

4 September 2014		ITEM: 7
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Information on Recent External Placements for young people		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Not applicable	
Report of: Roland Minto – Service Manager, Placements and Support		
Accountable Head of Service: Nicky Pace, Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, 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 note the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including some of our more difficult to place children.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Following discussions at previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee it was agreed that officers would provide elected members with some detailed information about the placement choices being made by officers for looked after children. With due consideration about the maintenance of appropriate professional boundaries of confidentiality, reports were prepared for the September, December, March meetings of the 2013-2014 Committee, and in June 2014, outlining all new external placements made in the periods immediately preceding them.

2.2 The process of sharing information will continue to evolve, as members and officers jointly negotiate what is practical, helpful and legitimate to share. Officers acknowledge that as members become more familiar with the information different questions will emerge, and therefore reports may vary in content. Officers will attempt to respond where possible within the report, and within the meetings, to additional queries raised by members.

- 2.3 Because of concerns about the possible identification of individual young people, no additional appendix has been added on this occasion. However in summary 7 young people were placed in external placements in the period 1.6.14 – 31.7.14, all older adolescents, some of whom were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people who have been placed in semi-independent accommodation as described in 3.1 below.
- 2.4 The specific cases to be considered in detail need to be understood in the wider context of placements in Thurrock. At 10.8.2014 there were 297 looked after children in Thurrock. The spread of placements was as follows (figures in brackets refer to last report presented):

Age of child	In house fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other	Total by age
Under 1	9 (7)	3 (3)		2 (4)	14
1-5	19 (17)	19 (20)		8 (9)	46
6-11	33 (30)	33 (35)	5 (6)	2 (2)	73
12-15	29 (30)	35 (39)	23 (21)	1 (1)	88
16+	27 (28)	19(16)	14 (15)	16 (10)	76
Total by provision type	117 (112)	109 (113)	42 (42)	29 (26)	297 (293)

In total therefore 226 children (or just over 77%), were living in foster placements, 42 (or just over 14%) were living in a variety of residential provision, and 26 (9.7%) had other arrangements, such as living with someone with parental responsibility or currently placed for adoption. Thurrock has been consistent in our relatively high use of foster placements over time; our performance has regularly been above the national average, which for 2012-2013 was average of 75%.

- 2.5 Thurrock had previously been able to concentrate most of its use of foster placements within our internal resources, with an approximate ratio of 70%-30%. Unfortunately as the numbers of Looked After Children rose over the last two years internal supply had not expanded to meet demand, and hence our proportionate use of Independent Fostering Agency placements increased, with a slight preponderance of IFA placements over the last year. It still remains our primary objective to restore the previous balance, as we believe a local foster placement, with foster carers who we have recruited, trained and continue to support, will be best able to meet a local child's needs. Pleasingly current figures suggest this balance has begun to swing back in favour of an in-house majority, although it is too early to conclude this is a longer term trend.
- 2.6 Currently we have 42 young people in a variety of residential provision, such as Children's Homes, Residential Special Schools, etc. However the cases of

around 33% of these children are held within the Team for Disabled Children, although this team hold only 8% of all looked after children. This reflects their high levels of need, and consequent costs which arise in trying to meet them.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 As reported previously one of the areas which require the use of external placements continues to be relatively high number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people. These are young people who have fled various troubled areas in the world and have become known to the authorities in Thurrock, usually having entered via the Port of Tilbury. They are generally older teenagers, about whom we have no background information.
- 3.2 At the time of needing to find placements it is unlikely that we will have completed an age assessment as legally required. Under the circumstances we often find places in semi-supported accommodation, with assistance provided to help them access education, health care, etc, although for those who are clearly younger or particularly vulnerable other resources may be more appropriate. These young placements are generally reflected in the table above in the “other” column.
- 3.3 However this group also form part of a wider cohort of young people 16+, for whom identifying suitable accommodation options remains a challenge. This includes young people who in mid-adolescence have outgrown other forms of care, such as foster placements; young people temporarily remanded into the care of the local authority; young people previously in children’s homes where the incremental benefits of maintaining them there are limited; and new entrants to the system whose main presenting problem, having become estranged from the parents, is homelessness. We recognise that we suffer from the absence of much local provision and therefore the commissioning team are being asked to explore opportunities to encourage providers into the area, which would both increase our options at the point placements are required, and also make the task of supporting them (e.g. by reducing travelling time and enabling easier access to Thurrock resources) more practical.
- 3.4 The wider issue of placement demands and options has recently been reviewed, and along with plans for how to address the issues arising will be consolidated into Thurrock’s “Sufficiency Statement”, which is due for completion and sign off in the near future.

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 attending the Committee are happy to answer any questions that arise from the information presented.

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

5.1 The Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee have been consulted about the style of the report to ensure transparency while protecting confidentiality.

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

6.1 None.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**

Interim Finance Manager

The key financial implication of the report is to note the continuing strain currently on the external placements budget, and the need to both contain the increase in numbers of looked after children where it is safe to do so, and make the most effective use of the funding available.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**

Principal Solicitor

The Children Act 1989 is very clear the best interest of the child should remain the paramount consideration, and the local authority would be very vulnerable to legal challenges if it were evidenced that placement decisions were being made purely on the basis of financial considerations.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**

Community Development Officer

The local authority has a clear duty to ensure that placements are identified appropriate to the needs of all children who require them. This is true for children of all backgrounds, cultures and ethnicities, but also for children with significant disabilities and particularly those less able to communicate their wishes and feelings to those organising their care. Recruitment efforts for carers, such as foster carers, should therefore give due weight to these considerations.

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

None.

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):

None.

Report Author:

Roland Minto

Service Manager, Placement Support

Children's Services, Care and Targeted Outcomes