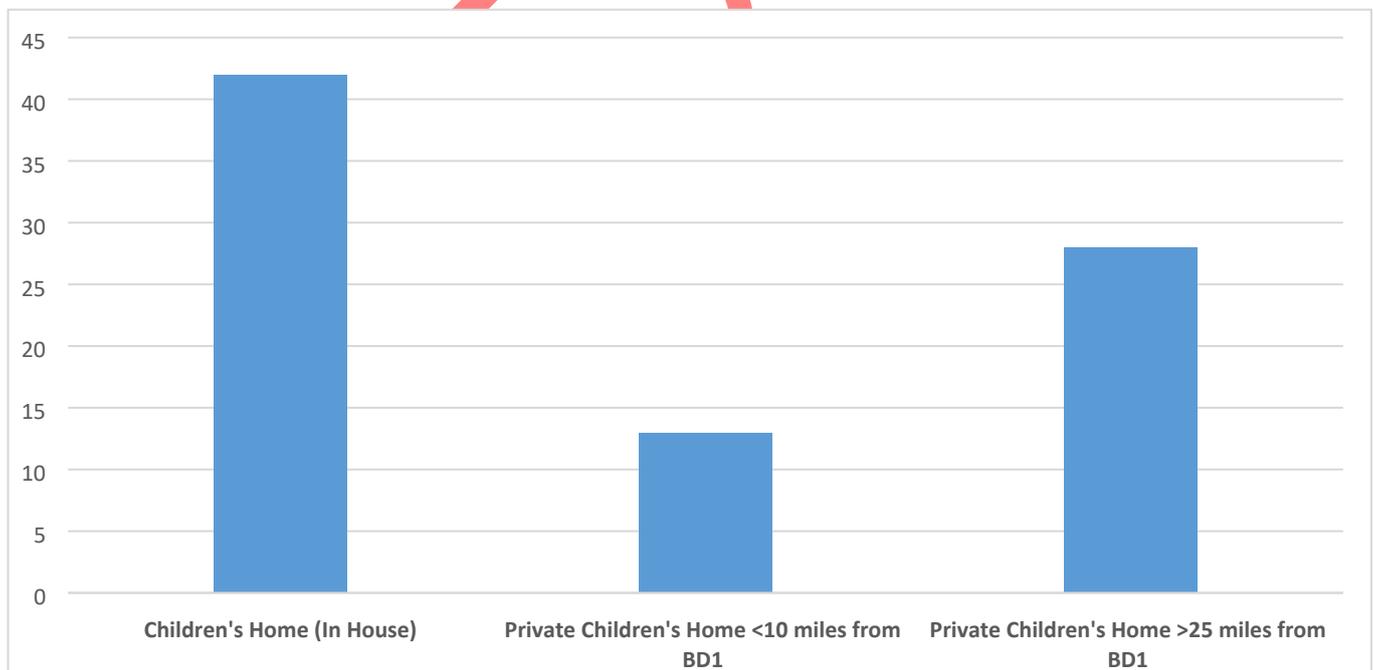
5. Priority – having a safe, stable and secure home

5.1 What do we know?

- Being a good parent means that we are responsible for making sure that our children and young people live in settled families where they can thrive.
- It also means that there has to be good, early decision-making and excellent multi-agency planning so that children don't drift or spend too long in temporary arrangements.
- This means seeking permanence for our children and young people at the earliest opportunity so that they know where they are going to be living for the rest of their childhood and who is going to be looking after them.
- We know that children and young people in care have the best chance in life when they live in settled families and feel cared for. Children and young people need to feel loved and to be able to build relationships with people who they can trust and rely on, and who look out for them.
- However, this does present a huge challenge. The increasing number of children in Bradford who need to be in care means that it is getting harder to find the right places for children to live. Alongside this there is a national shortage of foster and children's homes, particularly for older young people or those who have complex needs or who can be challenging to look after.
- Another challenge is that Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) are able to offer financial rewards to their foster carers that a Local Authority cannot compete with and many Local Authorities have seen foster carers leave them in order to work with an IFA.
- These challenges sometimes mean that we do not have a lot of placements to choose from when we are looking for a home for a child, particularly an older child. Sometimes our children can end up placed a long way from home as a result and this is something that we need to try to prevent unless there is a very good reason for it.
- As well as the *number* of placements that are available, our Sufficiency Strategy also has to consider the *type* of placements that we can offer. Our children come from a range of backgrounds and have diverse needs and we need a variety of placements to meet these needs. This includes families who are themselves from a range of backgrounds and who reflect the needs of our children, those who can provide short breaks for disabled children, sometimes requiring specific medical training, to those who can provide emergency placements for teenagers who are in crisis for example due to mental health problems or involvement in criminal justice. We need a mixed economy of emergency, short term and long term placements and a cohort of carers from a variety of backgrounds and with a variety of skills and experiences.
- The types of homes that our children currently live in are shown in the table below:



- Some of our children live in privately owned children's homes and some of these are a long distance from Bradford as can be seen from the chart below. This is something that we need to address. Although for some children the nature of their harm means that being placed at a distance from their home is the safest thing for them, for many others it is based on a lack of available resources closer to home and results in further separation from their families, friends, schools and communities.



- Although placement stability in Bradford has improved in the past year, we know that around 9% of children in care experience too many changes of placement and also too many changes of social worker. This is another area that we need to address through recruitment, training

and support of carers, better care planning and support to fragile placements, and improved commissioning arrangements with the private sector.

5.2 What have we done?

- We have now developed a new Sufficiency Strategy to support our over-arching strategy for children in care and care leavers. The Sufficiency Strategy provides more detail about our plans to increase our range of placements during the next twelve months.
- We currently have 1147 approved foster carers including Family and Friends and we intend to increase this number, to provide us with greater diversity and placement choice.
- Our carers already reflect the diversity of our communities and our cohort of children in care, with over a third of our carers being from backgrounds other than white/British.
- To increase the number of placements we have available, we continue to focus on recruiting new foster carers to Bradford. We have undertaken campaigns and have been reviewing the way we assess and pay our carers to make us as attractive as possible. This activity has not slowed as a result of the pandemic.
- At present we are specifically targeting people who could provide short break placements for disabled children and this campaign will continue for the rest of this year. Alongside this we have launched a specific Skills to Foster programme for carers who care for disabled children, or wish to do so in the future.
- We have a competitive financial package but are also reviewing the way that we support and train our carers. By doing so we hope to attract new carers, keep hold of our existing carers and also improve placement stability by increasing the skills and confidence of our carers.
- As well as attracting new foster carers, we need to ensure that our existing ones stay with us. These are our most experienced foster carers and we must do everything we can to ensure that they feel valued, supported and safe.
- To this end we have successfully applied for a license to implement Mockingbird in Bradford. This scheme has been proven to support foster carers, to help retain them and also to affect placement stability. In some Local Authorities, Mockingbird has also helped them to recruit new carers because they can see what a supportive resource it is. We are expecting our first Mockingbird constellation to be live in January 2021.
- We have also been able to achieve Fostering Friendly status. This means that the Fostering Network has assessed that the council is a “fostering friendly employer” because we offer increased flexibility to any of our employees who are also foster carers. We hope that this will encourage some council staff to now choose to foster.
- All foster carers, including Family and Friends carers, have an allocated Supervising Social Worker in our Fostering Service and we have also increased the number of reviewing officers who are responsible for reviewing a foster carer’s registration every year. This means that our foster carers should be well supported and have help in identifying and meeting any learning needs.

- For those foster carers who undertake training and show particular skill, we are improving our Skills Payments system so that these carers can progress and receive greater rewards based on their levels of experience. We hope that they will be able to support less experienced foster carers but that this will also help them to stay with us.
- In the previous twelve months 60 children have progressed to permanence via Special Guardianship. The majority of these arrangements were with relatives however we have also had a number of mainstream foster carers choosing this path for children who live with them. This presents an opportunity but also a challenge in that it inevitably reduces our foster care capacity, however in all cases it has been the best thing for the child.
- In addition, 30 children achieved permanence by adoption in the previous twelve months and at present 33 children are placed with prospective adopters. We need to keep a tight grip on these cases to ensure that the case progresses to an adoption order without delay despite the impact of the pandemic on court timetables.
- We have 44 children who are subject to a Placement Order but who have not yet been placed for adoption and the majority of these have not yet been matched to an adopter. We need to ensure that we help these children achieve permanence without further delay even if this means that adoption is no longer the right outcome.
- Although we have no current plans to increase the number of beds we have available in our own children's homes, we are working to ensure that they are utilised well and that we plan ahead to reduce the need for children to be placed in the private sector.
- We are proud of our children's homes and the staff who look after our most vulnerable and complex children. Most of our homes are currently graded as good by Ofsted and this is a real achievement.
- We have increased the size of our Placement Coordination Team and reconfigured it to give more capacity for family finding.
- We have introduced new systems that will help social workers and Independent Reviewing Officers to identify fragile placements and provide extra support to try to prevent breakdown.

5.3 What do we still need to do?

- We need to keep recruiting new foster carers particularly for complex children and short breaks for disabled children. In 2021 we will work with the private sector in order to strengthen our recruitment using their expertise to target specific parts of the community.
- We need to engage with the private sector in a more coordinated way so that when one of our children needs to live in a private children's home, this can be close to their home, friends, school and community unless this is not safe for them.
- We need to start routinely using feedback from children and young people when we are commissioning placements or services.

- We need to get better at helping children progress to permanent arrangements and doing this more quickly. This is something that we have not been good at and has been identified by Ofsted. Although we have new systems in place, it is an area that we must continue to focus on. Too many children spend too long in temporary arrangements without security so this is a key focus for us. We will need to work with our partners at One Adoption West Yorkshire to help reduce delays in children being matched or placed with adopters.
- We also know that we have not been good at supporting our children in care, and particularly those who are adopted, to understand their life histories.
- We have also not always been consistently good at hearing from our children and young people about what they think about their placements or about being in care. We need to do more of this.
- At present 399 children live with family or friends who have been approved as foster carers for them. Although this is an extremely valuable resource, these children are safe and well and many do not need the protection of the care system any longer. The care system can be stigmatising and can cause children in care to sometimes stand out from their peers. Children in care can also be discriminated against, both consciously and unconsciously. We need to reduce the barriers, including the financial barriers, to relatives pursuing Special Guardianship so that children can safely leave the care system without delays.
- We need to increase our effectiveness at supporting fragile placements to prevent breakdown.
- We have undertaken consultations with the parents of disabled children in respect of the short breaks offer and we know that we have work to do to make accessing this provision easier for parents.

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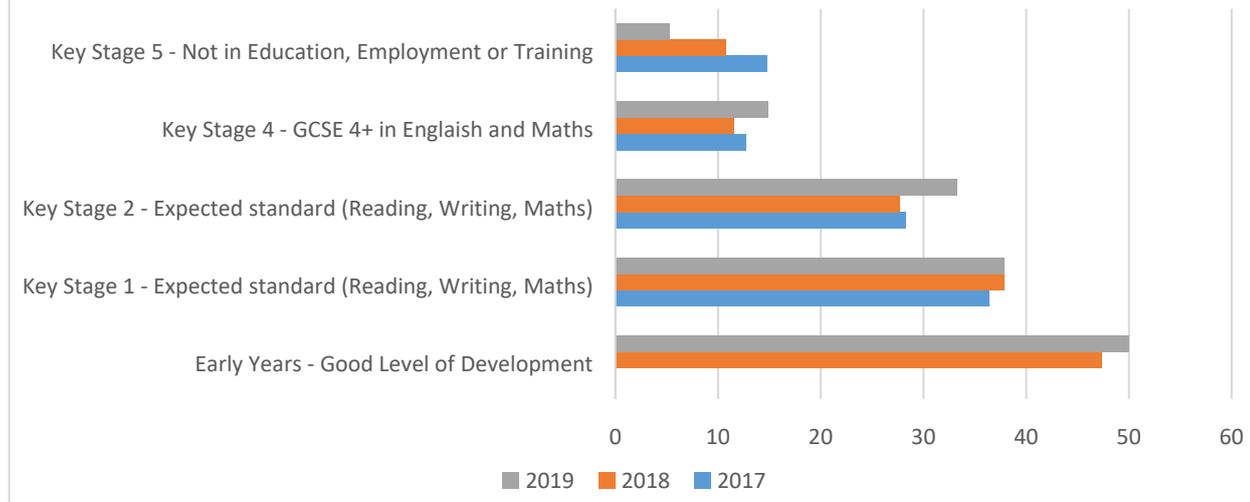
6. Priority – having the right support to be safe, healthy, happy and to achieve

6.1 What do we know?

- All children need support from a range of adults including parents or carers, older brothers and sisters, school staff and healthcare professionals. Our children in care have often had a poor start in life and may need additional support to live happy lives and achieve their potential. Many have experienced abuse, neglect and associated trauma. We need carers who can help us to provide all our children in care with good quality wrap around care and we also need services that are accessible and responsive to the needs of our children.
- Evidence shows that education attainment influences the health, social and employment prospects of a child or young person. But children in care can face additional challenges in the education system particularly when they have had adverse experiences or inconsistent care. Therefore, children in care often need extra support and understanding if they are to achieve as well as their peers. This is even more true when children enter care at a later age or at a crucial time in their education.
- A significant number of our children in care have additional education needs arising either from their early life experiences or from disability and a number of them also have Education, Health and Care Plans. These children require additional support in school and some of them require specialist education provision, including Residential Schools.
- As good parents we are ambitious for the children we care for and our care leavers, and we expect them to receive a planned and stable education which helps them to fulfil their potential. We have high aspirations and this means helping our children in care and care leavers to get the best from their school and college education so that they have the qualifications they need to pursue their career aspirations
- Adverse experiences also mean that many children in care experience problems with emotional wellbeing and mental health. Neglect and abuse can also cause lasting physical ill-health and additional needs. Children often enter care with a poorer levels of physical and mental health than other children and nationally two thirds of children in care have at least one physical health complaint, and nearly half have a mental health issue. As corporate parents we want our children to have the best start in life, to be healthy and to receive the care and support they need in order to thrive.
- Any child in any community is potentially vulnerable to being exploited or abused, bullied or discriminated against. However, some children in care, by virtue of their experiences and situations can be at greater risk. For example, in September 2019 the All Party Parliamentary Group for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults published No Place at Home which highlighted that children in care who have been placed out of area are potentially even more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. We want our children and young people to be protected from harm and to get the help and support they need if they are at risk
- It is crucial that services for children and young people in care are aware of and sensitive to these additional needs in order to help them to stay safe, stay healthy and achieve.

- Educational outcomes for children in care have shown continual improvement over the past 3 years at all Key Stages. We know our outcomes for children in care compare favourably with national comparisons, though Key Stage 2 continues to be a focus for improvement, particularly in literacy. While we know children in care make good progress against their starting points, we expect to improve the number achieving national expected standards. We will also ensure the gap in attainment between children and care and their peers closes.
- School attendance is a priority area for our children in care as we know regular attendance is crucial to their development and achievement in education. Although the attendance rate of Bradford's children in care of 94.6% is slightly above that of all children in Bradford, the rate is significantly below the national average for children in care. We know two particular areas of concern affecting attendance rates over the last year are the numbers of Bradford's children in care who are classed as persistently absent and the numbers receiving fixed term exclusions.
- We know a good start in the early years is of paramount importance for our younger children in care. Outcomes for these children, assessed using the early years foundation stage profile, show they continue to make progress above the national average for children in care, with 50% achieving a good level of development. Although this is below that of 68% for all children in Bradford, the gap has narrowed over the past 3 years.
- At Key Stage 1, Bradford's children in care reaching the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths has been at, or above, the national average for children in care for the past 3 years, at 38%. Although there has been little relative change for this standard over three years, the attainment gap with all children (compared to children in care) has increased slightly as results for all children in Bradford have improved.
- At Key Stage 2, the number of children in care reaching the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths has improved significantly over the past 3 years to reach 33%, however this remains below the national average by 4%. The average progress which children in care in Bradford make at key stage 2, is significantly above the national average and shows the attainment gap with their peers narrowing.
- At Key stage 4, GCSE 'Progress 8' and 'Attainment 8' outcomes for Bradford's children in care remain in line with the national average. While the number of children achieving a grade 4 in English and Maths has increased to 15% it remains below the national average of 18%. However, the attainment gap for this measure at both grade 4 and grade 5, is at its smallest over the past 3 years.
- We know the number of children in care progressing into post 16 education, employment or training has improved year on year over the past 3 years. Over the past 3 years the percentage of children in care not in education, employment or training (NEET) after leaving year 11 has reduced from 14.9% in 2018 to 5.3% in 2020. The percentage of Bradford's Care leavers who were not in education, training or employment (NEET) has increase slightly and most recent data shows it at the national average of 33%. Bradford's NEET figures for Care leavers also compare very positively with statistical and regional neighbours.

Education Outcomes - Bradford Children in Care



- In relation to health we know that many of our children in care have had experiences that their peers have not. This can include the physical impact of abuse and neglect as well as the emotional and mental health impact of adverse life experiences. We have a shared legal responsibility to ensure that the health needs of children in care are assessed and met and we therefore need close partnership between social care services, health services and carers. In Bradford we have experienced challenges in undertaking initial and review health assessments for children in care and ourselves and our health partners recognise that this is something that needs to improve.

6.2 What have we done?

6.2.1 Care planning and assessment

- We have supported our social workers and partners by developing new tools to help them assess the needs of children and young people in care and to develop appropriate plans.
- New case tracking mechanisms are designed to help us keep oversight of individual children and young people whose plans may not be progressing or may need to change.
- Our Independent Reviewing Officers provide statutory oversight of all children in care and statutory reviews are a mechanism by which needs and vulnerabilities can be identified.

6.2.2 Being safe

- In Bradford a tri-weekly, multi-agency Risk Assessment Meeting is now held in our Integrated Front Door for the purpose of identifying children and young people who may be at risk, to share information and to develop joint plans.
- Where risk of exploitation is deemed to be high, the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation Panel (MACE) is a higher level group that meets every six weeks to provide additional oversight of plans to keep children safe.

- Alongside these mechanisms, within the Department of Place the Breaking the Cycle Team offers intensive support to young people who are at risk of being criminally exploited. 95% of the young people referred to this project actively engage. This team links closely with our children's homes where some of our most vulnerable children and young people live.

6.2.3 Children who run away or go missing

- Bradford has commissioned a service to undertake Return Home Interviews for children who go missing including those who go missing from care.
- We have recently adopted the use of Philomena Protocols for all of the children and young people in our homes which allows for closer working relationships between residential providers and the police and prompt actions when a young person does go missing.

6.2.4 Being healthy

- Children in care have access to a dedicated health team who can provide advice to young people and carers and who undertake assessments of health needs.
- In addition, young people who have left care and are aged between 18 and 25 have access to two Leaving Care Nurses.
- Our new care planning tool is designed to help social workers and partners assess health needs.
- We have improved our performance in respect of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires.
- We are working jointly with our health colleagues to streamline the system by which consent is given for Initial Health Assessments as a means of reducing the delays that are caused by lack of appropriate consent. We are now sharing child-level data more routinely between health and social care to enable us to identify and resolve problems.

6.2.5 Achieving in education

- We have improved our monitoring and tracking of daily attendance at school and termly progress of all our children in care to ensure that improvement action is quickly identified and implemented.
- With our Virtual School we have taken steps to improve the quality of Personal Education Plans and the PEP format has also been amended to place the voice of the child at the forefront of the plan and strengthen their involvement in the preparation for their review.
- The quality assurance process for PEPs has also been strengthened to ensure that children have high quality PEPs which are tailored to their unique and individual ambitions, needs and abilities.
- Education Advisors are undertaking focused visits to all Head Teachers to discuss provision and support for children in care. Alongside this we have also expanded the capacity of the Virtual School so every child has a link teacher allocated to support their education.

- A digital inclusion strategy with significant resources allocated from the council has been agreed and implementation is underway. This will ensure that children in care and care leavers have access to the digital resources and support which enable them to succeed in education and prepare for their futures.

6.2.6 Staying active and having fun

- It is really important to us that our children in care and care leavers do not miss out on the holidays, trips and social activities that their peers have. We support and encourage our foster carers and children's homes to provide a range of social activities as they would for their own children.
- Within the Department of Place, our Sports and Culture service exercise their corporate parenting responsibility by:
 - Providing free gym membership to children and young people in care aged 16 and over. This scheme has now been extended to enable a companion to accompany the young person, and will also extend to junior gym membership for children in care aged 14-16.
 - Our Adventure Activities Development Team work directly with children in care and care leavers.
 - Occasional Adventure bookings from care homes or specific groups of children in care.
 - Children in care are supported to access our Multi Adventure and Holiday Courses
 - We supported a team of care leavers to enter the Dragon Boat competition and train at Doe Park
 - We have taken the Climbing Tower to the annual Care Leavers event for several years
 - We loan waterproof clothes, boots, sleeping bags to children in care who are going on residential visits
 - BASECAMPS are promoted to children in care and the Sports Development Unit liaise directly with social care staff to facilitate bookings
 - Bradford Aquatics ensure that children in care are placed immediately or put to the top of the waiting list.
 - Sports Development has accommodated children in care as volunteers working on sports activity sessions to improve employability
 - Bradford Theatres encourage access to the arts for children in care via a ticketing scheme offering them (and their foster families if applicable) free or greatly reduced price tickets to productions at the Alhambra Theatre and St George's Hall (subject to producer agreement and availability.)

6.3 What do we still need to do?

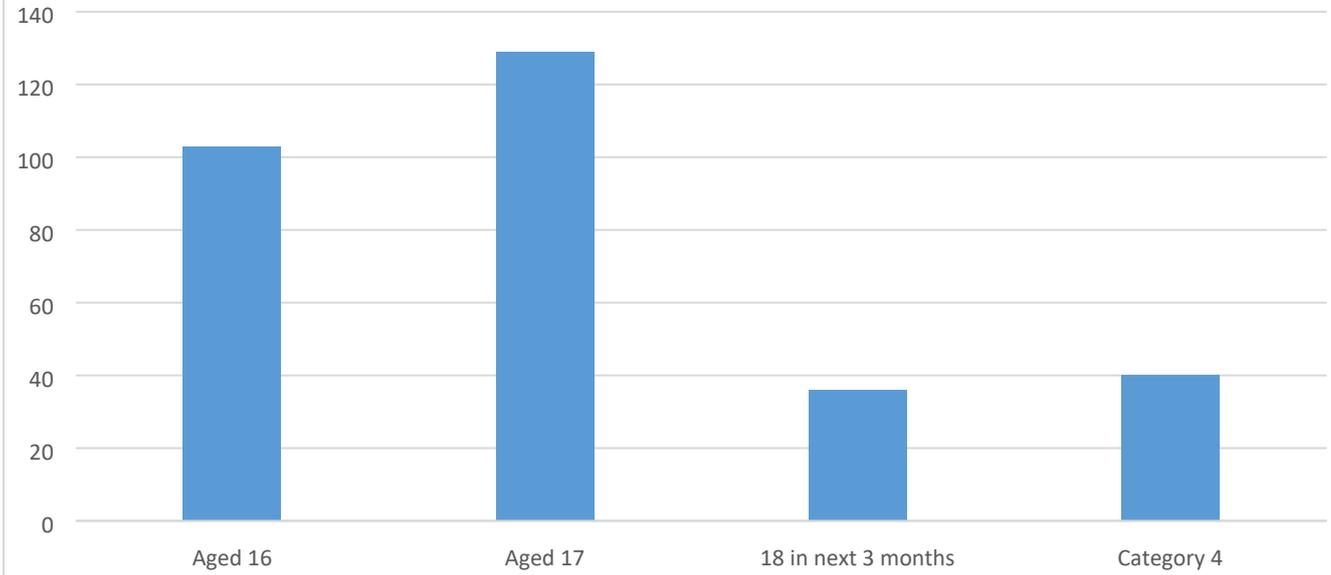
- We need to continue to deliver the Breaking the Cycle programme, growing the team if we can and increasing our understanding of the factors that make some young people more vulnerable to being exploited.
- We also need to focus on providing young people with a good “exit” from criminal exploitation for example work experience placements and apprenticeships.
- We need to further develop the partnership work around exploitation and the RAM and MACE meetings for example by co-location of services.
- We know that we need to work with health partners to improve the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments and this work has commenced.
- We also need to work with health partners to further improve the completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires but also to ensure that these are then used to identify additional support that is needed.
- We need to ensure that commissioning of services for children in care by ourselves and our partners is based on the needs of our population and is done jointly where possible.
- We must continue to strengthen our partnership arrangements around placement and care planning to minimise school moves where possible. We are working closely with partners to ensure suitable schools, ‘good enough’ to meet the needs of children, are arranged as early as possible and before a child is due to move where practicable.
- We need to deliver a comprehensive training and support programme to implement our improvements to the PEP process and quality assurance systems so by July 2021 all PEPs meet the high standards expected.
- We need to develop an inclusion protocol which it is expected all schools and partners will follow. This will be intended to enhance the expertise and support available through school and the Council to meet the needs of children in care, improve their attendance and reduce the risk of exclusion.
- We need to introduce progression activities to further support children in care with transition to FE and HE and also target resources through the Virtual School and 16+ Team to enhance the support to post-16 children in care and care leavers. Although we do provide support to young people going to university they are telling us that our financial offer in respect of their accommodation fees presents a barrier to them and therefore in 2021 we will be identifying ways in which we can expand our offer to make things easier for them now and in the future.

7. Priority – A positive transition to adulthood

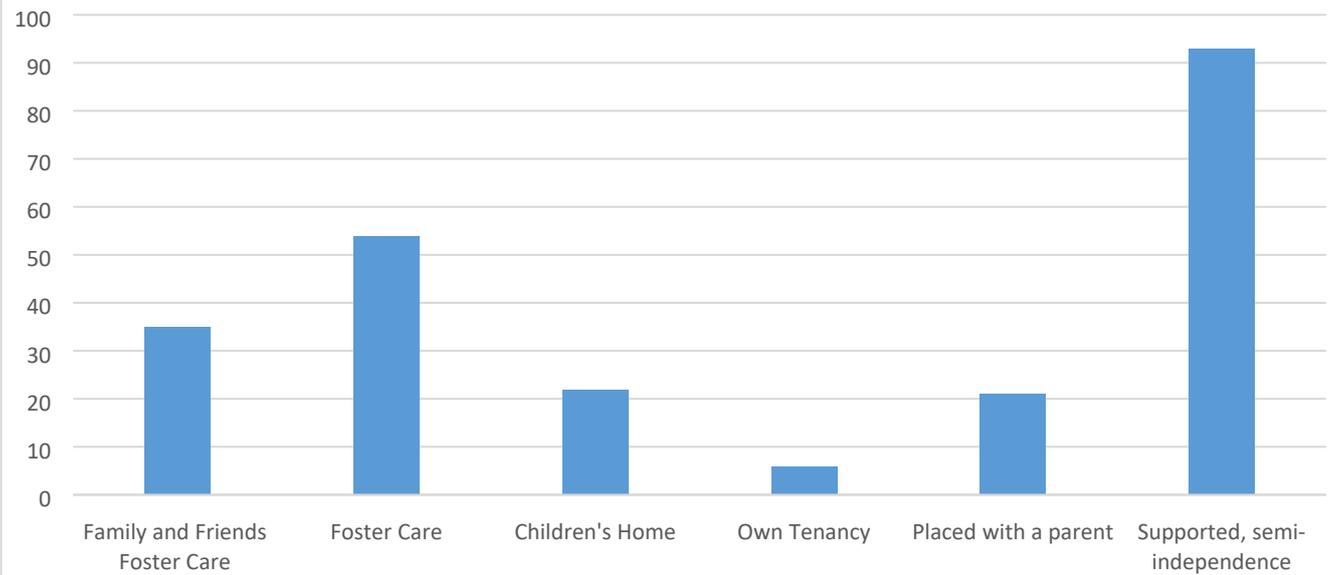
7.1 What do we know?

- For young people in care the transition to adulthood can be extremely challenging, particularly if they have not had a settled base and consistent care. They have to become independent at a younger age than most of their peers. They often struggle to cope with independent living which can then place them at heightened risk of social exclusion, homelessness, unemployment or exploitation. Many also have poor mental health, and need support to recover from past harm.
- During the transition period between 16 and 18 it is important that our young people are supported to learn the skills that they will need to live independently, in the knowledge that they will have to do this sooner than most of their peers.
- In addition, it is important to recognise that some accommodation for young people aged 16 and 17 is not registered with Ofsted, unlike children's homes and foster care provision. This kind of accommodation tends to be supported independent or semi-independent living. The fact that this type of accommodation is not usually registered with Ofsted means that we have to take additional steps to ensure that it is safe and of sufficient quality.
- It is crucial that after they reach eighteen and no longer have the framework of the care system around them, young people continue to receive care, consistency and support into adulthood, delivered in a way that reflects their needs, age and increasing maturity but also their earlier experiences.
- For children with complex needs and disabilities, the transition to adult social care services is a crucial point that can create a great deal of anxiety for parents and young people due to the different systems and thresholds. Therefore, an early plan and good joint working prior to 18 is crucial.
- More than 15% of our children in care are aged sixteen and seventeen and thus need support to prepare for adulthood.
- Within the next year 129 young people will leave care and be entitled to support as care leavers.

Children in care aged 16 and 17



16 and 17 year old placement types



7.2 What have we done?

- Our Transitions Teams work with disabled children from the age of 14 into adulthood to provide a more seamless transition from children's to adult services.

- In January 2020 we reconfigured our services to ensure that our young people in care have a smoother transition to adulthood. The creation of the 16+ Service means that although most children in care will experience a change of worker when they are sixteen, they will then remain with this service into adulthood and beyond care meaning that they have greater consistency at a crucial and difficult time.
- All young people aged 18 to 25 who have left care have access to specialist Leaving Care Nurses who can offer advice on many issues such as sexual health, pregnancy etc.
- Our multi-disciplinary LEAP Team provides education support and young people who engage with this service receive a bursary of £30 per week if they attend as well as subsidised travel. This team helps care leavers to gain functional skills and educational qualifications that they did not manage to obtain earlier. It provides a route into additional support services related to careers, drugs and alcohol, sexual health etc.
- We have established the role of Care Leavers Ambassador to give care leavers the opportunity to shape services and also a Care Leavers Council that runs in parallel with the Children in Care Council.
- We have engaged volunteers to support and befriend care leavers.
- Any care leaver who applies for an apprenticeship with the council is guaranteed an interview if they meet the basic educational requirements. If they do not meet the requirements, the LEAP Team can support them to undertake exams, complete CVs etc.
- We have established the Smooth It Out group for young people aged 15 ½ to 21 which focuses on preparing for independence.
- Through partnership between our 16+ Service and Youth Service we are able to offer a variety of different projects of relevance to our care leavers including Youth in Mind, Breaking the Cycle and the Buddy Programme.
- We have extended our Staying Put scheme and Supported Lodgings service.
- We have provided a Cook and Eat programme (although the pandemic has impacted on this)
- The Jump Start programme assists young people in the transition from care to independence by providing pre-tenancy support.
- Young people who are approaching 18 have an opportunity to have a taste of independence via the My First Home “taster home” which runs alongside an assessment of tenancy readiness.
- Housing Options is a team of specialist workers who will provide advice and support on a variety of accommodation issues including debt.
- All Bradford care leavers are exempt from Council Tax until they are 21.

- We have committed to ensuring that all our care leavers have a smart phone and access to the internet.
- All care leavers can access council gymnasiums free of charge to help them to stay fit and healthy.

7.3 What do we still need to do?

- We need to ensure that young people who have left care are able to remain in touch with professionals, friends and family and that they are “digitally included” which for many is a challenge due to finances.
- We need to expand the “taster flat” facility to enable more young people to access it prior to leaving care and also the supported lodgings provision.
- We need to establish a “family links” model to enable young people to leave the 16+ service with a network of non-professionals who can continue to support them in the long term.
- We are planning to establish a multi-disciplinary Young People’s Central Hub where care leavers can access a range of support under one roof.
- We need to undertake a review of our pathways for young people with additional needs but who are not defined as having a disability.
- We also need to extend the take-up of apprenticeships for our care leavers and provide more opportunities.
- We need to strengthen our relationships with the private 16+ sector to enable us to ensure that semi-supported, transitional accommodation is of sufficient quality. This includes us adopting a system similar to the statutory, independent Regulation 44 Visits that we undertake in our own children’s homes to ensure that the lack of Ofsted registration of these placements does not impact on the quality of placements that we provide. We also need to liaise more closely with partners such as the police who hold valuable intelligence in relation to localities and establishments that cause concern.

8. Governance and Performance Management

8.1 Governance of the Strategy

The strategy is owned by the Children in Care and Care Leavers Partnership to provide the initial governance to oversee the delivery of the strategy. Performance reporting and impact of practice will be submitted to the Children's Services Departmental Management Team, the Children's Improvement Board and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A number of task and finish groups will be established to look at the priority areas with agreed terms of reference and memberships.

The task and finish groups will implement the relevant aspects of the Sufficiency Plan as a partnership to improve performance in each priority area. Where necessary other subgroups or work-streams will be identified.

8.2 How partners will measure progress and success

The multi-agency partnership has been established to develop and drive forward a shared vision and strategy for children in care, with a focus on improving outcomes and promoting the needs and interests of children in care and young people leaving care. The members of the partnership will be from the primary agencies whose services have a key influence or impact on the lives of children in care and those who have left care. It is important that we quality assure the work we do both in terms of the individual service user's experience and the overall effectiveness of services. In support of this there are a number of different ways the partnership will measure progress and the impact of the strategy.

8.2.1 Strategy Action Plan

The strategy is supported by a comprehensive action plan that is reviewed regularly and scrutinised by a number of forums including the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategic Partnership and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A detailed annual action plan has been developed to support delivery of the priorities set out in this strategy.

The action plan addresses our priority areas and is partnered by our separate Sufficiency Plan, identifying key people and timeframes for the completion of each action. Many of the actions identified are subject to detailed specific plans and are monitored and evaluated within other forums. Where this is the case the detailed plans are referenced and links made to available evidence.

This action plan specifies a planned outcome from each action described and identifies a related performance measure with national benchmark information where available.

The action plan includes the means by which we will capture the views of the widest possible group of children in care and in out of area placements.

Progress against this action plan will be monitored quarterly by the Children in Care Strategic Group and the Corporate Parenting Panel.

A schedule for the monitoring and review of the action plan to support the delivery of this strategy will be agreed with the Corporate Parenting Board and Children in Care Strategic Partnership on an annual basis.

The action plan will be subject to review and evaluation and the overall strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

8.2.2 Progress through key measures

Various measures will apply to the delivery of the strategy both quantitative and qualitative measures. We will establish the baseline data against which the strategy will be evaluated.

These measures are detailed in our new Children in Care and Leaving Care Scorecard.

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9. Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy Priorities and Key Actions

Priority 1 – a strong culture of Corporate Parenting	Priority 2 - Helping children to stay within their families	Priority 3 - ensuring that our children and young people have a voice	Priority 4 - having a safe, stable and secure home	Priority 5 – having the right support to be safe, healthy and to achieve	Priority 6 - a positive transition to adulthood
<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish the CIC and Care Leavers Strategic Group Review the format and plans for the CPP for 2021 to promote engagement. Consider how best to support a wider group of elected members to become champions for children in care 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement Early Help Strategy Expand services for young people at the “edge of care” via the BPP service Remove barriers to permanence via SGO 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand and develop the CICC and CLC Develop a service-wide Participation Strategy and Plan Review our provision and ensure that our digital engagement platform is the right one for our children and young people 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to continue to recruit new foster carers at pace and develop new ways to retain our existing carers Develop a programme of work with a recruitment agency to support increased numbers of foster carers. Begin to engage with the private sector in a way that enables more children to remain closer to home We need to routinely seek, collate <i>and use</i> feedback from children and their families when commissioning 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to deliver and expand the Breaking the Cycle programme Focus on providing young people with a good “exit” from criminal exploitation Further develop the partnership work around exploitation and the RAM and MACE meetings Work with health partners to improve the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments Further improve the completion of Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires but also to ensure that these are then used to identify additional 	<p>Key actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We need to ensure that young people who have left care are able to remain in touch with professionals, friends and family and that they are “digitally included” Expand the “taster flat” facility to enable more young people to access it We need to establish a “family links” model Establish a multi-disciplinary Young People’s Central Hub Undertake a review of our

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to help children to progress to permanence in a timely way. • We need to provide increased support to fragile placements to prevent disruption 	<p>support that is needed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to provide comprehensive training and support to implement our improvements to the PEP process • We need to develop an inclusion protocol which it is expected all schools and partners will follow. • Introduce progression activities to support children in care with transition to FE and HE • Identify ways for us to make a bigger financial contribution to University accommodation fees 	<p>pathways for young people with additional needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the take-up of apprenticeships for our care leavers and provide more opportunities. • Implementation of independent visits similar to Regulation 44 Visits in the 16+ provision sector.
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