

9 March 2017

ITEM: 6

Corporate Parenting Committee

Information on Recent External Placements for Young People

Wards and communities affected:

All

Key Decision:

Non-Key

Report of: Paul Coke, Service Manager, Through Care Services

Accountable Head of Service: Andrew Carter, Children's Social Care

Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children's Services

This report is Public

Executive Summary

This report updates members of the Committee on a range of issues regarding the placement choices made for looked after children

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 That the members of the Committee review the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including our more difficult to place children and unaccompanied asylum seeking children.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Reports for previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee have provided elected members with some detailed information about the placement choices being made by officers for looked after children. These reports have included information on new external placements made in the period immediately preceding them and commented on a number of the presenting issues which influence decision making.

2.2 The numbers of looked after children in Thurrock is detailed in a comparative table below. This is a snapshot within the month, as the numbers will fluctuate as children/young people enter and cease being looked after throughout each month – **Table 1:**

	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2016/17	342	341	335	342	340	358	350	350	325	327		
2015/16	280	285	295	303	313	320	330	332	344	334	335	338
2014/15	287	293	292	297	302	299	294	293	290	286	276	282

2.3 The following table shows the numbers of **Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)** that have become looked after during the financial year of 2015/16 and 2016 to November. – **Table 2:**

	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2016/17	79	78	75	84	87	95	91	88	73	67		
2015/16	38	41	51	55	61	60	63	67	74	70	69	67

2.4 The comparative rates per 10,000 of the looked after population which the local authority benchmarks against as of January 2017 is as follows:

- National Rate: 60.0 (2015/16)
- Statistical Neighbours: 49.0
- Thurrock Rate: 80.0

2.5 The comparative rates per 10,000 without the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children for Thurrock is as follows:

- Thurrock Rate: 63

2.6 The numbers in age groups entering and ceasing care during the period of 1 December 2016 – 31 January 2017 are as follows – **Table 3:**

AGE GROUP	ENTER	CEASE
0-5	5	5
6-11	4	1
12-15	4	4
16+	5	19

2.7 As of February 2017 we had 329 looked after children (0-17). The breakdown of this in terms of placement type is as follows – **Table 4:**

Age of child	In house Fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other	Total by age
Under 1	7	6	0	0	13
1 – 5	16	8	0	0	24
6 - 11	37	30	9	0	76
12 – 15	36	48	7	2	93
16+	19	38	9	55	121
Total by provision type	115	130	25	57	327

- 2.8 The total number of children in **Table 4** is 327. There are an additional 2 children that are currently on Placement Orders in various stages of the adoption process.
- 2.9 It is important to define what we mean by In-house fostering, Independent Fostering, Residential and other. These definitions are governed by how we classify these categories by Placement Type and Placement Provider. The categories are defined by national government, and are how we report as part of the return each year (903 Return)

2.10

	In House Fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other
Placement Type	All children & young people placed with foster carers & parents/connected family	All children & young people placed with foster carers & adopters	All children & young people placed: Children's homes Residential Care Home Residential School	All children & young people placed in Independent living YOI/Prison Supported/semi supported for our 16+
Placement Provider	Provision owned by Local Authority	Provision is: private or voluntary/third sector	Provision is: Own provision Private Voluntary/third sector	Provision is: Parents or others Other public provision Local Authority Private Voluntary/third sector

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The information within this report and the previous one shows the intent of the Department to make use of our in-house foster placements as opposed to IFA's.
- 3.2 We have increased our use of in-house foster placements from 96 to 115 and reduced the use of IFAs from 142 to 130. This has been achieved through more effective management of existing resources. More work is underway to reduce the overuse of IFAs.
- 3.3 Our use of residential has also reduced from 31 to 25 through effective management action and the planned moves of young people to more appropriate accommodation.
- 3.4 To date we have 65 UASC, which is a significant reduction.

- 3.5 The Commissioning Service are also developing its arrangements to commission accommodation for young people 16+ as a part of its overall placement commissioning framework.
- 3.6 The Department continues to monitor placements through the various panels, such as the Placement Panel, which is chaired by a Senior Manager and also involves the Corporate Director of Children's Services, and is multi-disciplinary, and the High Cost Placement Panel, chaired by either the Head of Service or the Corporate Director of Children's Services.
- 3.7 The Department recognises the need to manage the budget and works very closely with the Finance Department and other professionals in ensuring placements are of good quality, that we get the best value from each placement and we plan the transition of our young people where necessary.
- 3.8 The Department continues to work on the recruitment of foster carers and increase our pool of in-house foster carers. Progress to date has been steady, and the shift in balance of placements has been managed by a combination of an increase in carers and more effective management of the resource.
- 3.9 The Department have approved a further 11 carers since April 2016. It is currently in the process of assessing a further 10 potential carers, with the aim to have them all approved by the 31 March 2017.
- 3.10 In the last financial year, April 2015 – March 2016, the Department approved 16 carers, and by February 2016 had approved 8.
- 3.11 This year is a marked improvement in the numbers, as the target for the year is 20, which we are on course to achieve and exceed.
- 3.12 In respect to the Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs); when referrals for placements are requested it is expected that exploration of our current in-house foster carers is our first point of call before IFAs are looked at. Agreement for IFAs has to be approved by the Service Manager, once all explorations of in-house have been exhausted.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 It is hoped that members of the Committee will continue to find this information useful in developing their understanding of the issues involved. Officers accept there is a very real challenge in balancing the need to find the best possible placement option for children and young people, whilst simultaneously working within the financial resources available.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 None

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

6.1 None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Jo Freeman**
Management Accountant

The numbers of looked after children in this report has decreased. The number of children/young people in residential has also reduced. There remains, however, significant cost pressures particularly in relation to semi-independent placements and IFA placements.

It also has to be acknowledged the ongoing financial impact of the UASC cohort, at significantly over the 0.07% rate.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor Children's Safeguarding

It is important to note that whilst the Local Authority continues to scrutinise all placements it also has to be aware of its duties under the Children Act 1989, which must be the focus on the best interest of each child, especially when exploring placements.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Price**
Community Engagement Officer

Prior to progressing an external placement, the authority considers the needs of each young person in line with the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that individuals with protected characteristics are not adversely impacted.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Placements have to also take into consideration the experience and quality of staff, health and safety issues within each placement and that all the providers used are aware of their duties within the Crime and Disorder legislation.

Providers, whether regulated or not, must also be aware of their responsibilities when it comes to child protection issues.

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- Not applicable

9. Appendices to the report

- Not applicable

Report Author:

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Children's Services, Care and Targeted Outcomes