

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 15th January 2019  
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### Report Title

Out of Borough Placements for Looked After Children: the costs associated with these, and work undertaken to place these children in internal Trafford provision.

### Purpose of Report

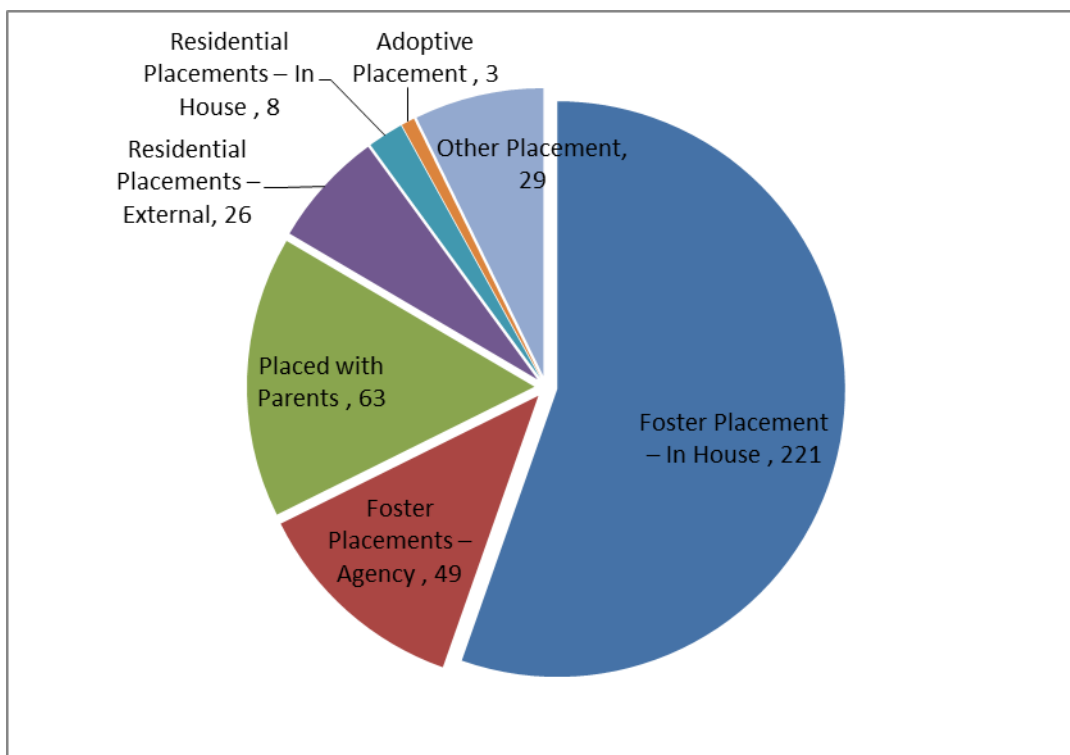
To provide updated information on the strategy to manage current placement sufficiency and spending on external residential and foster care placements. This includes the work undertaken to track these placements and increase in house capacity.

## 1. Introduction

At the end of September 2018 there were 399 Looked After Children in the care of Trafford Council. This updated report focuses on those children who are placed in external provision with independent agency foster carers or in external residential provision.

## 2. Profile of Provision

2.1 The following graph illustrates the range of placement provision for Looked After Children at the end of September 2018. The children included in adoptive placements are still looked after as the adoption order had not yet been granted.



2.2 Our aim is to place children in local, family based care to enable them to maintain links with friends and family and achieve continuity of educational provision, community engagement and a sense of identity. Of the 221 children in Trafford foster care placements there were 121 children with general foster carers and 100 with Connected Person Foster Carers. We are approaching our target of having 124 children placed with in house foster carers by the end of 18/19. Our target was to reduce the number of children with Connected Person Foster Carers to 71 by the end of 2018/9 through the increased use of Special Guardianship Orders. Although there has been a significant increase in the number of SGO's made, we have been unable to reduce admissions to care which accounts for the high numbers with Connected Person carers, however some of these cases are still in court proceedings with a final permanence plan of an SGO and we now have a robust and systematic process of reviewing all cases at an SGO panel to drive conversions.

### **3.0 Placement Sufficiency**

3.1 To ensure Trafford has appropriate accommodation that meets the needs of children in care in family based care, it is vital that we limit the number of placement moves a young person experiences. Identifying the right placement in the right place at the right time, is essential for improving stability and better outcomes. Good matching of children to placements depends on having good placement choice.

3.2 To increase fostering in-house provision we have:

- Increased Trafford fostering allowances in line with regional rates
- Introduced a flexible and responsive Fostering Plus scheme to provide short breaks for our foster carers and for children on the edge of care
- Developed a plan to introduce a Specialist Fostering scheme with a high support therapeutic approach to caring for children with complex emotional presentations who may otherwise be placed in residential care
- Refreshed our fostering recruitment materials and further developed our social media presence
- Extended our Refer a Friend scheme to reward all employees as well as foster carers for recommending a friend to foster
- Sought Fostering Friendly Status for the Council to encourage employees to combine work and fostering
- Targeted support to increase foster carer resilience and placement stability
- Enhanced the network of support available to carers by continuing to develop our mentoring support and dedicating a Family Focus resource for foster carers
- Implemented our new procedure for providing financial support to experienced foster carers to extend their accommodation to increase their capacity to provide placements

3.3 The following actions have been taken to re-fresh our placement sufficiency strategy:

- Placement Panel has become more effective in reviewing and tracking all children who are in external provision. A separate Panel is now in place to review all 16 plus provision. This panel scrutinises the purpose of the external provision through discussion with the social worker for the child and the exit plan where possible to step down to family based care and in house provision where appropriate.
- There are monthly placement savings with service managers and the children's finance team to review high cost placements to drive plans to move the children to in house provision which is closer to home and where we can monitor the arrangements more effectively .
- We have a monthly Placement Sufficiency Board with key stakeholders chaired by the Acting Director of Safeguarding. We strategically review all performance data across our provision. This is the first time we have been able to review all the data in each type of provision in one place. We ensure we are maximising usage and anticipating where we see shortfall. It is critical that drift and delay is avoided at all costs in transition planning for children and young people.

- The refreshed SGO policy is now re-issued and offers comparable support for carers. In particular the support plan has been commended by the Courts.
- We have also published our new procedure on providing financial support to allow existing foster carers to extend their property.

3.4 Trafford is continuing to develop and implement a recruitment strategy in order to increase the amount of carers we have. We are also working across the 10 GM Local authority footprint and now have in place an agreement whereby we can buy and sell children's homes beds. This can mean less reliance on the external private market. This is in its early days and Trafford are yet to purchase or sell any beds.

3.5 A GM Commissioning Group has recently been established, setting 5 priority areas for the region:

- Returning fostering services to growth
- Improving the effectiveness and value for money of placement finding / brokerage systems.
- Securing residential capacity which is financially sustainable and meets needs
- Achieve a reduction in the use of high cost placements which do not effectively meet needs (Trafford is leading this priority)
- Addressing the impact of high numbers of inward placements.

3.6 Noteworthy successes to date are the findings of a GM benchmarking exercise to compare weekly residential fees. The data demonstrated that Trafford was paying the indicative cost as per the new contract or below that figure on all but one occasion. We have since discussed the cost with the provider and confirmed that the level of service offered to our young person does represent value for money and our young person is progressing well.

3.7 Trafford recently hosted a 'Complex Placements Forum' on behalf of GM, whereby referrals for complex young people were sent to IFAs and if they had a potential match, they were invited in to meet with key social care professionals & current support staff for the young person. Trafford received an offer and following an extremely positive meeting, the young people (2 siblings) are due to move in with the carers in early January 19.

#### 4.0 Savings achieved and forecasted

The table below outlines the savings achieved and forecast for 2018/19. This is a difficult area to forecast as the expected savings depend on the ongoing stability of the step down placements. Careful assessments are undertaken before any child moves placement and children stepping down from residential care have particularly intensive support plans to maintain stability. Every move presents risks particularly with regards to supporting children with attachment difficulties who are likely to find moves and changes of carer particularly complex and challenging.

There are some contingencies built into our financial planning but there is a risk that expected savings will not be achieved if we need to place a child in a high cost external placement due to their level of assessed need.

Description	Total savings to be achieved 2018/19 £	Savings achieved to date £	Savings still to be achieved £	Total Forecast to be achieved £
Continuation of 17/18 Programme	900,000	1,067,747	0	1,067,747

## **5.0 Further development work for 2019/20**

5.1 Trafford has secured DfE innovation funding alongside other Local Authorities in Greater Manchester. The project is called No Wrong Door. The project is focused on improving outcomes for vulnerable adolescents on the edge of care. It will also provide better support for placement stability including in family based settings.

As part of the project we will re-align and strengthen some of our existing services; Family Focus team, our small team of Fostering Plus carers, and existing Childrens Home provision.

Elements of the No Wrong Door approach:

- No child is 'unfosterable'
- Creating capacity in the system to manage a crisis and reduce an 'incident driven' response that often leads to long term placement consequences for a young person.

This is a major piece of organisational change and a culture shift for staff. We will also benefit from support from GM colleagues who will be implementing this at the same time.

5.2 We are also widening our 'in house offer' for young people in need of accommodation over 16. This will allow young people to be closer to home and we will be able to monitor the arrangements closer. The 5 bed supported accommodation commission will be in place for April 2019. We are also underway in building an additional 5<sup>th</sup> flat to Forest Court.