

<b>5 December 2013</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Annual Review of the Looked After Children Strategy</b>		
<b>Report of:</b> Barbara Foster – Head of Children’s Services		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Barbara Foster		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Carmel Littleton		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To update the LAC Strategy.		

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report updates information about the Looked After Children Strategy and provides key information on the developments that are applicable to looked after children and care leavers.

**1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**1.1 That the members of the Corporate Parenting Committee agree the updated data and any other changes to the Strategy.**

**2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

2.1 The Looked After Children (LAC) Strategy was discussed and adopted at the Corporate Parenting Committee on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2012 (see appendix 1)

2.2 It was agreed that the LAC Strategy would be reviewed on an annual basis

2.3 Along with this was the LAC Strategy Action Plan for 2012 – 2013 (Appendix 2)

2.3 A further Planning Agenda for the Corporate Parenting Committee was devised for 2013 – 2014 (see appendix 3)

### 3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:

3.1 This report addresses the service priorities within the LAC Strategy

3.2 Within the current service priorities, there are a number of individual reports that provide the Committee with detailed information relating to the subject matter.

#### 3.3 Service Priorities

- Looked after children have continued to increase in numbers over the past years.
- The current figures as of October 2013 are as follows:
  - LAC numbers: 282
  - Rate per 10,000: 73
  - Rate per 10,000, England: 59 (2012)
  - Rate per 10,000, Statistical Neighbours: 65 (2012)
- There has been an increase in care proceedings, which indicates that the threshold criteria is correct, as the majority of children are being provided with alternative permanency plans such as adoption, special guardianship or long term fostering.
- The Foster carers have set up a local network known as the One Team
- The One Team provide the following to our foster carers:
  - A buddying system to new foster carers
  - Information sharing and liaison between the different fostering services (ie Therapeutic, Level 3, Supported Lodgings carers)
  - Foster Carers Charter and constitution, which also addresses partnership working
  - Sit on various panels and meetings (ie Corporate Parenting Committee)
  - They run various events and activities to raise money for our LAC
- There is a 12 month training calendar which is devised in partnership with Workforce, Planning and Development
- All in-house foster carers have attended the mandatory training which includes child protection
- All in-house foster carers have completed the National Minimum Standards, 12 months from registering
- There is a high proportion of carers that have provided permanency for the looked after children through committing to long term placements and by allying for SGO's.
- Adoption has achieved in the majority of cases suitable placements 3 months from the Placement Order
- The majority of children have been adopted within 6-8 months of being placed
- There is good interface between the Adoption Team and the Permanency Team

- The service for our looked after and care leavers has been scrutinised by the Children in Care Council (CiCC) who have discussed and reviewed the Council's Pledge and made comments to the Local Authority. (see Report, Participation of LAC and the Voices of Children and Young People – Appendix 4)
- The CiCC are part of the Corporate Parenting Committee along with foster carers. Councillors have met with members of the CiCC and through the Participation Group, work is being undertaken in organising a celebration event. The CiCC will also be arranging another 'Meet and Greet' event for all Councillors including the Mayor.
- Within the work the Council does in respect to our looked after children, the guidance from the Government incorporates all the work we do on a daily basis. As Councillors, it has been agreed that a more detailed report is presented to the Corporate Parenting Committee providing information around placements and care packages. This report is discussed within a closed session due to the issues of confidentiality.

### Corporate Parenting and Children's Rights

- A training session was held for Councillors in September 2013 which addressed the role and responsibilities of Councillors. This was open to all Council Members. The Council works very closely with Open Door, who provide an advocacy service for our looked after children and facilitate the CiCC. As Officers we continue to work with our health, education and housing colleagues in order to bring about good outcomes for our looked after children. These partnerships continue to develop and strengthen as time goes by.
- The advocacy service (ie Open Door) promotes the voice of our looked after children and supports them where necessary in terms of making complaints but also in helping all parties resolve these issues at an early stage.
- The Department has consulted with the CiCC on a number of policies and areas of development. It is agreed that this area needs to be developed further.

### Placement Stability

- Placement Stability is the corner stone to children and young people who are looked after going on to succeed in their development and attainment. There is a separate report on this topic also to Corporate Parenting Committee.
- Please see report dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013.(Appendix 5)

### Health and Wellbeing

- There is a Health Steering Group and Action Plan which is multi agency led by the Service Manager and a Team manager

- The Steering Group have completed the Health Policy, which went to consultation with the CiCC
- They are developing the Health Passport that will be for all looked after children and care leavers

### Education

- A Report is due to go to the Corporate Parenting Committee regarding education results for our LAC in March 2014, as all the data will be available
- The Department is moving forward in developing an E-PEP, which will be completed on the IT system, (therefore no need for paper PEP's) which will be interactive and enable the Department to gather data etc
- An Achievement and Aspiration Strategy is due to be written, which will incorporate the Virtual School and Looked after children
- An advertisement has gone out for a new Virtual Head Teacher, with the closing date being the 24<sup>th</sup> November 2013
- A draft discussion document will be written to explore the area of education for care leavers and others post 18

### Accommodation and Support

- The Department has a supported lodgings service, which provides accommodation and support to young people aged 16 and over.
- The Supported lodgings service supports young people over the age of 18 where it is assessed they require this type of support
- Within this service there is some very experienced carers and the Department is always looking to increase this pool of carers.
- The Department continues to work with Housing Services and there is a protocol in place that enables the needs of care leavers to be prioritised.
- Continued work with housing is essential in order to develop the relationship and ensure the needs of care leavers remain a priority.
- The Department is currently in discussions with key partners exploring the possibility of developing more supported accommodation.
- Please see report dated 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013.(Appendix 6)

## 3.4 Analysis

3.4.1 The priorities within this Strategy reflect the needs of our looked after children, but as there are new developments and initiatives from national government the strategy needs to be altered to incorporate these changes.

3.4.2 There are significant new standards from Ofsted and from central government, which set out improved targets most particularly for Care Leavers but also for all looked after children.

- 3.4.3 On 29<sup>th</sup> October the government published 'Care Leaver Strategy; A cross departmental strategy for young people leaving care' which summarises all previous best practice in the areas of education, employment, financial assistance, health, housing, the justice system and ongoing support, plus inspection requirements and data collection. The LGIU briefing document on these requirements is attached as [Appendix 7](#)
- 3.4.4 On 7<sup>th</sup> November, Ofsted published their new 'Inspection framework and evaluation schedule for the 'inspections of children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers'. Alongside these inspections, the Local Safeguarding Children Board will be concurrently inspected and there has been national guidance issued which emphasises the vulnerability of looked after children and the necessity for the LSCB to include the welfare of these children in their considerations for activities.
- 3.4.5 These new inspections will make judgements on:
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
  - The experiences and progress of children looked after and achieving permanence including graded judgements on both adoption performance and the experiences and progress of care leavers.
  - Leadership, management and governance
  - The details of the judgements for looked after children and for adoption and care leavers are attached as [Appendices A, B and C](#)
- 3.4.6 In line with the Children & Young People's Plan, a mock inspection is taking place in November and the outcomes will be reported back to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

#### **4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

- 4.1 It is proposed that the council undertake a full audit across the new required standards in order to inform future planning in the service and that the results of this audit are returned to the Corporate Parenting Committee.

#### **5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

- 5.1 No new implications.

#### **6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

- 6.1 No new implications.

## 7. IMPLICATIONS

### 7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652466**  
[kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:kgoodacre@thurrock.gov.uk)

The Budget for looked after Children has been under significant pressure, with increases in allocations being made in 2013/14, and in 2014/15. This is due both to the increase in the number of Children looked after and the costs of care. The Department currently has a budget which is under constant review and may be subject to further review in light of the new Leaving Care strategy that has just been published by the Government.

### 7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652054**  
[Lindsey.Marks@BDTLegal.org.uk](mailto:Lindsey.Marks@BDTLegal.org.uk)

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### 7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**  
 Telephone and email: **01375652472**  
[Sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk)

The strategy needs to ensure that it takes into account the needs of this vulnerable group and, where appropriate, is able to provide quality services that address the diverse population and individual circumstances.

### 7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

Not applicable.

### **BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

Not applicable.

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- Appendix 1 – LAC Strategy Document
- Appendix 2 – LAC Strategy Plan
- Appendix 3 – Corporate Parenting Committee Planning Agenda
- Appendix 4 – Participation Report to Corporate Parenting Committee
- Appendix 5 – Placement Stability Report (Dec 2013) – please see pages 7-14 of the agenda pack for this appendix.
- Appendix 6 – Housing for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (Dec 2013) – please see pages 69-74 of the agenda pack for this appendix.
- Appendix 7 – LGIU Briefing Document
- Appendices A, B and C – Judgement Details for LAC, Adoption and Care Leavers

**Report Author Contact Details:**

**Name:** Barbara Foster

**Telephone:** 01375 652764

**Email:** [bxfooster@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:bxfooster@thurrock.gov.uk)