

5 July 2016

ITEM: 6

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

Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, 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 scrutinize the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including our more difficult to place 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 This report will focus on the period of 1 February 2016 – 31 May 2016

2.3 The numbers of looked after children in Thurrock is detailed in a comparative table below – **Table 1:**

	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2016/17	342	341										
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

2.4 For the month of May 2016, the comparative rates per 10,000 is as follows:

- National Rate: 60.0
- Statistical Neighbours: 66.4
- Thurrock Rate: 85.0

2.5 For the month of May 2016, the comparative rates per 10,000 without the numbers of unaccompanied asylum seeking children for Thurrock is:

- Thurrock Rate: 64.3

2.6 The numbers in age groups entering and ceasing care during the period of 1 February 2016 – 31 May 2016 are as follows – **Table 2**:

AGE GROUP	ENTER	CEASE
0-5	13	9
6-11	6	8
12-15	17	7
16+	26	5

2.7 As of 31 May 2016 we had 341 looked after children (0-17). The breakdown of this in terms of placement type is as follows – **Table 3**

Age of child	In house Fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other	Total by age
Under 1	5	5	1		11
1 – 5	9	7	2	2	20
6 - 11	20	36	6	8	70
12 – 15	30	52	12	6	100
16+	14	35	18	60	127
Total by provision type	78	135	39	76	328

2.8 The total number of children in **Table 3** is 328. There are 13 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.

2.10

	In House Fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other
Placement Type	All children & young people placed with foster carers approved by the local authority.	All children & young people placed with foster carers approved by independent fostering agencies & other local authorities.	All children & young people placed: Children's homes Residential Care Home Residential School	All children & young people placed: With parents or family 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 From the information contained in **Table 1** you can see that the numbers of looked after children have continued to rise.
- 3.2 It is important to note the information in 2.4 and 2.5 as this will give you a contextual explanation for our numbers. If we take out the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children our rate per 10,000 is below our statistical neighbours but slightly above the national figure.
- 3.3 The issue regarding unaccompanied asylum seeking children is being addressed at a government and regional level, whereby it is hoped that a new Transfer Protocol will ensure that these children/young people will be evenly distributed amongst all Councils across the country. It is hoped that this will be a voluntary arrangement across the country, but will also form part of the new Immigration Act 2016.
- 3.4 At a local level, due to the complexities and capacity of working with unaccompanied asylum seeking children the Department is currently exploring a number of options in terms of how this is managed within the current social work teams and the accommodation of the young people, especially those 16 and over.

- 3.5 In respect to Table 2, it is clear from the figures that the Department receives a large proportion of its looked after children from the ages of 12 upwards. This cohort, which includes the 16+ cohort as well, appear to remain in care longer, which could suggest that moving the children/young people to alternative permanent placements with family members (ie placement with family members or Special Guardianship Orders, or return home to parents) is not as expedient as with the younger cohort. We again would need to take into account the unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- 3.6 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 throughput of children and young people increases.
- 3.7 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 along with other senior managers.
- 3.8 Children In Need and Child Protection surgeries, chaired by the respective Service Managers ensure there is no drift in respect to cases.
- 3.9 The Permanency Panel addresses permanency plans for our looked after children, thus identifying those young children who may require adoption as their primary plan.
- 3.10 In respect to Table 3, I would like to draw you to the number of Independent Fostering Agency placements, which are the bulk of our placements (135). The other area of note is the use of 'other', which is the supported/semi-supported accommodation for our 16+ cohort.

Due to the rise in this number of young people that we have placed in supported/semi-supported accommodation (16+), the Department is exploring alternative avenues via our Commissioning Service as to how we get the best value from the providers both in terms of quality of care and cost.

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: **Kay Goodacre**
Finance Manager

The numbers of looked after children in this report have increased. This inevitably will have an impact on cost, and from this report the Officers continually address this through the various forums mentioned in this report. All placements are reviewed for quality and cost and best value decisions are made. The impact of external placements continues to be a significant budget pressure for the service and continue to be a focus for future cost reduction.

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: **Natalie Warren**
**Community and Development 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