



Knowsley Council

Sufficiency Needs Assessment for Children Looked After 2015 – 2017

Produced in partnership with Policy Impact and Intelligence

Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

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1. Introduction

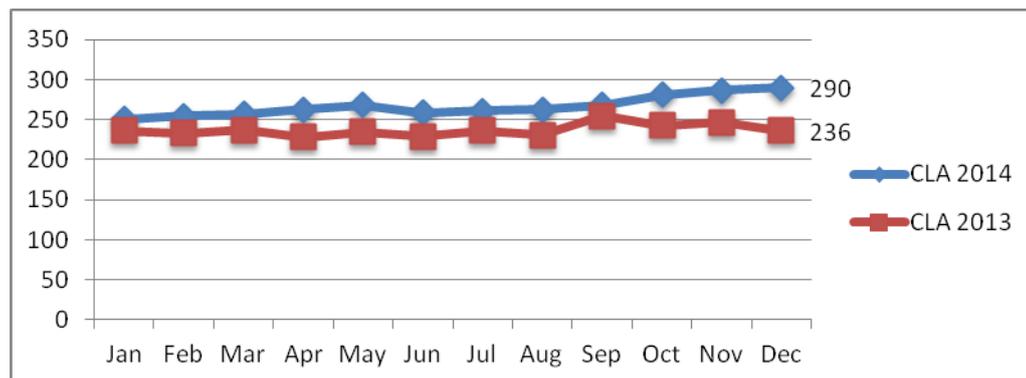
- 1.1 Knowsley's Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2014 – 2017 sets out our overall approach to looked after children in the authority for the next two years. It establishes the principles and values that govern our approach to these children and young people, including our corporate parenting role and gives details of how we intend to develop the service.
- 1.2 This document should be read in conjunction with the Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy, and also the Children Looked After Charter (2014), published by the Make a Difference Everywhere group (MADE).
- 1.3 The purpose of this document is to set out clearly and succinctly the strategic intentions of Knowsley Children and Families Services in fulfilling our sufficiency duty (s22G, Children Act 1989) towards children looked after. As part of the "sufficiency duty" it places a requirement on local authorities to,

"take steps to secure as far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the local authority's area which meets the needs of children that the local authority is looking after, and whose circumstances are such that it would be consistent with their welfare for them to be provided with accommodation that is in the local authority's area."
- 1.4 Securing sufficient accommodation requires a whole system approach which delivers early intervention and preventative services to support children in their families along with high quality services for children if they do become looked after.
- 1.5 This Sufficiency Strategy will be an evolving document in that it will change shape and develop over the next two years.
- 1.6 Overall the local children looked after population has seen an increase over the last three years. In particular there has been a significant increase in the last 12 months and for the first time ever there is approaching 300 children looked after by Knowsley Borough Council. Over the next two years it is expected that the children in care population will continue to rise to 350 children. The rise occurring in our borough is being mirrored nationally and can largely be seen as a response to changes in legislation and Government guidance. However, there are factors that are specific to us in Knowsley that will result in a growing care population.
- 1.7 As part of the post Ofsted inspection (April 2014) and the subsequent Improvement Plan, one of the main priorities for the Council is to oversee the improvement in Children's Social Care, including early help, child protection and children looked after. Given that the number of children looked after is predicted to continue to rise, our priority is to meet their individual needs ensuring there is a range of choice across all areas of our provision that achieves our priorities in demonstrating quality, effectiveness, efficiency and economy leading to better outcomes for children.
- 1.8 We aim to ensure that all children who require accommodation are provided with a permanent placement within the quickest timescales to maximise stability and success.

- 1.9 Our priority is to develop preventative services for those children on the edge of care, increase in house fostering particularly for all children sibling groups and those with complex needs. Priority will also be given to developing residential provision, supported lodgings and the adoption services.
- 1.10 We will expand our recruitment strategy, recruiting within and outside our geographical boundaries for prospective adopters to meet the needs of our children awaiting adoption. This includes ensuring that the assessment and approval process as per the Governments two stage assessment process for both adopters and foster carers introduced in July 2013 is implemented, monitored and reviewed.
- 1.11 We have redesigned our internal processes for the commissioning of placements with the recent implementation of the Access to Resources Team (ART). As such, once fully developed ART will provide a 'one stop approach' to the commissioning of internal and external placements for children looked after.
- 1.12 We are strengthening our Fostering and Adoption teams to ensure they are 'fit for purpose' and meeting the needs of children looked after. This includes reviewing the remit of the respective Fostering and Adoption Panels to ensure children are achieving permanency more quickly.
- 1.13 We are developing a service that will include Specialist Foster Carers who will offer a service to:
- ❖ Older aged children including adolescents with challenging and complex needs requiring more specialist family based care
 - ❖ Children with disabilities who require short break provision that can be provided through foster care as opposed to residential care
 - ❖ Fostering care for larger sibling groups
 - ❖ Parent and child fostering provision
 - ❖ A fostering or residential resource that can be linked into 'edge of care' support to enable children to remain living within their families.
- 1.14 We will offer an alternative to children remaining in long term foster care either through mainstream fostering or 'connected' persons' arrangements by providing a clear offer in respect of special guardianship.
- 1.15 We are re-shaping our early help model with a focus on targeted intervention for those children who are considered vulnerable to requiring statutory services.

2. Children Looked After in Knowsley

- 2.1 **The population** - since 2012 the care population has varied between 240 and 280 children at any given time. This has risen more recently to over 290 children (December 2014). In the last 12 months, a total of 113 children have come in to care, which is higher than the previous 12 month total (70 children), although the overall number of children in care has not grown significantly compared with trend data. The rate per 10,000 of child population for children looked after is now 78.4 (31/03/14).



- 2.2 We anticipate that this trend will continue during the next 12 months and will exceed 350 children by end December 2015.
- 2.3 There are a number of reasons why there has been an increase in the children looked after population, particularly during the previous 12 month period. These include;
- ❖ Lack of a coordinated and robust early help model that avoids children entering care. This includes babies and infants experiencing neglect and abuse, and also adolescents who enter care due to family breakdown, challenging behaviours at home and within the community. This is particularly relevant to those children considered being on the edge of care
 - ❖ There is increasing need based on demographic and economic factors influencing national and local trends. Nationally there has been a rise in children looked-after population. This includes an increase in Care applications made to the Court. Our local authority neighbours have also reported an increase in children-looked after by as much as 30 per cent
 - ❖ Response to the implementation of new legislation and guidance. This is particularly relevant with the introduction of the Public Law Outline (PLO) and also the change in Care Planning regulations (2010) with the introduction of 'connected persons' arrangements
 - ❖ Once children enter care through the courts, insufficient consideration being given to achieving permanency for children through adoption, special guardianship or Child Assessment Orders

- ❖ Improved decision making and the application of thresholds for care. With the application of the Pre-Proceedings Protocol (part of the Public Law Outline arrangements) social workers are beginning to work with families in a more explicit manner. This includes being clear with parents about the causes for concerns, what needs to change, by when, by whom, and what will happen if the desired changes don't happen. This will move us away from what is typically known as the “start again syndrome” whereby children are left too long in potentially abusive and neglectful environments due to parents not being able to make sustainable changes.

2.3 There is a cohort of children entering care only remaining for a short period of time. The majority of these children are adolescents aged between 12-17 years old accommodated on a voluntary basis under Section 20 (Children Act, 1989). However, in the last 12 months this has included a number of children entering care due to risks associated with child sexual exploitation and gang activity which has resulted in children and young people being placed in high cost residential provision including secure accommodation.

2.4 **Demographic profile** – there are higher proportions of children aged 10 and over who are in care (58%). These are children who are likely to be in care for a long period, in addition to those aged between 5 – 9 years (accounts for 25%). For some of these children alternative plans other than long term fostering should be considered, particularly for those who are placed with family or friends (connected carers) or in settled longer term placements with foster carers. There is a cohort of young children aged 0 – 4 years (16%) where long term care plan should consider permanence via adoption or placement with family members under special guardianship.

2.5 There are more boys than girls looked after. There is a split of 57% and 43% respectively.

2.6 In line with Knowsley’s demographic profile the overwhelming majority are White British. The proportion of white/ British accounts for 95% of the care population. There are approximately 10 children whose ethnicity is recorded as being some other than White British, as detailed below;

Ethnicity	Total	Percentage	Knowsley Age 0-17 population
White – British	246	94.6%	95.5%
White - Any Other Background	3	1.2%	0.79%
Mixed - White + Black African	3	1.2%	0.82%
Mixed - Any Other Background	5	1.9%	0.41%
Black/Black British – Other	1	0.4%	0.05%
Other Ethnic Group - Any Other Group	1	0.4%	0.15%
Undeclared/Not Known	1	0.4%	0.15%

2.7 There are a relatively small number of children looked after due to disability, especially in terms of those entering care in the last three years. In July 2014 there were 53 children looked after identified as having a disability and required either specialist provision or short breaks. Of the current children looked after population 6% have a disability. In addition there is provision required for short breaks for an additional seven children looked after, and 30 children who require accommodation for short breaks. There are a range of respite and support services for families with children who have disabilities. In terms of

current placements in Knowsley, there are three specialist places for children or young people with disabilities, however, more foster carers are required for this specialist group.

2.8 There is a high proportion of Knowsley’s children looked after identified as having special educational needs. In 2014 there were total of 65% children considered to have special education needs (NB: 29% considered to have SEN but no statement).

2.9 Over the last three years there have been high concentrations of children looked after coming from specific wards in Knowsley; Longview, Stockbridge, Whitefield and Page Moss. These are all areas with recognised high levels of deprivation. The geographical mapping of communities from which children looked after originate will influence Knowsley’s Early Help Strategy and the delivery of targeted services.

2.10 **Where children are placed** – the table below illustrates those 175 children) of children looked-after in Knowsley are placed with in house foster carers, family/ friends carers or with parents.

Placement Type	31/03/12	31/03/13	31/03/14	31/01/14
Foster Carer – in-house	124	112	102	103
Foster Carer – Independent Fostering Agency	28	34	43	69
Foster Placement – relative or friend	33	29	36	43
Placed with parents	26	29	27	26
Residential – in-house	5	6	6	11
Residential - agency	13	15	23	27
Independent living - agency	9	7	5	2
Youth Offending Institute	1	1	2	3
Secure Unit	1	1	2	0
Parent & Child Unit	0	0	2	1
NHS/ Health Trust	0	0	0	0
Placed for adoption with current carers	0	1	2	0
Placed for adoption with current foster carers	5	3	8	4
TOTAL	255	237	257	289

2.11 As the above table illustrates there has been a move towards more children being placed in independent provision, whether in foster care or residential homes. Whilst it can be necessary to place children in independent provision due to complex or challenging needs that require specialist provision, the increased reliance on private provision has been due to insufficient in house capacity for fostering and residential care.

2.12 Whilst there has been an increase in the number of children becoming looked after there has been a net loss of placements in fostering and residential provision since 2012. The current position is due to the reduction in house placements and the additional children becoming looked-after we don’t have the resources to cope with the level of demand.

2.13 The increasing dependence on external provision has led to children being placed outside a 20 mile radius from their family home.

3. Current Placement Provision

3.1 In-house provision – this refers to internal resources, whether it is foster care, residential care or leaving care provision.

- 3.2 In house foster care accounts for the majority of placement arrangements for looked after children. Currently we have 79 mainstream foster care placements foster carers approvals arrange from 1- 18 years. The Fostering Service currently has 21 carers approved for 3 children, 29 carers for 2 children and 29 carers approved for 1 child. Currently there is a shortage of foster placements to care for siblings and children aged 10 years plus. From 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 there were only five approvals for mainstream foster carers and seven 'connected persons'.
- 3.3 In addition to the mainstream foster carers, we have only five who provide short term breaks for disabled children.
- 3.4 We have a proportion of carers approved to look after specific individual children as part of 'family and friends' arrangements (referred to as 'connected persons'). Currently there are 28 approved friends and family carers.
- 3.5 There are three children's residential homes (two mainstream homes and one short-term breaks provision for children with disabilities). Details of these homes are summarised below;
- ❖ Short term breaks provision provides 34 children with 116 bed nights. The outreach service provides 38 children with 102 outreach sessions
 - ❖ Of the two mainstream units, one has approval for three young people between the age ranges of 12 – 17 year olds; the second has approval for two young people as part of the residential provision providing short term accommodation for 10 -16 year olds with a plan to return home. Since 2012 there has been a policy to close in-house Children's Homes with the expectation that this would lead to savings by moving children into foster placements. However, Council Policy needs to be reviewed as the sufficiency report indicates that more capacity is required for residential care.
- 3.6 Independent provision – this refers to external placements that are commissioned from private providers. Placement types include fostering, residential care, specialist; i.e. mother and baby placements or adolescent/therapeutic support, secure accommodation or leaving care accommodation.
- 3.7 The North West Authorities have a collaborative approach to accommodation for children looked after through Placements Northwest as an established commissioning framework with registered providers. The commissioning of placements is co-ordinated by the Access to Resources Team (ART) that has been operating since mid- 2014.
- 3.8 The development of the ART model is seen as key to ensuring there are controls in place in the coordination and commissioning of placements. This includes a 'one stop' approach to accessing services that will investigate all available resources both in-house and external to the local authority with a key aim of commissioning high quality, value for money services that improve outcomes for children and young people.

4. **Aims and ambitions**

4.1 The key aims of our sufficiency strategy are to:

- ❖ Strengthen the early identification of need, the provision of early help and effective, timely intervention to prevent children entering the group on the edge of care
- ❖ Reduce the need for council care by strengthening preventative support to those on the edge of care including the use of family group conferencing and the Pre-proceedings Protocol as a precursor to a child becoming looked after and the innovative use of foster care and elements of residential provision to enable children to remain living within their families
- ❖ Provide a range of care placements that provide choice, stability and swift permanence that fulfil the requirement of s22C of the Children Act 1989 i.e. placements that:
 - Are near to home and within our local area
 - Minimise the disruption to education and training and help the continuation of community links and friendships
 - Allow siblings to live together
 - Meet the needs of disabled children
- ❖ Strengthen social work practice that provides a focus on looked after children, concentrating on the journey of each individual child within the system
- ❖ Secure permanence at the earliest point for those who do enter care
- ❖ Provide a pattern of services that improve outcomes for children in care in the areas of safety, education and training, health, positive engagement and preparation for a successful future.

4.1.1 These aims are set within a framework of strong corporate parenting, effective care planning and a firm focus on the needs and wishes of children and young people.

4.1.2 In the first instance, over the next 12 – 18 months we will bring together our resources, including financial budgets and placement provision (management of the ART and in house fostering and mainstream residential care) under the control of the temporary Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption. This will ensure the strategic priorities set out in this report are achieved and there is sufficient operational management controls in place to manage the efficient use of the available finite resources.

4.2 **Strengthen early help and timely, effective intervention to prevent children entering the group on the edge of care**

4.2.1 The Family First 0-18 service (including the Stronger Families Programme) will continue to offer a case management Lead Professional approach to a whole family assessment. This includes planning and intervention based upon Team Around the Family as part of the Early Help targeted offer for families with multiple and complex needs.

4.2.2 The service currently responds to key factors contributing to children nearing the edge of care including parental mental health, substance misuse, domestic violence and criminality. This is achieved through the provision of universal and targeted services which extend from partnerships with Maternity services, Third Sector Providers, Early Years settings to the Department for Work and Pensions, Adult Social Care and Housing Providers.

4.2.3 As part of the development of the second phase of the Troubled Families Programme (Stronger Families locally) the service will work with Children's Social Care to explicitly target support toward families where the prevention or de-escalation of statutory social work intervention can improve outcomes, reduce cost and realise Department for Communities and Local Government funding through 'payment by results'.

4.3 Reduce the need for council care by strengthening early help to those on the edge of care

4.3.1 There will be a re-configuration of resources that are part of the current Family Centre provision to ensure it is targeted at children who are on the edge of care, to prevent their admission.

4.3.2 It is expected that staff within the newly created team will use a range of approaches, including parenting and boundary work, solution focused interventions and strong engagement skills to maintain or restore them with their family.

4.3.3 Due to current gaps in not having a robust early help resource in place, there is a high risk that the children in care population will continue to rise, particularly amongst adolescents aged between 13 -17 years old. As such, we will develop a 13- 19 years strategy that focuses on effectively managing risk in the community that will involve Children's Social Care, Stronger Families, Youth Offending Service and the Youth Mutual.

4.3.4 During 2014, we have introduced the Multi Systemic Therapy service aimed at preventing children and young people from entering care or custody. A needs analysis was undertaken by the local authority in 2013 and identified an unmet need and gap in provision relating to intensive community/family based interventions. In response to this, in October 2014 via partnership working between the Department for Education, Youth Offending and Children's Social Care the Multi-Systemic Therapy service was launched. The service is located directly within Childrens Services and managed by the Youth Offending Service enabling a direct referral route from the three key contributory services. Consisting of one Supervisor and three Therapists the service aims to work with between 30 – 40 families per year. Performance monitoring frameworks are in place and continuance/expansion of the service will be subject to effective outcomes.

4.3.5 For those children deemed to be at high risk to suffering neglect or abuse, we will make full use of the court's Public Law Outline (PLO) framework, in particular the Merseyside Pre-Proceedings Protocol, as early as possible, in successfully preventing entry into care.

4.3.6 As part of the edge of care arrangements, focus will be placed on adopting the Family Group meeting model as a means to working with families in order for them to identify their own solutions, whilst trying to avoid admissions into care. With the exception of children where there exist immediate child protection concerns, it is expected that in all

cases where care is being considered, a child would have been subject to a Family Group meeting.

4.3.7 The new model will also have access to skilled foster carers and residential workers who will work alongside families where children are at risk of becoming looked after as part of providing a 'wrap around' intensive support package. This will mean developing a limited pool of foster carers and utilising the use of residential workers. The residential provision will need to have a focus on working with children who have entered care on a short term basis with a focus on rehabilitation and those at risk of becoming looked after. This will have the flexibility of providing intensive support to children within their homes whilst also being able to work with children as part of a short term breaks arrangement to prevent breakdown.

4.4 **Develop a range of care placements that provide choice, stability, diversity and swift permanence**

4.4.1 We aim to provide early permanent placements of a type that best meets the needs of the child within the shortest feasible timescale. This will be achieved through a variety of means, from returning to the family home, placements with family and friends ('connected persons' in the 2010 Care Planning Regulations), foster care, residential care or adoption.

4.4.2 In order to reduce the number of agency and out of authority placements we will focus on developing local provision for the majority of our children, with the exception of a small number of children who have complex or specialist needs. We aim to do this by first of all developing our resource capacity for mainstream foster care. Currently we have insufficient in house foster carers to meet our need and this has resulted in children, (with the exception of babies and small infants) being placed with agency carers. As such, we will invest in recruiting more foster carers ensuring that they have the right skills, training and support to provide good quality care. There will be an emphasis on recruiting foster carers approved to care for sibling groups between two and four children. We also aim to develop specialist foster carers for children with specialist needs, including parent and child placements, remand carers and older children with complex needs. This will be balanced against best value criteria, with the interests of the child remaining the paramount consideration.

4.4.3 We will invest in developing high quality, cost effective local foster care provision. We intend to increase the number of foster placements with the recruitment of an additional 20 carers in 2015/16. This will lead to less reliance on expensive external foster care and will increase placement choice, reducing the number of children placed out of area. We will continue to test this decision against best value criteria to take account of market changes over time.

4.4.4 The Fostering service has been reviewed and additional capacity will be added with a recruitment and training officer posts. This will ensure there is expertise and capacity to increase the recruitment of new carers for fostering and adoption (underpinned by a Recruitment Strategy with clear targets) and there is a good training offer in place that will enhance the skills and abilities of our foster carers, whilst making us competitive with the independent sector.

- 4.4.5 A Recruitment Task group has been set up to help coordinate the recruitment of foster carers and adopters. The work of this group will be underpinned by a Fostering Recruitment Strategy (2015-17). The Task Group will be chaired by the Head of Service for Adoption and Fostering and includes representation from existing staff, foster carers and adopters, elected members and education.
- 4.4.6 We need to develop fostering provision to increase the number of short breaks foster carers to provide family based care for children with disabilities as an alternative to our residential provision. This resource needs to be closely aligned to residential provision that currently exists to ensure it meets the needs of this group of children and their families, providing quality of care and achieving best value.
- 4.4.7 We need to develop our training programme to reflect the needs of the carers and the children we look after. This will be supported by having a dedicated training officer post.
- 4.4.8 We need to ensure foster carers have attended basic training in order to achieve the Training, Support and Development (TSD) minimum standards
- 4.4.9 We will revise the foster payments scheme to reflect increased responsibilities and skill levels for certain carers whilst maintaining fair allowance rates for the majority of 'mainstream' carers. This is reviewed annually. This is unlikely to be 'cost neutral' as we will need to ensure that as a local authority we are competitive with neighbouring local authorities and independent agencies.
- 4.4.10 We will review the 'statement of purpose' for our two mainstream children's homes. Currently there is only capacity for five placements. This isn't sufficient for the needs of our young people. As such, the two homes will be designated long-term residential placements for children looked after. We will increase capacity by having a further six – eight placements operating from two small units available for children aged 12/13 years plus where the care plan is long term residential care (with complex and challenging needs) and for those with a plan of rehabilitation to family. Options will be considered as to whether this would be best achieved through extending in house provision or going to the private providers to agree a 'block purchase' arrangement. The latter option will also provide the opportunity to work with 'best practice' providers and also utilise alternative funding methods such as the use of Social Impact Bonds (SIB).
- 4.4.11 We will develop our 'in-house' adoption service to increase the numbers of available adopters and improve the quality and timeliness of permanency planning to ensure children achieve permanence through adoption without unnecessary delay.
- 4.4.12 In 2014/15 we have recruited adopters with whom we have placed our own children. By April 2015, it is expected that we will have placed 15 children for adoption. This is a 100 per cent increase compared to 2013/14 when eight children were placed for adoption.
- 4.4.13 Any new potential adopters will be encouraged to consider becoming 'fostering to adopt' carers in order to prevent placement moves for children with a plan for adoption. This approach will allow children to be placed earlier with potential adopters and provides for earlier building of relationships and attachments to their new family.

- 4.4.14 Knowsley Youth Offending Service (YOS) is currently working to keep the level of secure remands for young offenders to a minimum. From 1 April 2013 the Local Authority became financially responsible for all Remands to Youth Detention Accommodation (YDA). This presents a serious challenge in that the devolved budgets are finite. Fortunately in 2014, there were only 5 young people remanded to youth detention with a combined period of 308 nights. We will continue to work with our YOS on methods of reducing the number of secure demands.
- 4.4.15 To achieve this, the YOS needs to be able to offer the courts robust bail and community packages as alternatives to a YDA remand. This is now required in all cases where the risks to the public can be managed. It is agreed that when the YOS become aware that a young person may be remanded in custody liaison will take place with Children's Social Care regarding an alternative placement.
- 4.4.16 The YOS is already investing its resources in activities and interventions that reduce the incident of breach and remand on open cases.
- 4.4.17 We will work with the YOS and the Police to ensure that young people are not kept in police stations overnight unnecessarily whilst identifying a small number of placements to cope with those that do occur.
- 4.4.18 We will train a number of foster carers in the skills required to provide placements for young people remanded to the care of the Local Authority by the courts, as an alternative to a YDA placement. This will provide more robust bail packages to the courts that reduce the number of remands to YDA placements and in which the court can have full confidence.
- 4.5 **Provide an increased range and choice of provision for care leavers and other post-16 provision**
- 4.5.1 We are committed to children in our care remaining with their foster carers as part of our "Staying Put" arrangements and in line with Government policy. We support all our children in care post 16 currently in a fostering arrangement "to remain with their foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown". (Staying Put. HM Govt May 2013). We have in place a care leaver's charter which has been compiled with our young people and signed and supported by corporate parents.
- 4.5.2 We have a dedicated Leaving Care service incorporated into the Children-Looked After teams that provide greater specialist support to care leavers and children post-16.
- 4.5.3 Currently there isn't any specific care leavers accommodation, particularly as part of the transition from care into independence. Access to housing for this cohort of young people is through a working relationship with Knowsley Housing Trust in order to get priority housing for a young person. Alternatively, there are providers who specialise in supporting care leavers by obtaining a tenancy and providing the additional support to the young person. As part of our sufficiency work, we will explore the options available to ensure our

young people have access to suitable accommodation to enable them to make the best start in their adulthood.

4.6 To strengthen the quality of practice and care planning that focuses on looked after children, concentrating on the journey of each individual child within the system.

4.6.1 The case management 'fieldwork' social work teams have been restructured partly in response to meeting the 26 week timescales for the completion of care proceedings and the requirements set by the PLO. There is a positive picture in this respect with Knowsley exceeding the 26 week timescales set by the courts. We have created designated Children-Looked After Teams and expanded capacity in order to improve the quality of social work practice, including care planning.

4.6.2 Revised performance/ management processes are being reviewed by legal services and children's services to accommodate the changes. This includes the 'tracking' of children once they enter the care system to ensure there is robust care planning and where appropriate plans for permanence are discussed by the second children's looked after review meeting. The arrangements surrounding access to legal advice and management of pre-proceedings cases has changed with the introduction of Legal Planning and Pre-proceedings meetings. Parents, with the benefit of their legal representatives are being made fully aware at the earliest possible time of the Local Authority concerns and subsequent expectations.

5. Reviewing the Strategy

5.1 This strategy will form the basis of an action plan covering 2015-17. Those actions will be set out in terms of what needs to be done, by whom and by when. The impact of the strategy will be reviewed annually during the period to 2017.