Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children

Appendix 1: Market Position Statement
Appendix 1 – Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children Commissioning Market Position Statement

Introduction

As indicated in the sufficiency document, the numbers of children in our care has begun to reduce after a significant rise in the preceding couple of years. We continue to project a reduction in numbers to bring the population more in line with North West Regional norms over the next two years.

The increase in LAC numbers placed considerable pressure on our accommodation arrangements and resulted in an increase in the use of independent fostering agencies and residential settings some of whom are located in neighbouring authorities. Rebalancing our offer to ensure that children are accommodated within borough and preferably in a familial setting continues to be a key priority.

The quality of a child or young person’s placement is a significant factor in improving the outcomes and future prospects for a child or young person who is looked after. We want to partner with a range of outstanding, innovative and flexible providers of placements that are able and willing to be a vital member of the team around our most vulnerable children and young people with the aim of improving their outcomes.

The Local Authority has statutory duties to fulfil and has a mandate to deliver improved outcomes for children in the borough in partnership with colleagues within Peoples Services, St.Helens Clinical Commissioning Group as well as other Multi Agency partners from the Public, Private and Voluntary Sectors.

Securing sufficient accommodation requires a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative services to support children in their families as well as better services for children if they do become looked after. It also requires consideration regionally and in some cases nationally as often specialist services cannot be delivered in isolation.

This market position statement drawn from our ‘Securing Sufficient Accommodation for Looked After Children’ document sets out how the Local Authority will commission placements to ensure our children and young people receive the highest possible quality of care delivered through the services for which we are responsible and accountable.

A major challenge for the Council and our providers is to deliver an increased quality of service, improving outcomes for children and young people within budget. Over the period 2010/17 the Council will have lost over £74 million in Government funding. By the end of 2020, grant support will have reduced by three quarters and funding cuts will top £90 million and this has to be reflected in our development of services. We appreciate a degree of unpredictability may make it difficult to plan for service growth and development but we will keep Providers informed of changing patterns of need and also of regional collaborative arrangements as we develop this market position statement.
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Our aspirations

- Reduce the number of children coming into care by intervening earlier and increase the number of children placed permanently in families, including a return home where this is appropriate
- Encourage innovative partnerships between children’s homes, foster care agencies, service providers, including local authority and partner services, in order to work together to improve outcomes for children and young people in our care
- Our providers will work with us and our agency partners to maintain and support placements in order to improve outcomes for children and young people through placement stability
- Increase the number of placements provided within St. Helens in family settings whilst recognising that in a minority of cases, placements beyond the local authority boundary may be a positive option
- Our providers will all have good or outstanding Ofsted grades at the time of placement unless there is a good reason relating to the match of the needs of the children and young people and the skills and specialism of the provision
- Feedback from children and young people and their families will increasingly inform service development, service delivery and contract monitoring
- Maintain value for money, sufficiency of provision and quality of service by focusing collaborative work where authorities have common interests
- Work in partnership with flexible, innovative and outcome driven providers that can develop local collaborations to achieve multi-agency ‘wrap round’ responses to improve outcomes for the children in their care.
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Sufficiency analysis

St. Helens is meeting the sufficiency duty from the point of view of sufficient accommodation being available locally and purchasing placements for children from a range of providers within our region, however closer examination of the market reveals that there is a need to:

- **Maintain the quality of residential provision in St. Helens and aim that all provision is good or outstanding. Commit to stimulating a diverse, active market where outcomes reflect best value, innovation is encouraged and where providers are supported**

- **Consider further development of our in-house residential service and staying close offer**

- **Work with regional partners and national agencies to increase the options, availability and quality of provision for children and young people if their needs are complex or very specialist e.g. secure welfare**

- **Work with existing providers to widen their service offer and registration status to meet the complex needs of some of our children and young people. By remaining close with enhanced support, outcomes could be improved for these children. Local placements ensure children are nearer to family and friends and can remain at the same school if possible they also allow statutory and other services locally to 'wrap around' the child more easily which is likely to improve outcomes. Local placements should also reduce local authority costs in terms of travel etc.**

- **Predict placement trends ahead of time. Whilst this is complex we think it is likely that demand will continue to grow for adoptive carers, foster carers and supported lodgings carers within the local authority boundaries and remain static for standard children's homes. There is an increased demand for resilient children's home/leaving care settings that can cater for complex young people with education on site or within the organisation and with access to therapeutic support. In all cases the emphasis is likely to be on greater choice (to ensure best match and promote stability) and on meeting the needs of children with all levels of complexity**

- **Focus on placements and services that assist the authorities to reduce the length of time children spend in our care or help us return children to family settings from residential care, if this in the child's interest**

- **Continue recruitment of adopters; it is anticipated that the trend for children to come in care at younger ages with a plan for permanency such as adoption will continue and demand for placements for younger children from the under 5’s age group that are likely to be placed for adoption will remain**
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- Increase foster care placements in the following areas: parent and child foster carers; foster carers for sibling groups; children from minority communities including unaccompanied asylum seeking minors; young people on remand; risk taking teenagers with complex and challenging needs, (such as at risk of substance misuse and/or criminal or sexual exploitation and/or with behaviour management or mental health issues); Children who pose a sexual risk; and children who need to placed away from other children for a period of time.

- Recruit foster carers who are skilled and able to take children in an emergency

- Ensure quality and sustainability of accommodation for our care leavers including use of ‘staying put’ and supported lodgings/staying close options.

- Investigate collaborative opportunities in areas which may impact positively on outcomes for children in our care or on the edge of care

- Increase the use of children and young people’s feedback to inform future commissioning decisions

- Ensure integration with commissioning of specialist and short breaks services to develop a pathway approach to commissioning for outcomes.

Procurement

St. Helens is a participant or named partner in a number of regional and sub-regional frameworks for accommodation for looked after children

- North West Regional Fostering Framework – 2014/2017
- North West Leaving Care Services Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System – 2016/2020

Information about tender opportunities is published on the North West Local Authorities procurement portal The Chest: [www.the-chest.org.uk](http://www.the-chest.org.uk) so interested and current providers are advised to register.
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