

# **Report of the Strategic Director of Children’s Services to the meeting of Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on Wednesday 29 November 2023**

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**Subject: Update on the Bradford Placement and Sufficiency Strategy**

## **Summary statement:**

The Children Act 1989, the Sufficiency Statutory Guidance (2010) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010) places a duty of ‘Sufficiency’ upon Local Authorities (or their Trusts). Under this duty Local Authorities (or their Trusts) must, so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure that there is a range of locally available placements, either by direct provision or commissioned services, sufficient to meet the needs of all children in care (CIC).

In March 2022 the existing 2020-2023 Placement and Sufficiency Strategy and action plan was shared with this Committee. In March 2023 a further update regarding the progress of this strategy and action plan was given and the Committee also advised that in June 2022 Cabinet had approved an updated, 2022-2025 Placement and Sufficiency Strategy,

## **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:**

As a Corporate Parent Bradford Council, and its agent, Bradford Children and Families Trust (BCFT), must provide a service that meets the broad range of needs within its Children in Care (CIC) population and the wider demographic of young people in the city in general. The placement options available need to be sufficiently diverse, targeted, and have the necessary expertise, to meet the (differing) needs of individuals and ensure all children, especially those with complex care requirements, can have their needs met.

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Marium Haque  
Strategic Director Children’s Services

### **Portfolio:**

**Children & Families**

Report Contact: Paul Sutton  
Phone: 07974 855292  
E-mail: paul.sutton@bradfordcft.org.uk

### **Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

**Children’s Services**

## **1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1** The Placement and Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25 (and its 2020-2023 predecessor) sets out how Bradford City Council, and its agent, Children and Families Trust, BCFT, will work to ensure that Bradford's Children in Care (CIC), are living in suitable, stable, homes that enable them to thrive and achieve their potential. This update is specifically regarding progress against the red and amber actions in plan presented in March 2023 and particularly regarding fostering and adoption (As per the recommendation and action from Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> March 2023 that an update regarding the Placement and Sufficiency Strategy plan be provided and include some detail regarding the in-house Fostering Service and Adoption). Members are asked to consider this update.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The Children Act 1989, the Sufficiency Statutory Guidance (2010) and the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review Regulations (2010) places a duty of 'Sufficiency' upon Local Authorities (or their Trusts). Under this duty Local Authorities (or their Trusts) must, so far as is reasonably practicable, ensure that there is a range of locally available placements, either by direct provision or commissioned services, sufficient to meet the needs of all children in care.
- 2.2** This is a significant responsibility for Local Authorities, particularly so for Bradford where the number of Children in Care has increased in recent years. In March 2017 there were 926 children and young people looked after, by October 2023 there were 1,591, a rise of 72%% in 6.5 years. The demographic of Children in Care is also changing, for example more children of British Asian heritage becoming looked after.
- 2.3** The preceding (2020-2023) Sufficiency Strategy has been shared with this committee previously. The new Placement and Sufficiency Strategy 2022-25, which was approved in Cabinet in June 2022, was also shared in March 2023. When it was shared, an update was requested regarding the strategy action plan and also regarding fostering and adoption.

## **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

### **BRADFORD PLACEMENT AND SUFFICIENCY STRATEGY 2022-2025 - OVERVIEW**

- 3.1** The Strategy is a comprehensive document setting out the data regarding CIC and setting out the Council's (and now BCFT's) response to the issues and commitment to ensuring good homes for all Bradford CIC at a time of increasing numbers of children and young people (C&YP) being looked after.
- 3.2** The data in the strategy indicated a continuing upward trend in the number of Bradford CIC Further it showed, that whilst a rise in numbers is consistent with the wider national picture, the increase is bigger and faster in Bradford when compared

to National, Regional and Statistical Neighbour trends. This highlighted a need for Bradford to reduce the numbers of children entering care and improve the quality and quantity of placements available (to ensure permanence and stability) for those who do become looked after.

- 3.3** Regarding adoption the strategy noted that Bradford is part of the One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) consortium and that this is generally working well with an increased pool of adopters. The data in the strategy indicated that the number being placed for adoption has fluctuated in recent years but appeared to be increasing again.

**NB:** The 2022-2025 Strategy is currently in the process of being refreshed and a new Action Plan developed to accompany the refreshed strategy.

- 3.4** The strategy indicated that whilst an increase in care numbers is to be expected in an LA under Ofsted intervention, the accelerating trajectory should be of concern, especially the volume of emergency admissions. The strategy notes that an improved, Prevention and Early Help offer, especially one regarding preventing family breakdown (“edge of Care work”), needed to be developed and implemented, and current resources in this area reviewed (now done).

- 3.5** Supporting, enabling, and empowering families to care for their own children, where possible, should always be the aim of any Children’s Services. However, when children do become looked after the aim is always to find them a suitable alternative family environment (either Adoption, SGO, Friends and Family foster carers, in house retained foster carers or commissioned IFA carers). For some children, especially older adolescents, especially those with additional needs this is not always possible and residential care is found (in house if possible or external, commissioned provision, if it is not. This is at the heart of the sufficiency strategy and the action plan being developed.

#### **4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

##### **PROGRESS SINCE MARCH**

- 4.1** There is a lot of work in this area and progress continues to be made against the Strategy and Action Plan and improvements are being made regarding supporting CIC but further work is needed e.g. in reducing the numbers becoming looked after (especially adolescents), increasing the number and range of placements (residential and foster care) and recruiting more in house foster carers.

##### **OCTOBER 2023 Headline Data – CIC Demographic and Placement Types**

1591 Children in Care

The ethnic demographic of the main cohort of children is:

- White British background – 799 (50%)
- Asian British Pakistani background – 145 (9%)
- Asian British White background – 128 (8%)

**NB:** In the March 2023 paper to the CSOSC (based on March 2021 data) the committee were advised that Bradford CLA population was 58% white, (a consistent figure until recently) but that there was a growth in the number of British Asian heritage CLA. As can be seen the percentage of white British CLA has reduced by 8% in the last 2.5 years.

790 (49.6%) of the current cohort are aged over 11.

872, 54.8% are male, 712, 44.8%, are female and 7, 0.4%, are Trans/non-binary

Type of Placement	Percentage of Total Children in Care Cohort
Foster Care - Long and Short Term	40%
Family and Friends Long and Short Term	26%
Place with Parents	8%
Residential - in house	1%
Residential - purchased	13%
Semi Independent	8%
Mother and Baby Unit	Less than 1 %
Secure Unit/Young Offenders Institution/Prison	Less than 1 %
NHS/Other Hospital	Less than 1 %
Placed for adoption	2%
Total	

**NB:** Current capacity in Bradford in House Children’s Homes is 23 mainstream places plus 11 short breaks and 5 permanent places for disabled children. Two homes are currently closed for refurbishment and when these re open in the early new year will provide 10 more mainstream places. Two places will also go when Valley View and the Willows close before Christmas (a new home is being purchased to replace the Willows).

We have 513 fostering households registered in total of which 270 are Friends and Family Foster Carers (FFFCs) and there are 243 mainstream Foster Carers. 258 children are placed with Friends and Family Carers and 323 cared for by mainstream Foster Carers.

Regarding supported lodgings we have 9 places and regarding supported accommodation, we have 9.

NB: Whilst not counted as CIC there are also 404 SGO carers being supported with payments.

#### 4.2 Work is ongoing regarding:

- Reducing the numbers coming into care (“Turning the Curve”);

- Improving and increasing the use of Friends and Family Foster Carers and increasing the use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs);
- Work re adoption is improving e.g. the Should be Place for Adoption (SHOBPA) meeting and process is working well and One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) is now picking up all non-agency adoption and inter-country adoption applications.
- The adequacy and cost of placements (Placement Review Panel);
- Working with partners (especially the ICB) regarding sharing costs and better supporting children in care;
- Increasing the number of Foster Carers (Service Development Plan);
- In house residential provision which is being modernised and better utilised;
- Improving the range and number, and coordination of, short breaks, especially a more holistic, partnership approach (between Council, Trust and ICB) and the respite and short breaks offer at the two specialist residential homes is being reviewed as part of this and consideration as to whether the places offered can be increased;
- The commissioning of placements, there have been significant improvements. Bradford Council's Commissioning Service has been increased and is developing a good and strong relationship with the Trust. Additionally, the Trust has augmented its placement team and a review have been undertaken regarding procurement and we continue to work well with the White Rose Framework Agreement;
- Post 16 Supported Accommodation provision. The new regulation process has started to be implemented and as a result an application for all in house Supported Accommodation to be registered was made in October.

**4.3** Additionally, a detailed review of the “market” (in house provision and purchased provision) is being undertaken and a report is expected in December 23 (this report will support the refresh of the 2022-2025 Placement and Sufficiency Strategy).

**4.4** However, challenges remain and despite the work and improvements in this area the numbers entering, and in, care, especially adolescents, remain higher than we would want and the number of these children with complex needs (and thus difficult to place) is also high. This is not an issue unique to Bradford, it is being replicated in many Local Authorities (LAs) and increased demand and reduced supply has led to a rise in costs. This situation creates pressure on staff on and resources.

**4.5** Work is ongoing regarding further refreshing the strategy with current date and developing a new, more detailed action plan to give a more accurate current position and response. The Trust is working with stakeholders to refresh the Strategy and plan and ensure a systemic response to meeting the needs of this vulnerable group of children.

**NB:** The above is based on data in a strategy that was agreed in the summer of 2022, 15 months ago, data is currently being refreshed to advise on a new plan to support the strategy. However, a similar picture still exists regarding pressure on services. However, green shoots are appearing, and the situation is improving slightly in certain data e.g. in the strategy data show over 10% of C&YP being placed at home, this is now down to just under 8%.

**4.6** The strategy notes that Bradford already does relatively well in supporting family and friends to care for CIC e.g. as family and friends foster carers but in specific relation to none related Foster Care we are also making improvements. The recruitment and retention of (in-house) foster carers is one of the most important roles for the Trust. By recruiting and retaining a range of skilled, knowledgeable, and experienced, foster carers we are able to provide safe, warm and loving homes to the most vulnerable children and young people within our community, ensuring they are more likely to thrive. Further, providing this care through in house carers rather than other arrangements, (IFA or Children's Home) is a more efficient and economic (and, due to the local connection, probably more effective) and therefore benefits the Trust in various ways.

**4.7** BCFT Fostering Service is working hard to recruit new, and retain existing, foster carers. In the six months of the trust we have introduced the following:

- Faith in Fostering Campaign launched
- Ramadan – Radio campaign released to promote fostering in the Muslim community.
- Foster Care Fortnight - working with Northern Rail to take over Forster Square station as 'Foster Square'. This attracted extensive media coverage both locally and nationally.
- Play in the park - sessions in summer to promote fostering.
- Shared Care Campaign – targeting health venues to provide information sessions this will include video production with carers for promotion.
- LGBT Week in March – recruitment and retention event in the community which will include local business Cake 'Ole in Bradford City centre.
- We are working on improving relationships with the Asian Express and T&A newspaper to support with advertising.
- Staff Fostering Policy written and agreed off.

**4.8** Regarding retention we listen to our carers and acknowledge the importance of retaining our current foster carers and financially supporting them is not the only consideration. In consultation with our carers we have recruited an Enrichment Officer who will be leading on the retention plan and retention activity which has also been used to enrich our marketing and recruitment to new carers. Additionally, we have:

- Improved links with Bradford Independent Foster Carers Association. They have been working more closely with the service to engage foster carers with the service. They have created an additional support group in Keighley to complement the existing group in Shipley.
- Restructured the service in order to allocate carers on a locality model to support building relationships and linking carers in with support groups and locality-based support services.
- Engaged Norton Webb to deliver Level 3 Diploma Children & Young people's workforce training, currently 20 carers are completing this.
- Developed a foster carer ambassador scheme – we have a number of carers interested in this and they will be supporting the service developments in different areas for example buddy scheme for foster carers and training.
- Worked with Principles Trust to provide holidays for foster carers and their

children.

- Worked with Buckton House activity centre and provided some activity days and short stays for foster carers and their children.
- The recommend a friend scheme has been re launched and payments increased.
- The service continues to develop the Mockingbird model and is currently recruiting a second constellation. This will provide additional support to carers.
- Recruited a training officer to improve our training offer to carers.
- Made a successful application to the Government Household Support Fund to support foster carers pay their water and energy bills this year were awarded £330K (This is a one-off payment).

**4.9** However, there are challenges to recruiting and retaining foster carers, it is becoming harder to recruit, not just locally but nationally, fostering services are under huge pressure nationally. One report by Ofsted revealed that the number of available foster placements nationally has decreased by 23% over the last 4 years. At the same time, the number of people enquiring about fostering has decreased.

**4.10** There are many reasons for this, such as people living in smaller homes and the fact that many more people are working from home since the pandemic and have turned spare bedrooms in to home offices and thus not having the space to foster. Additionally the increased cost of living has impacted, another report produced by Foster Talk (a leading fostering support charity), found that 43% of all foster carers who responded thought they might have to give up fostering in the next two years due to the additional cost of fostering.

**4.11** A report from the Nationwide Association of Fostering Providers (NAFP), the trade association of Independent fostering agencies, highlighted the reduction of available foster placements and the difficulty in recruitment of new foster carers in the North West. This has resulted in a large increase in the use of Independent Residential Child Care provision (with impacts on that market, e.g. increased cost).

**4.12** Additionally, the provision of foster care has become a crowded and competitive marketplace. There are 30 independent fostering agencies operating in and around the Bradford district. These IFAs are recruiting carers locally and using them as a resource to sell to other authorities.

**4.13** In recruiting and retaining fosters we are operating in a very challenging market, whilst we are working hard to recruit and retain carers, we have seen 12 mainstream carers de-registered in the year to date and additionally our recruitment efforts have yielded 5 new carers, with an extra 10 to be completed by December. If we do achieve the recruitment of 15 new carers by December and have no more de-registrations, then we will have seen an increase of 3 carers in total in the year to December (increasing placements by approximately 5).

**4.14** Regarding Adoption we currently have 32 children (2% of total CIC cohort) placed for adoption. There are weekly SHoBPA (Should be Placed for Adoption) meetings to oversee the work regarding adoption and the relationship with OAWY is good and continues to strengthen. We meet quarterly with them regarding performance and challenge and received data and have good communication regarding service

delivery.

- 4.15** In the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2023/24 the number of children placed reduced by 31% to 9 and the number adopted reduced by 20% to 12 when compared to the same quarter last year indicating a reduction in year on year performance regarding placements. However, in the same period the number of Agency Decision Making (ADMs – Decision to place a child with prospective Adoptive Parents) has risen 60% to 24 and the number of Placement Orders (POs – placing a child with a view to adoption) by 21% to 17. Additionally, the Percentage of children placed with OAWY approved adopters is now 89%, a rise of 27%. This indicates that we will likely see an increases in the number of adoptions over the coming year.
- 4.16** At quarter end there were 56 children with a placement order but not matched, of these 9 had a potential match, and 5 had a panel booked. The demographic of this group is 32 male, 24 female and 37 were under the age of 2, 14 under 5 and aged over 5. 23 were part of a sibling group and 33 were single children. In relation to the top 5 ethnicities represented in the group, 23 children were White British, 10 were White Other/White Irish, 6 were Gypsy/Roma, 5 Mixed heritage, White & Black Caribbean and 4 Mixed heritage White and Asian (59% of the group are White).
- 4.17** There has been an improvement in timeliness for the children adopted in the quarter. While these figures remain above the national indicators, the time taken between children entering care and moving in with their adoptive family is below the England average. Eight of the 12 children adopted were children considered more difficult to find adoptive families for due to their age, ethnicity or needing to be placed for adoption with a brother or sister.
- 4.18** Regarding the number of children and families receiving adoption support this has risen 12% to 175 and at 409 (231in,178 out), the number of letters processed by the letterbox team has risen by 38%.

## **NEXT STEPS**

- 4.19** The Council, Trust and Partnership Sufficiency board is working on refreshing the strategy with new data and updating the action plan and this will be produced by March 2024 Additionally:
- The residential service is improving (5 out of 11 are now rated as good by Ofsted) and has become more stable. The use of agency managers has significantly reduced and now all but 1 of the homes is being managed by BCFT employees. The estate is being upgraded (two homes closed for refurbishment and one closing and being replaced by a new home, in the process of being purchased). Staff, are being trained in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI). All open homes are now full. The intention is for all existing homes to be open, operational, and occupied by February 24 and the new home by the autumn of 2024.
  - The Foster Carer Service has been augmented with some new resource and are implementing their improvement plan. They have an improved the marketing strategy and are focussing on recruiting more in house foster carers.



Engagement by the Foster Care Service with Foster Carers, especially Friends and Family carers, is good and improving and more work is now ongoing to improve engagement and relationships between Children's Social Workers and foster Carers. Further, additional work is ongoing to increase the use of SGOs.

**NB:** As we are now a Trust, the Foster Care Service is legally and Independent Fostering Agency and as such will now get inspected by Ofsted in its own right, separate to the rest of the Trust. Work is ongoing regarding the preparation for this.

## **5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

## **6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

There are no legal issues arising from this report.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **7.2 TACKLING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

N/A

### **7.5 TRADE UNION**

There are no Trade Union issues from this report.

### **7.6 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

There are no Ward implications from this report.

### **7.7 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

Corporate Parenting is an important statutory duty of the Council as is the provision of sufficient placements to meet need. This Placement & Sufficiency Strategy helps meet those statutory duties and thus will be overseen by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

**7.8 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

None.

**8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None.

**9. OPTIONS**

Not applicable.

**10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**10.1** Members are recommended to review and consider this progress update.

**11. APPENDICES**

None.

**12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.