

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Safeguarding Sub Committee	17 November 2016
<b>Subject:</b> Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children in Care	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
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### Summary

This report will provide Members with the current context to the sourcing of placements for the City of London's children looked after population, summarising the proposed commissioning strategy for placements in the future. It explains how this will ensure that there are sufficient placements, with the capacity to meet the diverse cultural and ethnic needs of the City of London's children looked after population.

This report identifies the options available to ensure that there will be sufficient placements in the future, advising of potential strengths and risks in relation to these options and taking into consideration the needs analysis of our current children and young people looked after and how this will be reviewed.

### Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

### Main Report

#### Background

1. The City of London has one generic children's team which provides services including adoption, early help, children with disabilities, children in need, child protection, children looked after and care leavers. The number of City of London resident children who have become looked after is very low, usually three or four children at any one time. The majority of children who are looked after in the City are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC); on average, the number of these children looked after at any one time ranges from seven to twelve.

2. Due to the low numbers of children looked after in the City of London, placements for children have been provided by independent fostering agencies (IFAs) through the Pan London Consortium, of which the City is a part. Local authorities within the Consortium come together under a single contractual arrangement with IFAs to ensure that there is an agreed standard and cost for placements.
3. This does not preclude the need for individual contractual arrangements with IFAs, but there is a certain assurance as to the quality and consistency of the services being provided. There is also a wider pool of diverse foster carers which offers more choice when finding a placement. The majority of local authorities use the Pan London Consortium when they have exhausted their own placements, or where they have a child who requires more specialist care which cannot be provided in-house.
4. The risks in relation to this strategy are that the quality of the placements can be variable. City of London children and young people can also be placed over a wide geographical area when establishing the best match in regard to ethnic and cultural needs, which can be isolating for the children and young people involved. There is also some concern that the consortium may be disbanded due to a lack of interest/participation on the part of other local authorities.

### **Other placement options**

5. The following options will be considered to ensure that sufficient placements are available to meet the needs of children looked after in the City of London.

#### **Option 1**

6. This option would be to bring fostering services in-house, with foster carers being recruited and supported by the City of London. The strength of this strategy would be that the City would have more control over the quality of services being offered, training foster carers in the specific needs of the City. It would also enable the recruitment of foster carers from in and around the locality of the City, making it possible for children and young people to remain near their homes; however, as previously identified, the majority of the City's children are UASC. In-house foster carers would support the children's and young people's identities in being connected to the City, and local resources would be available.
7. The risk in relation to this strategy would be a smaller pool of foster carers to call upon; this could restrict the City's capacity to meet the diverse needs of the City of London's children looked after population. Consideration would also need to be given to the current structure of Children's Social Care to support a fostering service. This strategy could have considerable resource implications, due to the infrastructure required to deliver in-house fostering services.

## **Option 2**

8. This option would be to have direct contractual arrangements with one or two IFAs, to provide fostering services for the City. The strengths of this strategy would be similar to those of option 1, in that the City would have more control over the quality and costs of the provision through individually negotiated agreements directly with the providers. Unlike option 1, the City would not be required to increase the infrastructure of Children's Social Care to accommodate the fostering service.
9. The potential risks in relation to this strategy could be the restricted number of foster carers available, and their lack of diversity to meet the needs of the City's children looked after population. When commissioning the service, consideration would have to be given to placement disruption and the potential deterioration of the quality of the IFA in order to ensure that the City could minimise the disruption for young people, while retaining good to outstanding services. However, this could be resolved through putting robust contractual and monitoring arrangements in place which would quickly identify areas of concern, and working with the IFAs to resolve any performance issues.

## **Option 3**

10. This option would look at commissioning fostering placements from another local authority. Given the low numbers of children looked after, this could provide a sustainable option that is likely to offer the diversity needed. The strength in using this strategy would be the potential to have children and young people placed near the City in neighbouring boroughs. It could also give children and young people the opportunity to link into local services in the area in which they are placed. This option has been pursued in the past; however, there was limited response from other local authorities due to the pressures they were already experiencing on their placements from their own children looked after population.
11. These potential concerns could be resolved through the commissioning strategy used: for example, exploring the option of funding additional foster carers, by contributing to training costs for foster carers and supporting the recruitment of additional carers. The potential risks in relation to this strategy would be the availability of placements when required, and whether there would be enough diversity within the foster placements to meet the needs of the children and young people.

## **Conclusion**

12. The Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy analyses the needs of children and young people looked after in the City of London, and the impact that this data has on our future placement requirements. We need to explore the strengths of this strategy and the potential areas for development to ensure that children and young people feel connected and central to the strategic planning of future services.

13. A key area of development has been to bring both City of London resident children and UASC together to ensure that they have a say in the development of services for children. This has been achieved through the Children in Care Council (CiCC) which offers opportunities for children in care and care leavers to be involved in the monitoring of commissioned services.
14. We are currently reviewing the feasibility of the various options put forward to ascertain the most suitable resources for the City of London's children looked after population. It may well be that a range of options will be used to reduce the potential risks.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Sufficiency and Commissioning Strategy for Children in Care in the City of London 2015 to 2017

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