



1. Background & Context

As with the national picture, Bristol's Children and Families Service has been experiencing significant budget pressures resulting from: demand in the system; rising weekly placement costs related to a dysfunctional market; and increasing complexity of issues, particularly within the teenage care population. Following the appointment of a new Service Director in May 2017, a series of management actions were implemented to tackle overspending budgets, addressing each area of pressure and these had some positive impact in the short-term.

It was recognised however, that the existing model of delivery did not allow for the pressures to be addressed over the longer term in a sustainable way and was not impacting on demand or enabling delivery of good outcomes for children and families living in Bristol. This was feeding into our challenges around demand pressures, increased costs and workforce instabilities. System-wide transformation was required to bring about sustainable change to focus on the root causes of demand underpinned by ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences); improve the partnership response to children and families in need of support; and enable us to deliver our vision and key outcomes.

The Strengthening Families Programme is Bristol's response to these combined challenges and ambitions. A system-wide programme of transformational change was developed, underpinned by a business case for investment, which set out to deliver substantial financial and non-financial benefits over a 5-year delivery period. The Programme received formal Cabinet approval and funding in April 2018, however, work on some transformational activity and early release of benefits pre-dates that.

A focus on ACEs and their impact on health and emotional wellbeing, harming behaviours, alcohol use, drug use, violence, sexual behaviour, incarceration, smoking, poor diet, leading to a higher than average use of health and social care services, underpins the direction of travel within the Strengthening Families programme.

1.1 What did we say we'd do and how are we doing?

The **vision** for children and families in Bristol is that they get the "right response, the right assessment, the right help, at the right time".

The **Statement of Intent** for the Programme is to make cost savings whilst holding the ambition of improving outcomes, commissioning and delivering quality services and keeping children and families at the heart of what we do.

- **We want the best** for Bristol's children and young people and they are at the heart of everything we do.
- **We will help families** to achieve the change they want to see for themselves and their children
- **We believe** that children should live with their families or someone who knows them best.
- **We take action** when children need to be protected from harm.
- **We do everything we can** to make sure that the children in our care and care leavers are set up for life.

There are three¹ angles from which we approached the challenge:

1. **DEMAND** – tackling the number of children, young people and families that need our support and reducing the level of that need;
2. **SUPPLY** – how we organise our resources and commission in order to respond to that demand and, within that;
3. **WORKFORCE** – how we organise and support our staff to deliver the most effective and timely response to families.

1.3 Current Programme Progress

The programme is currently 6 months into the formal delivery phase having previously been approved by Cabinet. Delivery period is September April 2018 to September 2019, with a benefit realisation period of 5 years (2018 to 2023).

Progress to date is positive due to benefit and savings delivery being validated via the P5 forecast for Division 15 which shows that programme interventions are having the required impact - specifically in terms of reducing numbers of children in care and those placed Out of Authority. All key milestones are being met for headline projects and areas of innovation, however, the pace in other areas of programme activity needs to be stepped up if they are to be delivering benefits in time for 19/20. It is anticipated that with the conclusion of the Ofsted Inspection - signalling the removal of this major risk from the programme - that all areas of required activity will be attended to in short order. Moving forward, the challenge will be to maintain this position where it is accepted that there is volatility in budgets. Two major risks were de-escalated and/or closed during September in relation to the Ofsted Inspection and delivery of MASH telephony.

2. Programme Benefits

2.1 The following change and benefits will be realised through implementing the Strengthening Families Programme:

- a) Families will be supported to be more resilient, more children will be safely cared for within their birth families or extended families.
- b) The Right Child will receive the Right Service at the Right Time in the Right Place. We will do this by integrating our locality and area children's services to assist us in the development of a seamless service organised around children and family's needs. We will bring together partners and multi-disciplinary staff to ensure that families receive the right assistance and advice at the point need is identified.
- c) More children and families will receive support from universal and early help providers. This will be achieved as we increase support to schools and providers through our Integrated Localities and 'Team around the School' approaches.

¹ A detailed explanation of each of the three challenges is contained within the Strengthening Families Full Business Case.

- d) We will reduce the number of children entering care during their teens. We will do this by creating or commissioning an Edge of Care service which provides intensive support to families at risk of breakdown.
- e) Children in Care will increasingly be looked after within families: foster families or their extended families. We will do this by increasing our foster carer households and supporting retiring foster carers to provide short breaks or crisis care.
- f) Children in Care will be safely reunited with their families. We will do this by providing intensive support to return children safely back to their birth families through a new Reunification (intensive support) Team to ensure sustainability.
- g) There will be significantly fewer children and young people placed in Out of Authority residential settings (they will instead be placed in a new model of local small children's homes providing accommodation for two children or young people).
- h) Staff will be better supported to carry out their role, through improved training and a reduction in workload and roll out of mobile technology.

3. Programme Trajectories

3.1 The following trajectories are tracked to measure success in achieving the programme benefits:

a) Number of Children Entering Care Reduces

Children in care rate per 10,000 reduced to 69 which are below stat neighbours and core cities. UASC make up 6% of our looked after population. We have been intent on eradicating drift and delay for children with a Child Protection Plan.

This focused work has:

- reduced the number of CP plans lasting over 2 years (3 children; one family)
- 8% of CP Plans have been in place over 12 months
- increased the number of CP plans that end at the first review
- Enabled us to reduce the time between CP reviews

b) Number of Older Children Entering Care Reduces

Through the programme, we have focused on reducing the need for adolescent entry to care by improving support to young people and families as a safe alternative.

To complement a recommissioned Targeted Youth Service, we used programme investment to work with a deliver partner to deliver a 6-month intensive Edge of Care service with 50 adolescents. Alongside this, we developed our own multidisciplinary edge of care and custody service based on our successful FIT (Family Intervention Teams).

The new Strengthening Families Service launched on 10 September 2018 and enhances our response to contextual safeguarding.

c) Caseloads are Reduced to Recommended Levels

The reduction in area caseloads has largely been driven by a relentless focus on reducing drift in case work and ensuring that case work which has lasted over 18 months is completed and either stepped down or closed.

A commissioned contract to close cases has finished recently. Now that grip in drift is evident the focus shifts to through put and threshold management. The average caseloads by area teams range from 18 to 23.

Strengthening Families has invested in an Exit from Care team and Strengthening Families (edge of care) Team which has bought additional capacity to the system.

d) Children Exiting Care Via an Appropriate Route

Increasing the number children exiting care via an appropriate route is a key metric for the programme. We continue to work on this metric so that it can properly evidence the impact the programme is having (for example, a downward trajectory may be more accurately linked to a lower care population rather than declining performance in achieving permanence). There is additional capacity to address this gap coming soon.

e) Use of In-House Foster Carers Increases

There is existing strong performance in our use of in-house foster carers compared to IFA's, however, the programme seeks further improvements to deliver savings (an increase of 77 placements sought over the next 3 years)

We are now working with the Behavioral Insights Team on our recruitment campaigns and pursuing other activity driven by a Foster Care Summit event.

f) Quality of Partner referrals to First Response Improves

A reduction in the number of contacts resulting in 'no further action' is an indicator that partners understand our thresholds.

A future refinement of this metric is to view contacts 'v' no further action by referring agency e.g. Police, schools, health, so we can determine where we are having the most and/or least impact in terms of our approach

g) Cases 'Stepped Down' from Social Care Increases

This is considered to be a key metric in determining the success of our integrated locality arrangements and Family in Focus teams. This is not something historically recorded as the cases traverse two systems and is therefore problematic but it is something we are developing

h) Workforce is Enabled to Deliver High-Quality Practice

This metric is currently still in development.

4. Financial Benefits

The Strengthening Families programme received investment to deliver better ways of working to get better outcomes for children. The circumstances for individual children will be varied. However, over the five year programme, these service improvements should

mean that overall average placement costs will be cheaper, average durations may be shorter and average numbers of placements should be lower. Tracking the costs and numbers of placements is important in understanding whether these changes are happening.

4.1 Quarterly Children in Care numbers

The following table presents a snapshot of average costs at 31st March 2018. The analysis of Looked After Children indicates that:

- Overall numbers of LAC have reduced by 32 (5%) since the end of March 2017.
- At the snapshot average weekly costs rates, this would have reduced overall LAC costs by £1.5m over a year.
- If the actual cost of changed placements was different to the average snapshot values, this would affect the overall position.
- Numbers of agency foster care, a key part of the Strengthening Families savings plan, had been reducing, but has increased again since April 2018.
- Numbers of in-house foster care have been reducing since March 2017, rather than increasing.
- A key issue is whether the reduced numbers and costs are offset by higher numbers and continuing costs of care leavers or Special Guardianship cases. This line of enquiry is what officers are pursuing and will report on at a future meeting.

Summary of children's placement numbers and estimated costs (based on averages)

	31/03/2017	30/06/2017	30/09/2017	31/12/2017	31/03/2018	30/06/2018	30/09/2018
	Nos						
Total LAC	686	673	661	653	643	654	643
Total Permanency with a cost	586	584	590	584	594	596	596
Total Care Leavers with a cost*	115	120	121	125	130	130	130
Total placements	1,387	1,377	1,372	1,362	1,367	1,380	1,369

	31/03/2017	30/06/2017	30/09/2017	31/12/2017	31/03/2018	30/06/2018	30/09/2018
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
LAC costs	24,375	23,511	23,223	23,526	22,709	23,150	22,640
Permanency costs	5,088	5,069	5,139	5,111	5,202	5,324	5,324
Care Leaver costs*	1,756	1,872	1,931	2,030	2,157	1,738	1,738
Total costs	31,219	30,453	30,293	30,667	30,069	30,211	29,702

5. Core Cities Comparison

The LGA estimates that a minimum of £2 billion will be required by 2019/20 to fund the additional pressures on children's services brought about by a growing population and inflation.

5.1 Number of Looked after Children Increases

The number of looked after children continues to increase; it has increased steadily over the last nine years. At 31st March 2017 there were 72,670 looked after children, an increase of 3% on 2016.

The number of children starting to be looked after in 2016-17 has also risen in recent years and has increased 2% compared with the previous year.

6. RISK TO DELIVERY

A number of key risks have been identified to continuing delivery of planned benefits, which unless mitigated, may negatively impact on the delivery of the programme and ultimately achievement of savings. Risks include:

- Increasing our in-house foster carer placements. We are already a high performer in this area and additional gains become increasingly more difficult to access. Stagnant rates for foster carers exacerbate this ambition to deliver -£322,350 savings.
- Increasing risk of demand pressures arising from continuing austerity.
- An emphasis on delivery by operational service manager and service leads creates a friction with the day-job and impedes capacity to deliver transformational change.
- We are experiencing a bulge in our Care Leaver numbers which will increase pressure on that budget.
- Potential inflationary growth on residential placements (c1.4%). While we have held prices down, there will be pent up cost pressures in the system which cannot be contained forever.
- Our ambition to recruit and retain experienced social workers is compromised by current levels of pay which are increasingly out of step with neighbouring authorities.
- We continue to have limited information about placement trends in data and activity due to the lack of a suitable finance module for the LCS record system.