

10 September 2015		ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee		
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 (CATO)		
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 and invites scrutiny to further improve practice.

As corporate parents it is important that the committee are able to satisfy themselves that children and young people are receiving high quality placements that support good outcomes and provide value for money.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the members of the Committee continue to challenge the provision of placements for looked after children to ensure that placements are of a high quality, promote good outcomes and are value for money.**

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 period covered in this report is 28/05/2015 – 04/08/2015. There were 21 new entrants into the system.

2.3 The numbers in age groups entering and ceasing care are as follows:

AGE GROUP	ENTER	CEASE
0-5	3	1
6-11	4	2
12-15	6	0
16+	8	1

2.4 As of the 4 August 2015 we had 297 looked after children (0-17). The comparative figure for the previous period is in brackets

Age of child	In house Fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other	Total by age
Under 1	4 (3)	5 (7)			9 (10)
1 – 5	15 (13)	11 (9)	0 (1)	2 (4)	28 (27)
6 - 11	30 (34)	28 (28)	4 (2)	1 (4)	63 (68)
12 – 15	34 (27)	38 (38)	21(2)	4 (22)	97 (89)
16+	18 (17)	24 (22)	17 (3)	41(40)	100 (82)
Total by provision type	101(94)	106 (104)	42 (8)	48 (70)	297 (276)

2.5 The total number of children and young people in foster placement is 207, 69.7% as opposed to 70.6% in the last report.

2.6 It is important to define what is meant 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 how we report as part of a data return each year.

2.7

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

			sector	provision Local Authority Private Voluntary/third sector
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3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 As you can see the percentage of children and young people in foster placement has remained relatively stable over the last two reported periods, but there has been a slight rise in the number of Independent Fostering Agency placement. Thurrock Council has entered into a Service Level Agreement with Essex County Council to increase the number of available local authority placements, increase placement choice and achieve increased value for money. Essex County Council has a large pool of foster carers in certain age groups and Thurrock Council is now able to refer to Essex County Council for placements (that are more cost effective) rather than seek these via Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 3.2 The numbers in residential and other establishments have now evened themselves out, but it is clear there has been a significant rise in the number of children 16+ placed in residential and other provision. There is a regional and national shortage of foster carers for adolescents and particularly those with complex behaviour. We are actively working with providers to increase the pool of adolescent placements and are focusing our in-house recruitment campaign on this area.
- 3.3 There has been an increase in this period of those young people aged 12 – 17 becoming looked after (14).
- 3.4 Of the 14 young people becoming looked after in this period, a third are unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC). There is no direct correlation between the recent situation in Calais and the increase in unaccompanied minors at this stage. We continue to monitor the trend in relation to unaccompanied children locally and across the Eastern Region.
- 3.5 A knock on effect of the current situation with UASC across the region is the finding of appropriate placements for those coming into care, which has at times been a challenge. The current funding formula for UASC is under review and the Association of Directors of Children’s Services has been negotiating with central government given the pressures that increasing numbers of UASC can place on local authority budgets.
- 3.6 The local authority continues to scrutinise and challenge where necessary all placements through the Placement Panel. The Head of Service has to approve all residential placements and there are a number of other Panels

that ensure management oversight is consistent throughout the process, such as Threshold Panel, which addresses the request for children and young people to come into care, chaired by the Head of Service, Children In Need and Children Looked After surgeries, chaired by the Head of Service or respective Service Managers that ensure there is no drift.

- 3.7 A particular focus in the Looked After Children's Surgeries is those cases where rehabilitation home is the primary plan. This will enable the Department to manage these cases, ensure there is no drift and use the forum for challenge where appropriate. This will also ensure our through put of children and young people increases, but more importantly the right children/young people remain in our care.
- 3.8 The department continues to focus on the most expensive residential placements to ensure the plan is fit for purpose and the service we are receiving is of good quality and value for money. The department is working with colleagues in commissioning to look at how we better commission and procure placements. The aim is to reduce the reliance on spot purchased placements wherever possible, and ensure high quality placements that are cost effective.
- 3.9 Joint funding arrangements continue to be reviewed to ensure that effective funding is in place from partner agencies such as Health. Changes in the health funding arrangements are likely to continue to put increasing pressures on the placement budget.
- 3.10 At the previous Corporate Parenting Meeting on the 18 June 2015, it was requested that Officers explore whether or not comparative data can be provided in terms of cost of placements.
- 3.11 Officers have extensively explored the issue of comparative data and there is no publicly published data that would allow Officers to provide Members with meaningful comparisons between one local authority and another. Officers continue to explore possible solutions to this in order to meet the request from Members.

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 and scrutiny 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: **Sean Clark**
Head of Corporate Finance

The numbers of looked after children in this report have increased. The number of children/young people in residential and other placements has also increased. This inevitably will have an impact on cost, and from this report the Officers are addressing this by scrutiny of the residential placements. It is also important to acknowledge how volatile the business is in terms of numbers of looked after children. The latest budget report to Cabinet assumes that these costs will be contained within the overall budget envelope but will continue to be monitored closely.

7.2 Legal

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

It is important to note that whilst the Local Authority is clearly planning on scrutinising all residential 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: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

When scrutinising the residential placements the Local Authority must ensure it also considers the needs of each individual child/young person, which includes their religious, language and disability to ensure these placements meet all their needs on a holistic level.

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