

# Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee: Children's Social Care Report

Final V3

February 2018

The Children's Social Care Task Group was set up by the Children, Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Scrutiny Committee set out its intention early in the year, to scrutinise a piece of children’s social care policy work, with a view to influencing it in its formative stages, and to ensure that the Committee’s views on effective support to and safeguarding of vulnerable groups, improving services to residents in the city and meeting the Council’s commitments around Fairness and Poverty are taken on board during the development of this policy.
- 1.2 The Committee set up a Task Group in October 2017, to fulfil this purpose. Initial meetings were spent gathering information on the key challenges facing Children’s Social Care, as set out within its Recovery and Improvement Plan. Whilst the full Committee scrutinised the plan in its entirety, during its meeting in January 2018, the Task Group decided to focus on two key elements of the plan:
- Sufficiency and developing the local offer
  - Workforce development strategy.
- 1.3 Membership of the group is outlined below:
- Cllr Mick Rooney – Children Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee Chair and Task Group Chair
  - Cllr Cliff Woodcraft – Children Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee Deputy Chair
  - Cllr Mohammed Maroof – Children Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee Representative
  - Cllr Jim Steinke - Children Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee Representative
  - Cllr Bob Pullin - Children Young People & Family Support Scrutiny Committee Representative

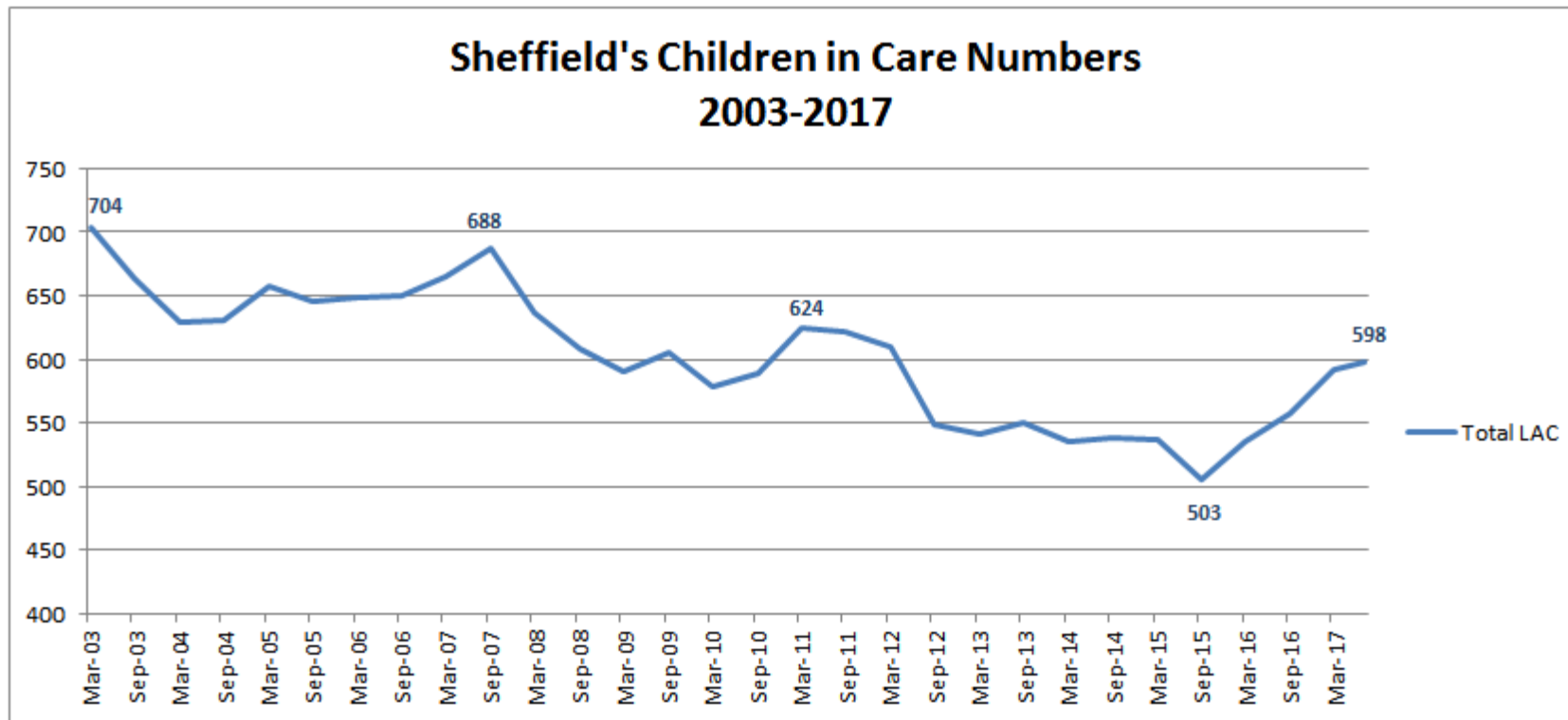
The Task Group review was undertaken from October 2017 - February 2018.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND\*

- 2.1 The Children's Social Care Service delivers the council's statutory responsibility to intervene in securing children's safety through a range of interventions. The service delivers support to families to enable them to thrive and to stay together, wherever possible. For those children who can no longer remain within their family the service performs the function of corporate parents.
- 2.2 Sheffield's Children's Services have developed an integrated service from early help through to statutory interventions, looked after services and care leavers. Since 2010, whilst demand has continued to grow, and the Service has faced the significant additional loss of grant funding such as Sure Start and Early Intervention Grant, the portfolio and Children and Families Service in particular has maintained a balanced budget until 2016/17.
- 2.3 The subsequent unprecedented increase in demand has created financial pressure that requires a further longer term strategy and investment.
- 2.4 The service has developed financial recovery plans and service performance and improvement plans to address the situation. The current position in Sheffield reflects a national position.
- 2.5 Analysis by the Local Government Association (LGA), which represents more than 370 councils in England and Wales, has revealed that in 2015-16 75% of councils exceeded their children's social care budgets by a total of £605m.
- 2.6 The number of Children in Care (CiC) has seen a gradual reduction since October 2007 after they reached levels equivalent to the peak of 700 in 2003. This coincides with the beginning of the refocus on prevention and early help, with integrated teams and the development of the MAST service.

- 2.7 MAST and their partners aim to provide seamless and safe support to children and young people, giving them help at an earlier stage, rather than entering crisis services at a later stage. Throughout this period of time, services improved and initiatives to strengthen families were developed, from the early years through to young adulthood.
- 2.8 However the increasing impact of austerity, along with national and international policy changes, has had a gradual impact on service delivery and subsequent demand for services across the whole system.
- 2.9 The number of children becoming looked after since February 2016 has seen a marked increase. Since this date numbers have increased month on month. At the end of July 2017, the total had reached 597, which remains below the peaks reached in 2007 and 2003. The steep increase from February 2016 to April 2017 has created significant pressures on resources and, as a consequence, placement costs, which continues despite the significant reduction in the rate of increase over the last 4 months.
- 2.10 This recent increase mirrors the national picture which has seen an overall increase in the numbers of children in care.

**\*Information extracted from Social Care Improvement and Recovery Plans, Cabinet Report September 2017 and presented to Children Young People and Families Scrutiny Committee, 15<sup>th</sup> Jan 2018**



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- 2.11 Analysis of this upward trend, including sampling assessments of children coming into the care system, shows us that this steady increase includes a growing number of older and more complex children entering the system.
- 2.12 The recovery plan and investment initiatives have identified the need to focus on developing services to support families with teenagers to prevent this continued increase.
- 2.13 The nature of the children entering the care system will also require a refocus of the types of interventions/resources available to support children to remain in Sheffield, whether in the Council's facilities or private providers' provision.
- 2.14 The current nature of the provision has been insufficient to meet the need locally, forcing the service to purchase an increasing number of out of city placements, increasing the financial pressures.
- 2.15 The primary aim is to promote the early identification of children with additional needs, and deliver high quality prevention and supportive services to enable children to continue living successfully and safely with their families and communities.
- 2.16 The strategy has been, and continues to be, to deliver the right level of support by the right service at the right time. This strategy has been effective, achieving a track record of lower numbers of Children in Care per 10,000 population over a number of years compared with Core Cities, statistical neighbours and the England average.
- 2.17 In 2016, Sheffield had 46 LAC per 10,000 population compared to 82 for Core Cities, 63 for Yorkshire and Humber, 74 for Statistical neighbours and 60 for the England average. This is despite substantial budget reductions since 2010.

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2.18 In addition to an increase in demand for support, several unforeseeable challenges in the last 2 years have occurred; changes in senior management within the Portfolio, financial reductions and loss of a significant number of social workers to other local authorities, in particular to neighbouring authorities in special measures who have offered higher pay scales and guaranteed lower caseloads.

2.19 The themes for the Improvement and Recovery Plan are shown below. This provides the context within which the areas of focus for the review were taken

Leadership, management and governance	Children who need help and protection	Children who are looked after	Enablers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Securing strategic and partnership commitment</li> <li>• Management focus</li> <li>• Creating a fit-for-purpose working environment</li> <li>• Develop a quality assurance and performance infrastructure</li> <li>• Recruit, retain and develop the workforce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demand management</li> <li>• Performance Framework</li> <li>• Sheffield Safeguarding Hub</li> <li>• Emergency Duty Team review</li> <li>• Workload and capacity</li> <li>• Quality and compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workload and Capacity</li> <li>• Quality and compliance</li> <li>• Sufficiency</li> <li>• Adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Accommodation</li> <li>• Planning</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Communications and engagement</li> </ul>



### 3.0 APPROACH

3.1 The Task Group used a range of approaches to gather data for the review including desk top research and evidence gathering interviews.

3.2 The Task Group met with the following individuals / representatives:

- Carly Speechley, Director of Children and Families
- Victoria Horsefield, Assistant Director, Safeguarding and Quality Assurance
- Joel Hanna, Assistant Director of Children and Families (Provider Services)
- Helen Sweaton, Assistant Director, Prevention and Early Intervention
- Matthew Sampson, Head of Improvement and Sufficiency

3.3 The Task Group also spoke to some front line practitioners within Children's Social Care.

3.4 The Task Group considered the evidence gathered and identified and set out its findings and recommendations as detailed in the next section.

3.5 The approach taken was broken down in to a number of key stages, outlined in the scoping document for the review. In summary these stages were as follows:

#### **Context setting.**

3.6 The Task Group members spent two meetings with the Director of Children and Families and two Assistant Directors, over the course of two meetings, understanding the policy and financial context within which the review would be conducted. The purpose of this was twofold; to ensure that Task Group members were fully conversant with the challenges faced by Children's Social Care and the Improvement and Recovery Plan that had already been agreed by Cabinet and; to enable

them to make an informed decision on the area of activity that they wished to focus on based on potential added value from carrying out a scrutiny review.

3.7 As part of this process, members cross referenced the issues raised in the sessions with the actual Improvement and Recovery Plan. The combination of this and two separate sessions with different officers, enabled members to triangulate the information being provided and to identify the areas for focus. At the end of this process the members agreed to focus on two areas:

- Budget and **Sufficiency**
- Workforce Strategy – **recruitment and retention** of social workers

#### **Sufficiency.**

3.8 The majority of the evidence on this issue was considered during a session with the Director and the Head of Improvement and Sufficiency. At this session members received very detailed evidence around both Foster and Residential Care provision, developing an understanding of the financial implications of out of borough placements, shifting patterns in need locally and the insufficiency of in-house placements, particularly Foster Carers. They also received additional information, upon request, from the Assistant Director of Prevention and Early Intervention about parenting and family support, to complete the picture. Evidence in these sessions was both written and verbal.

#### **Recruitment and Retention.**

3.9 Again the evidence received for this area was considered over two sessions. Firstly The Task Group received evidence from front line workers; experienced Social Workers who had been with the Council for a number of years. The aim of this was to understand the challenges faced by them on a daily basis and to understand what working for Sheffield City Council meant to them. The second session was a presentation by the Assistant Director on the Council's new Workforce Development Strategy for Children's Social Care. Written evidence supporting this presentation was provided in advance of the session.

### Consultation.

- 3.10 Members considered user consultation evidence throughout the entire review and were particularly interested to hear from the Voices of Foster Carers groups. Unfortunately the meeting scheduled with them had to be cancelled and couldn't be rearranged within the timescale of the review.

### Desk top research.

- 3.11 Additional evidence was fed into the review via this process. The final session of the Task Group considered this information, alongside other written evidence that was requested throughout the review.

- Comparison reports and information from Manchester, Lambeth and Waltham Forest Councils own websites
  - [www.manchester.gov.uk](http://www.manchester.gov.uk)
  - [www.lambeth.gov.uk](http://www.lambeth.gov.uk)
  - [walthamforest.gov.uk](http://walthamforest.gov.uk)
- House of Commons Education Select Committee – Fostering: First report of session 2017-19
- “Council’s face huge bills as foster carers jump ship to private agencies” The Guardian 30/1/18
- Sheffield City Council’s Improvement and Recovery Plan and Action Plan
- Signs of Safety briefing – Resolutions Consultancy
- Workforce Development Strategy (draft dated 15/2/18)

Specific information requested and provided internally:

- Funding sources for SCC’s Improvement and Recovery Plan
- Fostering information by ethnicity
- Parenting/family support presentation
- Social Worker salary scales

## 4.0 FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 4.0 Findings

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Members of the Task Group made a number of observations about Children’s Social Care services that they considered within the scope of this review. On the whole, they found some very positive developments and where possible they have highlighted their support for the continuation of these. At the same time, they found some areas where they felt the need to provide additional challenge to the Service and have made their recommendations accordingly.

#### **Sufficiency**

- 4.1 The background and context to this review is very clearly set out in this report. Members were made aware of the budget challenges facing the service and expressed a very early concern about the sustainability of this in the longer term. They also recognised the link between quality and budget.
- 4.2 From the outset they became aware of the “sufficiency gap” within Children’s Social Care, i.e. insufficient in house placement provision.
- 4.3 It costs the Council approximately £350 per child, per week for in house foster care. When Foster care is provided within the independent sector, costs increase to an average of £800 per week, of which a significant percentage goes to the provider not the carer.
- 4.4 However there are some children who cannot be supported in foster care or where there is no foster placement available. In these cases children can be cared for in residential homes.
- 4.5 The council does have its own homes but also currently purchases beds from the independent sector at a cost of £3000 - £6000, though the average is around £3200.

- 4.6 When members considered that of the 5-600 Children in Care across the City, approximately a third (34%), at any one time, are placed within the independent sector they concluded that the sufficiency gap is increasingly driving the Council towards the independent sector and therefore increasing costs and pressures on the budget.
- 4.7 Despite this difficult outlook, members considered a range of initiatives being implemented or developed by the service and were impressed by the approach and outcomes/potential outcomes from them. One such example is the information they were provided on Family Support. They received a very informative presentation on this service and welcomed the work being done to support families locally, and the impact that this has on preventing children and young people requiring more intensive provision further down the line, and particularly those entering the Looked After system.
- 4.8 Another really important move was the work to ensure that young people who are leaving the care system remain connected to their placements and local community, with access to a support network that they have developed. Supported accommodation was a crucial element of this, and corporate links with the Housing Service were reported as being in their infancy. Some excellent results had been achieved, however, still limited in numbers.
- 4.9 The availability of appropriate properties, locations and access to flexible additional support / capacity in respect of staffing, is vital in achieving further development of this. Since this was originally considered by members, recent improvements have been noted, with offers of properties and other options being provided. Further capital investment will be required, in some properties to achieve the models the service is aiming for.
- 4.10 The members considered the recent recruitment drive to increase the numbers of in house Foster Carers, in terms of closing the sufficiency gap. There are currently 260 in house foster carers and the target is to increase this to 400-450, over the next 5 years. This would represent the greatest number that the Council had ever recruited so it will prove a challenge.
- 4.11 The drive commenced in October 2017. There is now a contact liaison officer whose role is to make contact with every carer every 4 weeks. A psychologist has also just been recruited to provide direct support to carers. The drive also involves strengthening the relationship with existing carers, which has an impact on word of mouth recruitment.
- 4.12 There are financial incentives, such as extensions to properties to add extra rooms, funded either through revenue budgets or prudential borrowing.
- 4.13 The Council is also developing a new set of financial incentives for carers of more complex cases. This will enable the

provision of a dedicated care worker for the child in a home environment as opposed to residential care. The levels of care required would attract higher payments, however, this is still in early stages of development.

- 4.14 Members noted the early success indicators from the recruitment campaign. Members also focused their attention on the recruitment of BME Foster Carers, and the number of BME children in Foster Care. There are currently 452 children recorded as being in foster care but 14 of these do not have an ethnicity recorded. 266 are White British therefore 172 are BME. Note that foster care includes those placed with relatives/friends.
- 4.15 The Task Group were surprised and concerned that currently there is no ethnicity information for Foster Carers, therefore the Task Group's ability to make any detailed recommendations regarding this was limited.
- 4.16 They were concerned about this lack of information and found that there is a need to have a more targeted and proactive approach to working with BME groups.
- 4.17 It was felt that local Councillors are an under-utilised resource and source of knowledge in this area, particularly those representing wards with larger BME populations.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

- 4.19 Members received a range of information about the developing policies within the Council and also spoke to some front line managers about what it is like to be a social worker in Sheffield.
- 4.20 One of their first observations was that the workforce was predominantly female, aged 26-35. This explained the higher levels of maternity leave, which coupled with sickness absence, meant a higher number of non-case holding social workers employed by the Council.
- 4.21 Members of the Task Group also wished to know how reflective this demographic is of the client base. It was confirmed that the majority of the clients were mothers, which raised the issue of how much work was being done with fathers. The Early

Help and Family Support programme had raised the issue of doing more targeted work with fathers, and though this was still in development, Members recognised this as a very positive step that the Council was taking.

- 4.22 Members confirmed their understanding with presenting officers, that the main issues being faced by the Council are the recruitment and retention of qualified and experienced social workers. This has led, to the employment of a significant number of agency workers.
- 4.23 Members heard that burn out is an issue, and high caseloads have a detrimental impact, even though the Council's efforts to reduce these have been extremely successful and this is continuously being monitored. As a result it was found that over time the Council has become over reliant on inexperienced staff with high levels of churn in the workforce.
- 4.24 In terms of pay and reward, it was felt that the Council had lost out to neighbouring authorities and also potentially to agencies, both of whom are able to pay higher rates than Sheffield.
- 4.25 The Task Group received evidence that Social Workers rewards following qualification and higher level of experience were to take on more complex and child protection cases, but with only small increases in pay. They felt very strongly that this needs to be addressed.
- 4.26 Nevertheless, despite this information, they also found that Social Workers who had left for neighbouring authorities were starting to return and that agency staff working in Sheffield were applying for permanent jobs with the authority. This suggests that the motivation to work for Sheffield isn't entirely financial and that other factors have an influence.
- 4.27 The discussion with front line Social Workers revealed a loyalty to Sheffield and indicated that staff morale was higher than might be expected. Task Group members found this to be a very positive factor in Sheffield's favour.
- 4.28 The Task Group also heard about what it is like to work in the "hub" as opposed to fieldwork. Members discovered that the level of investment in technology and resources being seen in fieldwork, is not mirrored in the hub and that as such the staff are struggling with the numbers of calls and referrals being dealt with.

- 4.29 Examples of such supportive resources required within the hub were mobile phones, large screen monitoring call status and volume, desk spaces etc. Members did welcome, however, and fully supported the replacement of the outdated Care First system with Liquid Logic as they heard how many difficulties Care First had been causing practitioners and managers alike.

### **Cross Cutting Findings**

- 4.30 The Task Group considered the role of Ward Councillors as champions for residential homes, based within their wards. Experiences show that this role is unclear for both Councillors and staff within the homes and they felt that this was a wasted opportunity to build relationships with the community and to be proactive about the role of Corporate Parent. Members felt that a “critical friend” role would be a beneficial development to the members and the homes.
- 4.31 Members came across the issue of multi-disciplinary working a number of times during the review.
- 4.32 They heard where it was starting to work well, for example with supported housing for Care Leavers, and where progress still needed to be made. For example, the Police and Health bodies could sometimes be reluctant to engage in statutory compliance issues. It was conclusively found that outcomes tend to be much better, when good cross boundary and corporate working take place.
- 4.33 Finally, the Task Group received information about the Governance Structures for the Improvement and Recovery Plan and expressed some concern about the role of the Challenge Board and its ability to provide robust and fair challenge to the implementation of the plans.



## **5.0 Recommendations**

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### **5.1 Sufficiency.**

In terms of planning to close the sufficiency gap, the Task Group recommends that the Council:

- 5.1.1 Continues with the very positive developments in Family Support, providing valuable assistance to vulnerable families in Sheffield; specifically work to further include fathers.
- 5.1.2 Carries out an evaluation of a range of potential incentives to becoming an in house Foster Carer, for example exemption from Council Tax.
- 5.1.3 Should continue with the established philosophy that Sheffield children should, wherever and whenever possible, stay in Sheffield.
- 5.1.4 Should establish a BME sub group of the Voices Foster Carers group, to focus on this sector and to pull together a specific plan to address the issues.
- 5.1.5 Should adopt a strong corporate approach to Children's Social Care by ensuring that all of its key plans including the Housing and Growth Strategies, can demonstrate clear deliverable links to the Improvement and Recovery Plan.
- 5.1.6 Ensures corporate awareness and understanding of the Signs of Safety initiative, leading to full senior level support of its implementation. This should include officers and Elected Members.

### **5.2 Recruitment and Retention**

With regard to ensuring that the Council reverses the over reliance on inexperienced staff with high levels of churn, the Council should:

- 5.2.1 Recognise the positive attitude that many existing staff have towards working for Sheffield.

- 5.2.2 Also recognise that, whilst motivation is not always financial, there is a clear need for the recognition of experience, skills and levels of responsibility
- 5.2.3 In light of 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, develop a clear offer for social workers in Sheffield which includes appropriate financial remuneration and captures a unique selling point (USP) for working in Sheffield.
- 5.2.4 As work to involve fathers develops, ensure that recruitment of social workers is reflective of the gender balance of the client base they are working with.
- 5.2.5 Aim to increase investment in the Hub, including the provision of mobile phones, installing large screens for monitoring calls and addressing the accommodation/space limitations.
- 5.2.6 Continue with the existing commitment to the roll out of the Liquid Logic system to replace Care First.

### 5.3 Cross Cutting Issues

The Task Group wish to stress the importance of a corporate approach to tackling the issues being faced by Children's Social Care and with this in mind request that the Council:

- 5.3.1 Develops a clear role description of critical friend for the Ward Councillors with Residential Homes in their wards. This should include two distinct roles:
  - Standards and scrutiny – assisting with scrutinising the home to ensure it meets designated standards
  - Community Cohesion – facilitating a positive relationship between the home and its surrounding community
- 5.3.2 Considers how it might best progress towards the development of all age social care, identifying the barriers to joint working across adult and children's social care.
- 5.3.3 Considers the role of the Scrutiny Committee on the Challenge Board, for example by offering the Chair a place on the Board.