



Swindon Borough Council

Making the Looked After Children and Care Leaver's Strategy a Reality:

The operational plan

2018-2020

Our vision is to ensure that every child is given the support they need to grow and thrive (Swindon's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2017-2022).

September 2018

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1 Introduction

The draft Children in Care Strategy report was presented to the board at the last meeting on 3rd July. The members expressed the wish that consultations should take place, especially with children and young people in care, on the objectives of the proposed strategy and be taken into account in the final strategy. The Board was further concerned that the final strategy should indicate how the objectives will be achieved so defining how ambitious objectives would become real services improving the lives of children in care.

Since then we have consulted children and young people in care, care leavers, departmental staff and senior managers and strategic partners on the objectives and the most effective ways of delivering services to achieve them. The proposal presented to the board today is that by incorporating the strategy within the overarching departmental improvement plan of the Six Pillars, the Strategy becomes anchored in the children's services department's priorities for service improvement and development.

The Sufficiency strategy which is being presented to the Board today describes the areas from which children enter the care system and the main reasons why children enter care; namely deprivation, disability and patterns of child abuse and neglect. The services provided for children in care are also fully described and how we are striving to meet the needs of children in care and care leavers. This report describes the actions the department will be taking in order to achieve the aspirations we have set out to improve the opportunities and life chances of the children in our care and those leaving care.

2 CHILDREN'S SERVICES IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Service Improvement Plan is built on Six Pillars:-

1. WORKFORCE
2. ICT
3. PARTNERSHIPS
4. QUALITY OF PRACTICE
5. EARLY HELP AND TROUBLED FAMILIES
6. CLA AND CARE LEAVERS

The diagramme of the Six Pillars is below in Appendix 1.

The original priorities in the Strategy report below are fully maintained within the priorities of Pillar 6 of the Six Pillars apart from Priority 5 'To listen to Looked after children' is reflected in Pillar 4 (Quality of practice) will ensure a fully joined up approach to engaging children and young people in their care plans and the services they receive.

The original 5 priorities:-

- Priority 1- Ensure looked after children and care leavers have suitable and stable placements and accommodation so they are able to make and sustain safe, nurturing and enduring relationships
- Priority 2 –To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children and care leavers
- Priority 3 – To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between the attainments of looked after children and their peers.
- Priority 4 – To improve support and opportunities for care leavers to increase the number and proportion who are in meaningful Education, Employment or Training (EET)
- Priority 5 – To listen to looked after children and care leavers to ensure that their voices influence their own care and pathway plans as well as wider service delivery and development.

The Pillar 6 service improvement plan – Children Looked After and Care Leavers

The full Service Improvement plan accompanying these priorities is below in appendix 2

<p>1) Increase the choice of placement options to meet the individual needs of our children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the Placements Team is appropriately resourced, has the right roles and skill set to deliver an effective and efficient placement function • Implement an operational framework to ensure an outcomes based approach to meeting the needs of Children in Care and ensures value for money. • Implement an effective strategic commissioning approach to meeting the needs of Children in Care. • Increase the number of children 'staying put'
<p>2) Develop and maintain a strong pool of local foster carers who are fully supported to care for our children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the Fostering Team is appropriately resourced, has the right roles and skill set to deliver an effective and efficient fostering function • Review and improve our financial offer, therapeutic care, training and support for our foster carers • Review and develop our foster carer recruitment plan targeting specific communities and addressing specific needs.
<p>3) Improve the permanency and resilience of placements for our children so they are able to make and sustain safe, nurturing and enduring relationships</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a permanency strategy throughout the Service and wider Council • Create and implement a mandatory training programme with our learning partners • Redesign the service to create Children in Care teams. • Implement more timely permanency solutions, including adoption, for children in Swindon through early intervention. • Improve the quality of practice and processes to support permanency planning and placement stability
<p>4) Improve the outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the number and quality of care plans and pathway plans for Children in Care, and offer (support, intervention, inter-connectedness and wider offer) to Care Leavers • Improve attendance (and reduce exclusions), educational attainment, training, apprenticeships and employment for Children on care and Care Leavers • Improve the health and emotional wellbeing of Children in Care and Care Leavers, and review the sufficiency of commissioned health provision and services

3 PARTICIPATION

Priority 5 of the original strategy - To listen to looked after children and care leavers to ensure that their voices influence their own care and pathway plans as well as wider service delivery and development – is now found in Pillar 4 of the Improvement Plan. Please see Appendix 3 below for the Voice of the Child / Participation aims and objectives.

The main difference in the in the draft strategy and the Pillar 6 improvement plan is that the Pillar 6 plan expands the range of priority action areas whilst developing more thorough set of service improvement actions which will drive forward change and against which the department can be held accountable. For example:-

- A) We express the determination to develop a sufficiency strategy to improve placement choice to meet children's needs but in the Pillar plan we go on to state that we will improve the decision making upon entry to care by developing a Care Panel chaired by the Assistant Director to preside over these key decisions in a child's life. Placement choice is then more closely matched to the child's needs. The review panel focusses attention on the 'Top 20' most complex cases to avoid drift and promote good practice.
- B) In both plans we aim to increase the option of fostered children 'Staying Put' with their foster carers but in the Pillar plan we identify actions such as staging briefings throughout the service raising awareness of 'staying put' and Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) being required to report to senior managers if the 16th birthday Pathway Plan does not record that 'Staying Put' has been addressed with fostered children and their carers.
- C) Both plans wish to promote care leavers access to apprenticeships, the Pillar plan sets targets for increasing the number of young people in care and care leavers taking up apprenticeships in house from 1 to 5 per annum and within the business community from 4 to 10 per annum.

Specific areas requiring more detailed implementation planning and oversight identified in this Pillar 6 plan will be the focus of a set of task and finish groups such as the Fostering Improvement plan, the Care Leavers Partnership group and the Top 20 placement improvement project. These groups will vary over time but will all deliver their results to the Children in Care and Care Leavers Executive group chaired by the Director.

4 GOVERNANCE

The Governance of the work of all the six pillars is simplified and clarified by the new structure. All six pillars of improvement report to executive groups chaired by senior managers who in turn report to the Children's Senior Leadership team (CSLT) and then to the (CMT). The Elected Members preside over the improvement work through the Cabinet and committee structure which will be able to hold senior managers to account for progress on the improvements achieved across all six pillars.

The proposal also includes changing the name of the Corporate Parenting Advisory Board to the Corporate Parenting Board (CPB) in line with best practice. The Board holds the officers and the Council to account as a corporate parent ensuring separate and diverse services act cooperatively and coherently to provide for the diverse needs of our children on care.

The diagrammatic representation of the Governance role of the Corporate Parenting Board is found in Appendix 4

The benefits of the pillar approach to whole service improvement are that:-

- governance is much clearer with pathways providing clear 'lines of sight' from members to practitioners within each pillar
- duplication is avoided so lead managers are identified as are the actions which fall under each pillar
- cooperation is built into the system as the interrelation between pillars is required for lead managers to achieve their objectives for example The 'Local Offer' for care leavers requires support from ICT (pillar 2) to achieve the portal, most casework practice depends on good partnerships as a supporting structure (pillar 3) and the voice of the child in care is enhanced by the work in (pillar 4) building participation amongst children in care to increase their voice in decisions on their future. Pillar 5, Early Help contains priority aims and objectives in relation to Edge of Care preventative strategies directed at finding alternatives to children entering care.

5 CONSULTATION

The Board wished to be assured that children and young people in Care had been consulted on the priorities and objectives in the plan as much as possible in the time available. Since the last Board, we have carried out an on line survey of key priorities and the Director has met with the Care Leavers group. Team managers have also undertaken a consultation exercise in placement improvement.

The on line survey was carried out on Survey Monkey and was completely anonymous. The full questionnaire and results are to be found in appendix 5 below. Some of the headlines from the survey and their impact on the Improvement Plan are:-

1. 27/28 correspondents were happy in their placements, felt safe and wanted to remain which appears to just as true of residential care as foster care.
2. 26/28 knew who to talk to when worried and care staff, foster carers and social workers featured prominently.

The provision of stable placements in or around Swindon with reliable key staff is clearly a top priority. The value of building up these relationships and providing access to their families is reflected in their responses above.

Improvement actions include:-

- Reviewing the 'top 20' placements to stabilise children and reduce change
 - Tracking new entries to care to achieve timely planning and interventions
 - Expanding the recruitment of Foster Carers to develop our in house supply
 - Reshaping the Placement Finding team to improve the matching of children to appropriate placement to reduce placement breakdown
3. 27/28 said they were fit and well and 16/28 had a health passport.
 4. Happiness was measured from 1-5 with 12 reporting 5, 7 reporting 4, 6 - 3, 2 - 2 and one child reported 1.
 5. 8 reported not to be EET and some had many leisure activities some had few.

Improvement actions include:-

- Prioritising the roll out of health passports to all children in care
- Contact with families is important and so parents will be invited to LAC reviews unless it is counter-productive to do so
- We will include access to leisure activities in the Local Offer and place emphasis on recreation in LAC reviews and care plans

Finally, in response to what is important? Respondents came up with a range of answers but education/school/college was included in 12 answers and was the most

frequently referred to. Only 5 respondents were either not in school or not doing well in their own eyes.

Improvement actions include:-

- Ensuring all children in care have up to date PEPs
- The Virtual School head working with local heads to reduce exclusions, targeting the pupil premium to best effect and giving looked after children the highest priority

These are initial responses to the on line survey which will be analysed in greater depth and a short report sent to all children in care with our actions in relation to their responses. The participation action plan from Pillar 5 sets out a plan to conduct focussed surveys throughout the year as part of a continuing programme of consultation and participation.

The Care Leavers group have been consulted during the year and a number of their concerns are addressed in the plan:-

- 'Transitions to adult health are confusing' –
Action 15.8 Develop clearer pathways to adult health services especially for mental health services
- 'Accessing mental health and counselling services can be slow' -
Action 15.2 Improve emotional and mental well-being by improving access to counselling and mental health services
- 'There is no website containing all services for care leavers' –
Action 14.9 is to launch the Local Offer.
- Clearer financial guidance was called for which as with many other requests for advice raised is covered in the Local Offer.

The care leavers group will continue to meet and play an active role in participation and consultation throughout the year.

The participation Aims and Objectives, Pillar 4, in Appendix 3 contains the strategic priorities of future surveys, consultations and events throughout the year.

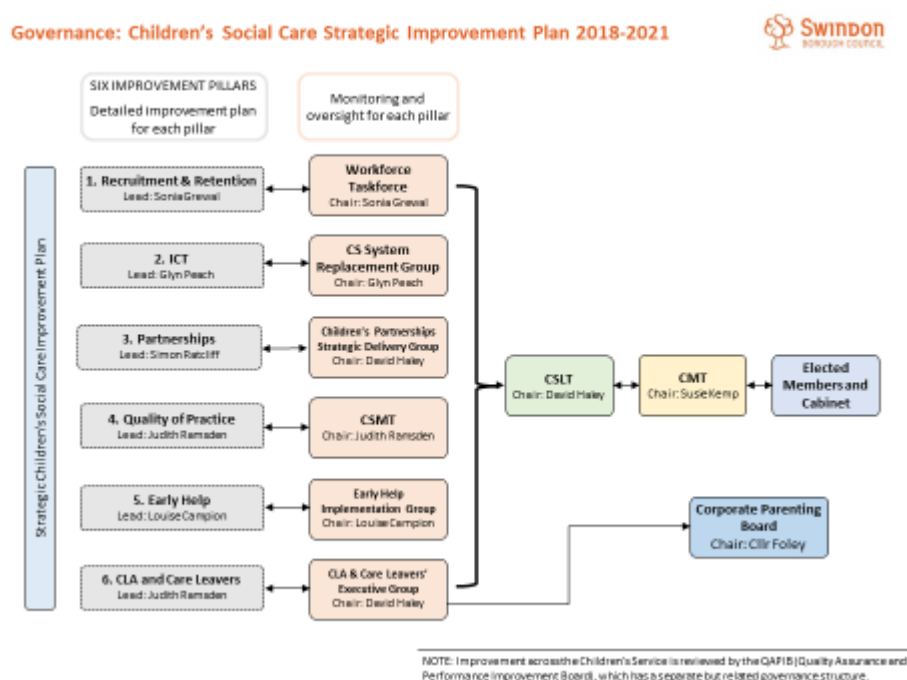
6 RECOMMENDATION

The Service Improvement plan represents a way forward for the department with Pillar 6 focusing on all aspects of improving the lives and opportunities for our children in care. We have consulted with children in care and care leavers in this process and will continue to do so in the forthcoming implementation.

These detailed action plans are part of an iterative process focussed on change and improvement rather than a descriptive document of 'business as usual'. They will develop and change over time as new challenges are confronted. This is the first version of this plan which is recommended to the Board for approval.

7 Appendices

Appendix 1 Service improvement Plan - Six Pillars



Appendix 2 –Pillar 6 Action Plan – Improving Outcomes for Children in care



Pillar 6 Improvement Plan 180918.zip

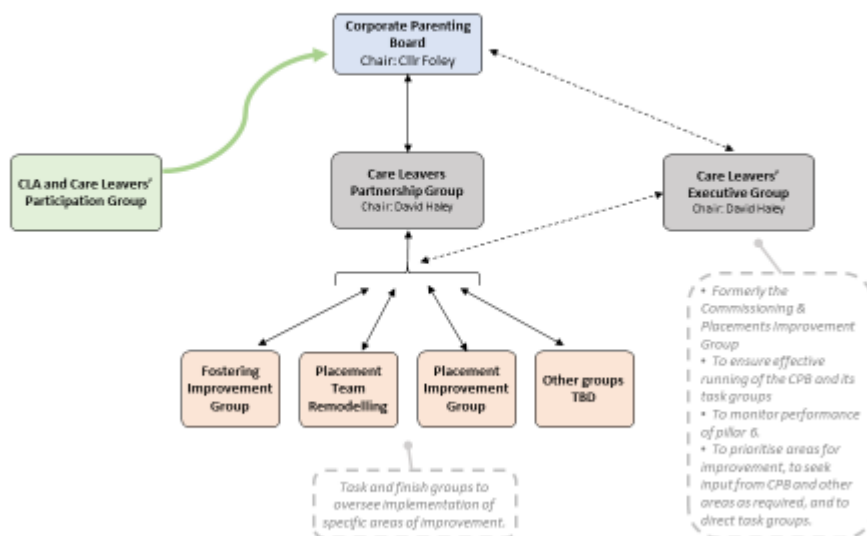
Appendix 3 – Participation Aims and Objectives – Pillar 4



Participation Pillar 4 appendix.zip

Appendix 4 = Governance structure of the Corporate Parenting Board

Governance, reporting and relationship to other groups
Pillar 6: Improve outcomes for CLA and Care Leavers



Appendix 5 – Survey Questionnaire

Priority 1- Ensure looked after children and care leavers have suitable and stable placements and accommodation so they are able to make and sustain safe, nurturing and enduring relationships

- Are you happy where you're living
- How long have you been there and do you want to stay?
- Do you feel safe
 - What does safe mean to you?
- Are we doing enough to help you?
 - Is there anything you think we should do?
- If you live with a foster family, do you feel part of a family?
- If you live in a flat or lodgings, are we doing enough to help you to manage yourself?

Priority 2 -To improve the emotional wellbeing and physical health of looked after children and care leavers

- Are you happy or sad
- Are you fit and well
- Do you have your health passport?
- If you needed to talk to someone about something troubling you, would you know where to go?

Priority 3 – To improve educational progress and attainment and narrow the gap between the attainments of looked after children and their peers.

- Are you getting the education you need to learn?
- How do you think you are doing?
- Is there anything we could do that would help you with school/college?

Priority 4 – To improve support and opportunities for care leavers to increase the number and proportion who are in meaningful Education, Employment or Training (EET)

If you are a care leaver complete this section:

- Are you in sixth form or a college and are you getting enough help to learn?
- Are you in an apprenticeship or internship or working and are you getting enough help to make the most of it?
- Are you unemployed and is there anything that we could do to help you get into work or college?
- When you are in work or college, how do you like to spend your time?

Priority 5 – To listen to looked after children and care leavers to ensure that their voices influence their own care and pathway plans as well as wider service delivery and development

- Are you on the children in care council?
- Are you in the challenge group?
- Are you in the care leaver's participation group?
- Would you like to hear more from us or meet other care leavers?
- Would you like to have your voice heard?
 - You can do this by emailing