

<b>DECISION-MAKER:</b>	CABINET		
<b>SUBJECT:</b>	LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN STRATEGY		
<b>DATE OF DECISION:</b>	17 JUNE 2014		
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SAFEGUARDING		
<b><u>CONTACT DETAILS</u></b>			
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<b>STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY</b>
None

### **BRIEF SUMMARY**

The Cabinet are asked to consider and approve the Looked After Children Strategy, note key priorities and the links to other key documents (such as the Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Commissioning Strategy 2014-17, and the Looked After Children Improvement Plan).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- (i) To approve the Looked After Children Strategy and associated Placement Commissioning Strategy 2014-17 attached at Appendices 1 and 2 of this report.

### **REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Under primary legislation the Council has responsibilities and a positive role to play as the Corporate Parents of Looked After Children in the care of the Council. A Looked After Children Strategy is a key document which outlines how the Council will discharge its responsibilities and prioritise delivery of services for this group of children.
2. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 strengthens the requirement on the Council to take steps to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for looked after children within their local authority area (Section 22G Children Act 1989). This is now referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'. The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Placement Commissioning Strategy 2014-17 outlines how the Council will meet its duty under the 1989 and 2008 Acts.

## ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

3. While the Council has a duty to prepare and approve the attached Strategies, the form and content of them is open to Council discretion having regard to a local needs assessment and meeting local priorities. A variety of different options exist which have been discounted having regard to the Council's assessment of priorities and needs within its area.

### DETAIL (Including consultation carried out)

4. The Looked After Children Strategy identifies eight priorities framing our services for looked after children
  1. Safeguarding
  2. Participating and Having your Say
  3. Staying Together, Identity and Relationships
  4. Ensuring Good Educational Outcomes
  5. Providing Clear Care Pathways and Timely Permanence
  6. Promoting Health and Well being
  7. Positively Managing Risk Safe and Stable Placements
  8. Widening Access to Culture and Leisure Activities
5. The priorities outlined in the Strategy give the broad ambition and direction of travel of the Council in respect of its Corporate Parenting Responsibilities. The Strategy is underpinned by the detailed actions contained within the Children's Services Improvement and Transformation Plans, specifically in Themes 3 and 4:
  3. *Robust and timely LAC provision. Ensure all looked after children have a care plan that delivers permanency in a timely manner.*  
*Review contact service and family centre provision to amalgamate into one Family Support Service that delivers assessed contact as part of an overarching family assessment.*
  4. *Enhance Fostering and Adoption Provision within the City. Ensure the capacity within our fostering and adoption service is maintained and the recruitment of resources is increasingly targeted to our identified needs.*

The Improvement and Transformation plan has previously been considered by the Corporate Parenting Committee.
6. The Placement Commissioning Strategy outlines the context to securing placements for looked after children in Southampton. The number of looked after children has grown beyond levels previously forecast and the demography of the looked after children cohort has also changed with increased numbers of children under 10 years of age.
7. It also outlines current service provision and performance in the areas of placement stability, location and type of placements, placement choice.
8. The strategy outlines a number of priorities including how in-house fostering be the preferred provision within a range of providers, adoption provision will be increased, development of accommodation and support for young people leaving care, and in developing joint commissioning arrangements.

9. In the medium term, the strategy reflects the anticipated impact of the transformation agenda. It envisages that early intervention strategies and swift planning for permanence will be to favourably impact the care population over the next three years.

## **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Capital/Revenue**

10. Delivery of services for looked after children is funded across a number of council services including the core social work teams, the fostering and adoption service, and preventative and support services provided by specialist teams such as the Integrated Family Assessment and Intervention Service.
10. Successful implementation of the strategy should reduce the numbers of looked after children from 2014-15 onwards. The financial impact of this reduction has been reflected within the medium term budget projections.
11. In the strategy, it has been assumed that the use of in house fostering will rise as a proportion of total fostering placements, but that the total number of fostering placements will reduce over time. It is also anticipated that residential provision will continue to be used as a last resort measure, and that the need for such placements will remain static. Unit costs for Independent Fostering Agency range from between £600 to £1,900 per week depending on the type of placement and complexity, whereas internal fostering placements cost between £150 to £620 per week. Costs for residential provision can range between £2,400 per week through to £5,200 per week for the most intensive or therapeutic provision. In-house provision is much more cost effective and quality can be monitored and delivered more effectively.

### **Property/Other**

12. None

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

### **Statutory power to undertake proposals in the report:**

13. The Children Act 1989 placed the statutory responsibility on the council to provide accommodation and services for looked after children. The Care Standards Act 2002 and associated regulations define the operation of local authority fostering and adoption services.
14. As mentioned previously in this report, the Council has a statutory duty in respect of delivering its Corporate Parenting Responsibilities and in ensuring sufficient and suitable placements for looked after children.

### **Other Legal Implications:**

15. In delivering the priorities and services outlined in the strategy the Council will have regard to its duties under the Equalities Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.

**POLICY FRAMEWORK IMPLICATIONS**

16. The proposals in this report fully support the Council’s Policy Framework in relation to early years provision and children’s services for children and young people.

**KEY DECISION?** Yes

<b>WARDS/COMMUNITIES AFFECTED:</b>	All
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**SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

**Appendices**

1.	Looked After Children Strategy
2.	Looked After Children & Care Leavers’ Placement Commissioning Strategy 2014 -2017

**Documents In Members’ Rooms**

1.	None
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**Equality Impact Assessment**

Do the implications/subject of the report require an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to be carried out.	No
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**Other Background Documents**

**Equality Impact Assessment and Other Background documents available for inspection at:**

Title of Background Paper(s)	Relevant Paragraph of the Access to Information Procedure Rules / Schedule 12A allowing document to be Exempt/Confidential (if applicable)
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1.	None	
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