

Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where
individuals, communities and businesses flourish

Corporate Parenting Committee

The meeting will be held at **7.00 pm** on **4 September 2014** in **Committee Room 1, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL**

Membership:

Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), James Halden (Vice-Chair), Jan Baker, Charles Curtis, Sue Gray, Susan Little and Joycelyn Redsell and 1 Independent vacancy

Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Jackie Howell, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association
Sharon Smith, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association
1 vacancy – representative of the Children in Care Council

Substitutes:

Councillors Tunde Ojetola, Maggie O'Keeffe-Ray, Maureen Pearce and 5 vacancies (1 Conservative, 1 Independent, 3 Labour)

Agenda

Open to Public and Press

	Page
1 Apologies for Absence	
2 Minutes	5 - 8
To approve as a correct record the minutes of the Corporate Parenting Committee meeting held on 3 July 2014.	
3 Items of Urgent Business	
To receive additional items that the Chair is of the opinion should be considered as a matter of urgency, in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972.	

4	Declaration of Interests	
5	Improving outcomes for looked after children: Implementing Electronic Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium Plus Grant	9 - 14
6	Adoption Report Outlining Process and Performance	15 - 34
7	Information on Recent External Placements for young people	35 - 40
8	Work Programme	41 - 42

Queries regarding this Agenda or notification of apologies:

Please contact Jan Natynczyk, Senior Democratic Services Officer by sending an email to direct.democracy@thurrock.gov.uk

Agenda published on: **27 August 2014**

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DECLARING INTERESTS FLOWCHART – QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Breaching those parts identified as a pecuniary interest is potentially a criminal offence

Helpful Reminders for Members

- *Is your register of interests up to date?*
- *In particular have you declared to the Monitoring Officer all disclosable pecuniary interests?*
- *Have you checked the register to ensure that they have been recorded correctly?*

When should you declare an interest *at a meeting*?

- **What matters are being discussed at the meeting?** (including Council, Cabinet, Committees, Subs, Joint Committees and Joint Subs); or
- If you are a Cabinet Member making decisions other than in Cabinet **what matter is before you for single member decision?**



Does the business to be transacted at the meeting

- relate to; or
- likely to affect

any of your registered interests and in particular any of your Disclosable Pecuniary Interests?

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests shall include your interests or those of:

- your spouse or civil partner's
- a person you are living with as husband/ wife
- a person you are living with as if you were civil partners

where you are aware that this other person has the interest.

A detailed description of a disclosable pecuniary interest is included in the Members Code of Conduct at Chapter 7 of the Constitution. **Please seek advice from the Monitoring Officer about disclosable pecuniary interests.**

What is a Non-Pecuniary interest? – this is an interest which is not pecuniary (as defined) but is nonetheless so significant that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard to be so significant that it would materially impact upon your judgement of the public interest.

Pecuniary

If the interest is not already in the register you must (unless the interest has been agreed by the Monitoring Officer to be sensitive) disclose the existence and nature of the interest to the meeting

If the Interest is not entered in the register and is not the subject of a pending notification you must within 28 days notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest for inclusion in the register

Unless you have received dispensation upon previous application from the Monitoring Officer, you must:

- Not participate or participate further in any discussion of the matter at a meeting;
- Not participate in any vote or further vote taken at the meeting; and
- leave the room while the item is being considered/voted upon

If you are a Cabinet Member you may make arrangements for the matter to be dealt with by a third person but take no further steps

Non- pecuniary

Declare the nature and extent of your interest including enough detail to allow a member of the public to understand its nature



You may participate and vote in the usual way but you should seek advice on Predetermination and Bias from the Monitoring Officer.

Thurrock: A place of opportunity, enterprise and excellence, where individuals, communities and businesses flourish

To achieve our vision, we have identified five strategic priorities:

1. Create a great place for learning and opportunity

- Ensure that every place of learning is rated “Good” or better
- Raise levels of aspirations and attainment so that local residents can take advantage of job opportunities in the local area
- Support families to give children the best possible start in life

2. Encourage and promote job creation and economic prosperity

- Provide the infrastructure to promote and sustain growth and prosperity
- Support local businesses and develop the skilled workforce they will require
- Work with communities to regenerate Thurrock’s physical environment

3. Build pride, responsibility and respect to create safer communities

- Create safer welcoming communities who value diversity and respect cultural heritage
- Involve communities in shaping where they live and their quality of life
- Reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and safeguard the vulnerable

4. Improve health and well-being

- Ensure people stay healthy longer, adding years to life and life to years
- Reduce inequalities in health and well-being
- Empower communities to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing

5. Protect and promote our clean and green environment

- Enhance access to Thurrock’s river frontage, cultural assets and leisure opportunities
- Promote Thurrock’s natural environment and biodiversity
- Ensure Thurrock’s streets and parks and open spaces are clean and well maintained

Minutes of the Meeting of the Corporate Parenting Committee held on 3 July 2014 at 7.00 pm

Present: Councillors Bukky Okunade (Chair), James Halden (Vice-Chair), Jan Baker, Charles Curtis, Susan Little and Joycelyn Redsell

Natalie Carter, Thurrock Open Door Representative
Jackie Howell, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association (Chair)
Sharon Smith, Thurrock One Team Foster Care Association (Vice-Chair)

Apologies: Councillors Sue Gray

In attendance: Nicky Pace, Interim Head of Service for Care and Targeted Outcomes
Paul Coke, Service Manager (Children & Families)
Roland Minto, Service Manager (Placement Support)
Jan Natynczyk, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

2. Declaration of Interests

None.

3. Looked After Children and Care Leavers

This report provided the Committee with an overview of the services for looked after children and care leavers and provided information as to the statutory and legislative changes that may have an impact on the service.

Members asked questions/commented as follows:

- The Looked After Children's Strategy needed to be reviewed in tandem with The Pledge. Officers reported that the Children in Care Council were reviewing The Pledge in March and the outcome would be reported back to this Committee. Likewise, Officers would review the Looked After Strategy, with a view to challenging both Members and Officers and report back to this Committee;

- A report on Troubled Families was requested, for submission to a future meeting of this Committee;
- There was concern over the increased percentage of children that had been difficult to place. Officers acknowledge this, but pointed out that it was still a relatively small number in the overall placement picture. The figures also identified some very positive moves into permanent adoption.
- Members were keen for children to be well informed of apprentice schemes available, ideally between the ages of 14-15 and Councillors had a key role to play in this. This could be facilitated via open days etc. It was also essential to link up with Youth and Education Services, with a view to targeting young people and certain groups.

RESOLVED: That the points highlighted above be noted and report backs be submitted to this Committee on The Pledge, Looked After Children's Strategy and Troubled Families.

4. Work Programme

Attention was drawn to the Committee's Work Programme for the forthcoming Year.

RESOLVED:

- 1. That the Work Programme be noted;**
- 2. That an item on the Independent Review of the Officers Annual Report be added to the Work Programme for consideration in September;**
- 3. That a report on the Fostering Service be added to the Work Programme for December;**
- 4. That details of Looked After Children's profiles be incorporated into the standard report submitted to this Committee;**
- 5. That a report on how to enhance access to apprenticeships for Looked After Children, be submitted to a future meeting of this Committee, taking issues such as the role of the Children's Council into account.**

5. Exclusion of the Press and Public

Prior to Exclusion of the Press and Public, Members raised concern that Co-opted Members were in receipt of exempt papers.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised the Committee, that Co-opted Members had a right to receive exempt papers, no matter how sensitive and remain in the meeting during consideration of these items.

Concern was also expressed about exempt papers circulating in the public gallery.

It was noted that the papers in question were those of a substitute Member of this Committee sitting in the public gallery, who had lent her papers to a fellow Councillor observing the meeting. The observing Councillor clearly stated that he had not and had no intention of looking at the exempt papers.

The Committee were also advised that all Members of the Council had a right to ask to see exempt papers.

The Chair stated that due to the sensitive nature of this issue, the exempt reports would be withdrawn from the meeting and the future content of such reports reviewed in light on the discussion at this meeting.

The Chair asked Co-opted Members to hand their exempt papers to Democratic Services and vacate the meeting. She invited Members of the Council, present in the public gallery, to remain in the meeting.

RESOLVED: That the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting on the grounds that the items involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as specified in Part I of Schedule 12A, Paragraphs 1 and 3 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Committee proceeded to consider the exempt items on the agenda.

6. Information on Recent External Placements for Young People

This report was the latest in a sequence of reports previously requested by Members of the Committee, to provide additional information about the decision making process and pressures in making external placements for looked after young people. The report placed this in the wider context of the current demand for placements for looked after children.

RESOLVED: That the efforts made by Officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including some of the more difficult to place children be noted.

7. Children's Placement Review Report

It was noted that Appendices 3 and 4 were missing from the report and would be circulated separately to Members of the Committee.

The purpose of this report was to examine budget and payment arrangements, commissioning and procurement arrangements and joint commissioning.

It also sought to establish that there were effective exit strategies in place and to appraise the development of the Council's own fostering service and how it could contribute to future planning.

Officers invited Members of the Committee to attend a panel meeting, which scrutinised the care plan of every child coming into the care system.

RESOLVED: That the report and actions taken be noted.

The meeting finished at 9.05 pm

Approved as a true and correct record

CHAIR

DATE

**Any queries regarding these Minutes, please contact
Democratic Services at Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk**

4 September 2014	ITEM: 5
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Improving outcomes for looked after children: Implementing Electronic Personal Education Plans and Pupil Premium Plus Grant	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: N/A
Report of: Keeley Pullen – Head Teacher for Virtual School	
Accountable Head of Service: Mike Peters, Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement, Learning & Skills	
Accountable Director: Carmel Littleton, Director of Children’s Services	
This report is public	

Executive Summary

The Virtual School is implementing a new process structure and ICT system through Electronic Personal Education Plans [EPEP] to enable a more robust and cost effective Personal Education Plan [PEP] system. The overall aim being to improve the outcomes of Looked After Children by ensuring that schools and the Local Authority target the best support for every individual pupil.

The Department for Education has made the role of the Virtual School Headteacher, statutory. It has given Local Authorities greater responsibility and accountability for using the Pupil Premium Plus Grant to raise the educational outcomes of LAC. This grant has increased significantly to £1,900 per child. The Virtual School has become responsible for ensuring that all schools who teach Thurrock LAC pupils are accountable for demonstrating the positive impact on educational outcomes that his extra funding should provide.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 Members are asked to note progress on the Electronic Personal Education Plans to improve educational outcomes for children and young people.**
 - 1.2 Members are asked to note the progress made in implementing statutory requirements around the allocation and administration of Pupil Premium Plus.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 One of the statutory responsibilities for the Virtual School is to Quality Assure [QA] the standards of Personal Education Plans [PEP] for every Looked After Child [LAC] in the Local Authority [LA]. This involves ensuring that the targets for pupils are robust, SMART and are having a positive impact on the young person's learning.
- 2.2 The current PEP process is completed using the Liquid Children's Services [LCS] system. This contains all of the information and processes that social care use to record their involvements with LAC. This system has a clear structure and process mechanism which has been established to ensure that all LA statutory functions for LAC are followed. At times some aspects of this have proved to be a barrier for social workers when completing the Personal Education Plan. For example, if the social worker has not activated the care plan section before opening the PEP section they are then not able to open it and complete the PEP paperwork.
- 2.3 In order to prevent a delay in the Quality Assurance of PEPs the Virtual School has been accepting word documents of these and has advised social workers that it is permissible to load these documents as an attachment to the pupil's individual files to ensure there is an electronic record. This has meant that compliance figures are greatly improving week on week.
- 2.4 This is an interim measure before EPEP becomes live as this system will replace the use of LCS to record PEPs but it will not replace the general functions of LCS which social workers will still use.
- 2.5 The current LA arrangement for schools receiving Pupil Premium funding for LAC pupils involves the provision of a single payment of the full funding in the October of the financial/academic year. The schools are not required to communicate how this money will be spent on our LAC pupils or the proposed impact of this spending. As a Virtual School it is a challenge to obtain the relevant information to measure the allocation and impact of this funding on the educational outcomes and attainment of our LAC pupils. Schools have a statutory responsibility to publish on their website how they allocate their pupil premium funding, but this also includes free school meals funding and has historically been a generalisation of their spending. For example, to fund an intervention programme. As a Local Authority we must be able to pin point the allocation and impact on LAC and improve accountability for pupil progress and attainment at all levels.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The EPEP is being provided through the company E-Care Solutions. They provide a range of EPEP formats throughout the country and have worked closely with a range of LAs to create bespoke systems. The consultation and implementation of Thurrock EPEP has been a long process to ensure that the system is set up correctly and that it fulfils all functions required by the LA.

- 3.2 A business plan was written to allocate the £17,600 needed to install and maintain this system. This amount was funded through the Virtual School budget 13/14.
- 3.3 The Virtual School team are working closely with the ICS Implementation Manager to ensure that all access rights and ICT policies are followed to maintain strict standards of ICT and information sharing protocols.
- 3.4 Two days of taster sessions in May 14 were provided for Designated Teachers and Social Workers to introduce this system to them. The Virtual School will be providing additional training and support for social care, foster carers and schools to facilitate the implementation for an expected live launch in September 2014.
- 3.5 The EPEP is an online system which can be accessed by all stakeholders involved with the LAC. Each individual will have their own log-in with certain access fields. Those using the EPEP will have restricted user access according to their role, thus ensuring ICT safety and information security protocols are met.
- 3.6 The online nature of this system means that schools, the pupil, the foster carers and social workers can complete their relevant section before the PEP meeting has taken place and that his key information can be discussed as part of the PEP meeting. Schools will be able to update attendance and assessment information on at least a termly basis, enabling the Local Authority to closely monitor the quality of education provided and target support where needed. The EPEP will enable a great transparency of information sharing which will support the educational outcomes of the LAC.
- 3.7 The most significant aspect of this system is the pupil voice. Their section is an interactive and fun way of gauging the child's views about school and their education. It has been devised to accommodate different age ranges and includes facilities for children with SEN or communication difficulties.
- 3.8 The overall outcome of the EPEP system will be to achieve compliance in all aspects of the Personal Education Plan process.
- 3.9 The Virtual School Headteacher has met with the Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement, Learning & Skills and Interim Finance Manager to plan the allocation of the Pupil Premium Plus Grant.
- 3.10 The Virtual School will become responsible for the allocation of this fund to schools. Each school will get the full amount of £1,900 for the financial year 14/15. This will be distributed across the school year rather than in a single payment. Two payments will be made in October and the remaining amount will be paid in February.

- 3.11 The basis of this is twofold. Firstly, to support pupils who may move school in the academic year, ensuring that the funding follows the child rather than requiring the receiving school to try to claw back funds from the previous school, which may have already been spent. Secondly, schools will be required to provide information relating to how they have spent this funding to improve the educational outcomes of their LAC and the impact of this on the child's educational achievement. The Virtual School will hold the schools to account as the Corporate Parent and ensure that funding is targeted in the most appropriate way.
- 3.12 This process will enable the Virtual School to be more informed and improve LA accountability for the outcomes of LAC.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The Committee is asked to approve the recommendations to secure the effective use of Pupil Premium funding and the improvement of educational outcomes through the use of the EPEP.

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

- 5.1 A process of consultation took place between the Virtual School and the ICS implementation manager to analyse the viability of the EPEP system.
- 5.2 Consultation with a sample of Designated Teachers and Social Workers took place to gauge ideas and the feasibility of adopting this new system.
- 5.3 Department Managers were consulted for their validation for changing to a new system and the implications for all service providers.
- 5.4 Shelagh Cosgrow, retired headteacher, was employed by the Virtual School on a consultancy basis to consult with E-Care Solutions to establish the EPEP system.
- 5.5 A robust business plan was submitted to Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement, Learning & Skills and Director of Children's Services which was authorised.
- 5.6 Consultation for the Pupil Premium Funding Grant included discussion with the Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement, Learning & Skills, Director of Children's Services and Interim Finance Manager.
- 5.7 The Virtual School headteacher has also presented to the headteachers associations TASS (Thurrock Association of Secondary Schools) and TPHA (Thurrock Primary Heads Association) to explain the process to Thurrock schools.
- 5.8 All schools with LAC both in and out of borough will be informed of the LA process via a letter from the Director of Children's Services which has been

prepared with the Virtual School and the Interim Strategic Leader, School Improvement, Learning & Skills.

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

6.1 Impact of the EPEP system will improve the current system for recording of PEPs for every LAC and improve compliance and quality assurance processes.

6.2 Impact of greater accountability for the spending of the Pupil Premium Plus Grant will enable the LA to have greater control and responsibility for ensuring that LAC obtain the best possible educational outcomes.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Interim Finance Manager

The funding of the EPEP has been allocated and identified through the budget of the Virtual School and other areas within the School Improvement budgets.

There are no further financial implications for the EPEP system, unless upgrades are identified as time goes by.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Chris Pickering**
Principal Solicitor

As this report is for information and noting only, there are no direct legal implications resulting from it. The report highlights a change to the statutory framework, making the Personal Education Plan a statutory requirement for all looked after children, as is the role of the Virtual School Headteacher.

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Teresa Evans**
Equalities and Cohesion Officer

The EPEP is designed to provide access to all looked after children and enables those with a disability to also contribute to their plan. It will be expected that the plan can be translated into other languages should that be a requirement for those where English is not their first language.

7.4 **Other implications**

Not Applicable

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): All DFE website.

- The Pupil Premium – Analysis and Challenge tools for schools – Ofsted Jan 13
- Promoting the Educational Achievement of Looked After Children – DFE June 14
- Pupil Premium and the role of the Virtual School Head 2014-15. Frequently Asked Questions March 14
- Pupil Premium 2014 to 2015: conditions of grant – DFE February 14

9. **Appendices to the report**

- None

Report Author:

Keeley Pullen
Headteacher for Virtual School
Children's Services

4 September 2014	ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee	
Adoption Report Outlining Process and Performance	
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key
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 is to fulfil the requirements of 25.6 of the National Minimum Standards for Adoption 2011, which are:

25.6 The executive side of the local authority, the voluntary adoption agency’s/Adoption Support Agency’s provider/trustees, board members or management committee members:

a. receive written reports on the management, outcomes and financial state of the agency every 6 months;

b. monitor the management and outcomes of the services in order to satisfy themselves that the agency is effective and is achieving good outcomes for children and/or service users;

c. satisfy themselves that the agency is complying with the conditions of registration.

This report updates the report previously presented in September 2013, and updates Members of the Committee on activity over the last six months.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 The members of the Corporate Parenting Committee are asked to consider this report and their level of satisfaction with the above criteria on management, outcomes and conditions of registration.**

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The work of the team is central to the provision offered to Thurrock's Looked After Children, and operates to deliver one of the key objectives of the Children and Young Peoples Plan, "Objective CYPP (PWN) 3.3. Deliver outstanding fostering, private fostering & adoption; develop & maintain excellent services for children in care".

The work of the team helps to meet a fundamental requirement for fulfilling our Corporate Parenting responsibilities, namely wherever possible to seek a permanent substitute family home for Looked After Children for whom there is no potential for reunification with their birth family.

- 2.2 In the main, children who are recommended for adoption will have been removed from their birth parents as a result of likely or actual significant harm. They will have been made the subject of Care Orders. During the legal process, a Care Plan, ratified by the Court, will have determined that it is in the child's best interests to be placed for adoption. As part of the court process the court also review the Adoption Support Plan agreed by the Local Authority to ensure that it will meet the child's needs. Children placed for adoption are increasingly likely to have more complex needs, or be part of a sibling group, resulting in increased support packages. Nationally the average age of a child at the point of adoption in 2011-2012 was 3 years and 8 months, and 74% of adopted children were between 1 and 4 years old.
- 2.3 Occasionally, babies are 'relinquished' by their parents at birth for adoption, when they (with counselling and help) come to the conclusion that they are unable to offer a stable home to that child.
- 2.4 Thurrock has been part of an Adoption Consortium with Southend and Havering. This partnership was first formed in 1999, which significantly extended the capacity of all three agencies to provide adoptive parents to children who need adoption. Until recently no major changes of approach had been necessitated, although one significant innovation occurred last year, in that we made a formal agreement to affiliate Barnados Adoption Service within the Consortium. This was in response to a clear message from central government that they wish to see greater cooperation between Local Authorities and Independent Adoption Agencies.
- 2.5 Unfortunately in April 2014 Havering announced a formal withdrawal from the Consortium, without prior warning, which significantly impacts on the capacity of the remaining partners to meet the majority of their placement needs from within the Consortium. We have made an agreement with Southend to continue with our partnership arrangement for the immediate future, but inevitably both authorities will need to review the long term viability of such a small Consortium, and we will both need to explore what alternative arrangements might best meet our longer term obligations.

- 2.6 Line management of Adoption falls within the remit of the Service Manager – Placements and Support.
- 2.7 The Adoption and Children Act 2002 (the Act) is the principal piece of legislation governing adoption in England and Wales. It has been in force since 30 December 2005, and has been amended by other legislation since 2002, most recently being the Children and Families Act 2014.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The staffing complement of the Adoption Team consists of one Team Manager, and four full time equivalent Social Worker/Senior Practitioner posts. The Team is almost up to full strength, with a vacancy of effectively one day. We planned to fill this remaining post, with the intention to use these hours to fulfil our responsibility to previously adopted adults who wish to trace birth families. Unfortunately we received no suitable applications, and will therefore need to reconsider how best to use the remaining hours.
- 3.2 The existing staff availability was reduced by one worker starting Maternity Leave in January 2014. There was also some significant disruption caused by periods of illness in the last year. However we had created an additional post, using money from the Adoption Reform Grant allocation for 2013-14. After initial failure to recruit externally to this post, we secured an experienced worker from another team as a Temporary Secondment. This helped offset some of the shortfall created by the maternity leave, but unfortunately did not create additional capacity as originally hoped.
- 3.3 There has been a significant change recently in that the Adoption Team Manager, who had been in post since February 2010, resigned in July 2014. This has obviously affected the stability of the team, but as described below this also provides an opportunity to review whether it would be helpful to look at alternative management arrangements. However in order to make sure that the work of the team continues during this period it is planned that we have an Agency Team Manager in place.
- 3.4 There is one full-time adoption administrator, who provides both day to day admin support to the team, as well as being the administrator for the Adoption Panel. Adoption work is very heavily regulated, and adherence to timescales is critical. The administrator's role is therefore a crucial one. In response to a number of new government initiatives in the summer of 2013 it was acknowledged that the workload had become unmanageable for one individual and a second part time post was created on a temporary basis, also using the Adoption Reform Grant. However the original agreement for this has now expired and we are currently seeking agreement to renew this arrangement to enhance our admin capacity.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 As reported previously, Thurrock Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted in February 2012, and received an overall judgement of Good. Nevertheless a number of recommendations were made to improve the service, and an Action Plan was developed to address these.
- 4.2 In late 2013 Ofsted launched a new framework for inspection of Children's Services under which there will no longer be separate inspections of the Adoption Service. Instead the new arrangement is that there will be a specific sub-judgement within the overall report on the effectiveness of the local adoption service. We are therefore reviewing our relative readiness to meet this challenge.
- 4.3 The current government has maintained its intention to heighten the profile of adoption as a means to provide permanent care since the publication of "An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay" in March 2012, which introduced the concept of "Adoption Scorecards". These set out specific thresholds against two indicators, with clear minimum expectations for timeliness of actions in the adoption system.
- 4.4 The stated intention is to raise these thresholds incrementally over a four year cycle. Local Authorities are expected to return key performance data to the Department of Education on a quarterly basis which will then be consolidated into comparative national data on an annual basis, known as the "Inspection Scorecard". Local authorities who fail to meet the thresholds will be expected to explain their performance to central government.
- 4.5 The current targets are as follows:
- A1: average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted. The target for the 2013 to 2016 average (as measured during the 3 years 2013 to 2016) is 14 months
 - A2: average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. The target for the 2013 to 2016 average (as measured during the 3 years 2013 to 2016) is 4 months

These are calculated as average times. A third measure (A3) of performance is the percentage of children who wait less than 20 months from entering into care and moving in with their adoptive family.

- 4.6 In January 2014 the most recent set of data was released, covering the three year period to March 31st 2013. Unfortunately Thurrock's reported figures against the two targets did not appear very good, as we exceeded both

targets by a considerable margin. Our performance against A1 was 784 days (or approximately 25 months) and against A2 it was 323 days (or approximately 10 months).

- 4.7 An explanation of these figures was provided in the previous report to the Corporate Parenting Committee in March 2014, and also discussed during a meeting with the DfE earlier this year. A significant contribution towards the poor performance against the timescales was the impact of two cases including sibling groups which proved particularly challenging, although there were positive outcomes at the end. One of these cases will disappear from the relevant cohort when the next national figures are published, although the other, despite the case having been concluded in May 2012, will continue to impact on the Scorecard for the immediate future.
- 4.8 An unfortunate consequence of the way the scorecard is constructed is therefore that it does not necessarily reflect current or recent practice or outcomes. In the period from January 2013 –July 2014 Thurrock made 20 placements for adoption. The average time between this cohort of children coming into care and moving into the adoptive placement was 466.6 days (or approximately 15.5 months) , and the average time between the granting of a Placement Order and the decision on an appropriate match was 134.5 days (or just under 4.5 months). These figures lay just slightly above the intended target, and would represent a significant improvement on the last Scorecard figures.
- 4.9 Moreover the averages for these 20 children are distorted by one particular case of a child, where the local authority was delayed in making plans for adoption by protracted Care Proceedings, during which several attempts were made to rehabilitate the child to her father. If we remove this child from the cohort the averages for the other 19 drop to 410 days (13.6 months) and 120.2 days (or almost exactly four months), thus demonstrating almost exact performance in line with the intended timescales for this group.
- 4.10 These figures give a more accurate reflection of current and recent performance, and there are another six children for whom formal matching decisions and subsequent placement moves are planned in the next few weeks. However we do need to recognise that because of some of the older legacy cases (and every authority is likely to have a small number of these) the next announced Scorecard figures are unlikely to show such a marked improvement. Some of the recent positive cases may also not be reflected for some time, as for A1, only cases where an Adoption Order has been granted are included, and this is not within the Authority's control. There is a minimum period of ten weeks after a child is placed with adopters before they can apply for the Adoption Order, but often the timescale significantly exceeds this.

4.2 Budgets

- 4.2.1 The Adoption and Permanence Team had a dedicated budget of just over £1.3 million for the financial year 2012-13, of which over £1 million was allocated to a range of support payments to carers, with most pressure arising from the increased use of Special Guardianship as a means for children to cease to be looked after. This has created problems for many authorities as these have increased nationally by 88% since 2008, often being seen as the preferred option by the Courts.
- 4.2.2 The overall budget was reduced to just over £1 million for 2013-14, with the aim that the reduced expenditure would be achieved by cutting the number and duration of Special Guardianship Allowances. Further reduction in the allocated budget has occurred for 2014-15. Unfortunately it is extremely difficult to resist the pressure for new payments to be agreed, with very high expectations being created in Courts by Children's Guardians from CAFCASS. However whilst we are unlikely to be able to reduce our level of existing commitments, we have been willing to explain to the Court that we are unable to commit initially beyond a three year period, and will then need to review in the light of competing demands and existing resources. This should give us a "permissive" platform from which to contain costs in future years, with our written policy adjusted accordingly. However we also need to balance the demands on this budget against the alternative costs that would accrue for the authority if these children remain looked after.
- 4.2.3 An additional pressure also arises from central government decision to equalise the Inter-Agency fee charged between Local Authorities and/or Voluntary Adoption Agencies to £27000. This fee covers the cost of procuring an adoptive placement from another authority. Under the previous Consortium arrangement there was agreement not to charge between the partners but there was pressure to abandon this practice from central government even before Havering's withdrawal, and hence this charge applies in all instances now. Potentially this is also a source of income as well as expenditure, but Thurrock's relatively small geographic area, and the size of the team in terms of assessing capability, we are likely to be net purchasers rather than sellers in the period ahead.
- 4.2.4 The remainder of the budget remains largely taken up by salary costs, with some additional expenditure required for the provision of the Adoption Panel, Medical Reports, CRB checks, post-adoption support groups, Ofsted fees, etc. Our most recent forecast across the whole budget cost centre indicates it will be a major challenge to remain within our overall budget for the service area this year.

4.3 Panel

- 4.3.1 The functioning of Thurrock's Adoption Panel remains largely as outlined in the previous reports, and the Panel has continued to function effectively in

ensuring that Approval of new Adopters and Matching recommendations for children with carers receives appropriate scrutiny

4.3.2 However we have been through a period of change, in that our existing Panel Adviser and Independent Chair both resigned, for different personal reasons, in the early months of 2014. We were able to identify a new Chair relatively quickly, and he has brought some fresh thinking and challenge about our existing practices, which has been extremely helpful. However more thought is required about how we fulfil the functions previously performed by the Panel Adviser. The model previously in place was to employ an external individual to add a greater level of scrutiny and QA to our performance, but this is not a requirement, and consideration needs to be given to whether these tasks can be absorbed within existing staffing resources.

4.4. Issues for Development

4.4.1 As indicated in Section 3, the departure of the previous Team Manager, combined with the recent withdrawal of Havering from the Consortium, has presented us with some immediate challenges in ensuring we continue to function effectively. However they simultaneously also provide a window of opportunity for us to consider whether any alternative approaches to the delivery of the service might enhance performance, or indeed provide more cost effective ways to achieve good outcomes. These options include internal restructuring, developing shared service arrangements with another authority, or entering into more formal partnership with one of the Voluntary Adoption Agencies (whose role in adoption work the current government are seeking to expand). To date we have had one discussion with a nationally recognised organisation, but no decisions have been made as yet, pending more detailed analysis of the benefits of various options, and we may yet conclude that no major structural change is required.

4.4.2 Whatever the conclusion of these deliberations the basic objectives to be achieved for Thurrock will remain as set out in the Adoption Service Plan developed earlier this year. A copy is attached as Appendix A of the report and identifies the key priorities and areas for development to be pursued in 2014-2015.

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

5.1 Not applicable.

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

6.1 The content of this report is compatible with Health and Well Being Strategy Priority 12: *Provide outstanding services for children in care and leaving care*

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Interim Finance Manager

The implementation of the mandatory Inter Agency charge of £27,000 creates a potential financial risk if the balance between “buying” and “selling” becomes too weighted in favour of the former. It is therefore imperative that Thurrock retains its capacity to recruit significant numbers of Adopters, which if they cannot be used locally, can at least be made available for other authorities, thus generating compensatory income. It is also the case that if Thurrock is seeking to find adopters for more difficult to place children there will be a demand for Adoption Support payments. However it also needs to be acknowledged that both these costs are likely to be less than those resulting from children remaining in care for a significant part of their childhood.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Lindsey Marks**
Principal Solicitor

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report, although it should be noted that a consequence of certain High Court judgments over the last year has been to make Courts apply greater pressure to ensure all options within birth families have been exhausted before they will grant a Placement Order in Care Proceedings. It remains to be seen whether this will have long term impact on the numbers of children becoming available for adoption.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Rebecca Price**
Community Development Officer

The significant Diversity and Equality implications arising from the report relate to the on-going difficulty of finding adoptive placements for “hard to place” children, such as children with developmental delay, sibling groups and some Black and Ethnic Minority Children. We also recognise that older children may also benefit from adoptive placements, but overwhelmingly prospective adopters wish to adopt younger children. We therefore need always to balance the rights of children to have us pursue any possible options, with the need to avoid raising false expectations by persisting with

plans that have no realistic prospect of success. These are challenges for all local authorities, and are not particular to Thurrock.

However we do recognise that Thurrock has a changing ethnic profile, and we need to be alert to the need to ensure that our future recruitment of adopters takes this into account.

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.

9. **Appendices to the report**

Appendix A: Adoption Service Plan

Report Author:

Roland Minto
Service Manager, Placements and Support
Children's Services

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Service Pack

Care and Targeted Outcomes Adoption Service Plan

2014-15

Page 25

Version Control

Owner: Nicky Pace/Roland Minto

Date: May 2014

Version No:

Status:

Service Overview

The service meets the Council's statutory duties in achieving timely adoptive placement for children for whom this has been identified as the primary plan.

Adoption Team

Staff - 1 Team Manager
4 FTE Social Worker/Senior Practitioner Posts
1 Administrator

(Plus use of shared Business Development Officer and Admin support)

Accountability

The service will meet its requirements under National Minimum Standard 25.6 by the provision of six monthly reports to Thurrock's Corporate Parenting Committee

Equality and Diversity

The local authority is under a statutory duty to advance equality and eliminate discrimination. This includes specific duties introduced by the Equality Act 2010 in relation to data and compliance.

Background

Thurrock Adoption Service was inspected by Ofsted in February 2012, and received an overall judgement of Good. Nevertheless a number of recommendations were made to improve the service, and an Action Plan was developed to address these. This plan was reviewed on a regular basis in 2012-13, with continued monitoring throughout 2013-14.

However, in line with both the high priority given to adoption nationally, and our own commitment to the continuous improvement of services, it is vital that this progress is maintained. This Action Plan outlines the key areas for development in 2014 – 2015, and also sets the plan within the overall context of Thurrock’s’ Care and Targeted Outcomes Plan for 2013-2016, as reviewed and revised in April 2014. The relevant updated sections of that plan are as follows:

Service Objective	Outcomes	Action / Outputs	Resources	Lead	Risk/Opp. Reference
Council Priority: Improve health and well-being					
Health and Well Being Strategy Priority 12: Provide outstanding services for children in care and leaving care					
Ensure that public care is reserved for those children for whom there is no safe and appropriate alternative and that those young people leaving care reach their full potential	Progress on the National Adoption Scorecard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce revised Adoption Development Plan for 2014-15, including clear target on recruitment of new Adopters • Negotiate appropriate use of 2014-15 Adoption Reform Grant, to strengthen Family Finding capacity • Development better tracking and monitoring systems, in conjunction with Annex A requirements, to demonstrate concerted focus on achieving timescales 		RMi RMi RMi/SQ/ Permanency Team	

The government has maintained its intention to heighten the profile of adoption as a means to provide permanent care since the publication of “An Action Plan for Adoption: Tackling Delay” in March 2012, which introduced the concept of “Adoption Scorecards”. These set out specific thresholds against two indicators, with clear minimum expectations for timeliness of actions in the adoption system. Performance thresholds make clear the government’s expectations for timeliness in the adoption system. The Government has made it clear that thresholds will be reduced incrementally to ensure national performance improves.

The key thresholds set by the Government are namely:-

- A1: average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family, for children who have been adopted. The target for the 2013 to 2016 average (as measured during the 3 years 2013 to 2016) is 14 months
- A2: average time between a local authority receiving court authority to place a child and the local authority deciding on a match to an adoptive family. The target for the 2013 to 2016 average (as measured during the 3 years 2013 to 2016) is 4 months
- A3: measures the number and percentage of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family (2013 to 2016)

The table below shows the projected tightening of performance against the first two targets:

Financial years	Indicator 1 threshold (months)	Indicator 2 threshold (months)
2010 to 2013	20	6
2011 to 2014	18	5
2012 to 2015	16	4
2013 to 2016	14	4

In January 2014 the most recent set of data was released, covering the three year period to March 31st 2013. Thurrock’s reported figures against the two targets were disappointing in the context of the hard work undertaken, as we exceeded both targets by a considerable margin. Our performance against A1 was 784 days (or approximately 25 months) and against A2 it was 323 days (or approximately 10 months). Although there were some contributory factors, it is important that we interpret this as a spur to continued improvement moving ahead, and this Action Plan forms the basis on which we intend to do so.

The keys ambitions for 2014-2015 remain broadly in line with 2013-2014, as follows:

- In conjunction with the Children’s Social Work Teams, maintain close scrutiny of all children entering care for whom Adoption is a potential outcome, to ensure no drift occurs and that the Adoption Team are appropriately involved from an early stage
- Ensure that all relevant cases are brought to the attention of the Agency Decision Maker, with appropriate paperwork completed to an acceptable standard, to enable a timely “Should be Placed Decision”
- Vigorous pursuit of Family Finding for Children for whom we have a Placement Order
- Reduction of the timescale between Family Finding and presentation of cases at Panel for Matching to the minimum possible
- Expansion of the pool of applicants to become Adopters
- Effective and professional production of good quality Prospective Adopter Reports
- Appropriate use of funding available from Central Government to progress the work of the service
- Review our capacity to deliver appropriate post adoption support in a timely manner
- Ensure that all Adoption Team activity is managed to reinforce the authority’s commitment to adhere to the 26 week target for completion of Care Proceedings.

A number of new developments were rolled out by central government in 2013-14, including key sections of the Children and Families Act 2014, and it is likely that further changes will follow. It is essential therefore to maintain close scrutiny of any changes in practice which will need to be implemented in response, and hence this action plan will need to be revisited on a regular basis and updated where necessary to acknowledge any wider policy or legislative changes

May 2014 Update

We have recently received notification that Havering will be withdrawing from our current Consortium arrangements with them and Southend. This poses an immediate challenge in identifying potential alternative partners, but also brings about an opportunity to review and challenge many aspects of how we have functioned in recent years. In this light therefore we need to embrace this change as an opportunity to reshape our external relationships and develop a more outward looking approach, giving us the possibility of importing fresh ideas that may stimulate positive growth.

Task / Objective	Action	Action by	Evidence
Maintain close scrutiny of all children entering care for whom Adoption is a potential outcome	<p>Consideration of all new entrants at Placement Panel</p> <p>Regular weekly scrutiny of all CLA on LCS reports</p> <p>Maintenance of monitoring sheet of all referred cases</p> <p>Maintenance of monthly monitoring sheets</p>	<p>RM</p> <p>RM/SQ</p> <p>SQ</p> <p>SQ</p>	<p>Social Workers referred to Adoption Team Manager for advice</p> <p>Proactive approaches to SW teams where cases have not been referred</p> <p>Discussion in Supervision between RM and SQ</p> <p>Up to date sheets circulated each month</p>
All relevant cases are brought to the attention of the Agency Decision Maker	<p>Timely referral to ADM following ILPM, including consultation with PA to ensure no delays in presentation</p> <p>Review and simplify process of consultation with Agency Adviser</p> <p>Attendance at Internal Legal Planning Meetings where requested</p>	<p>SQ (and Team Admin)</p> <p>RM/SQ</p> <p>SQ and Team</p>	<p>ADM sign off within 10-15 working days of ILPM</p> <p>Established and maintained target timescale for presentation to ADM</p> <p>Adoption advice apparent in Minutes</p>
Vigorous pursuit of Family Finding for Children	<p>Prompt allocation of cases following ADM decision</p> <p>Regular Family Finding Meetings following PO</p>	<p>SQ</p> <p>SQ and team</p>	<p>ICS updated</p> <p>Minutes of meetings</p>
Contribute to effective management of cases through Care Proceedings	Production of timely reports to Court where requested on process, progress and prognosis for Family Finding at request of Court, with personal attendance where necessary	SQ and Team Legal	Reports filed on time

Reduction of the timescale between Family Finding and presentation of cases at Panel	Prompt “linking” meetings after identification of possible Match Close liaison with Panel Adviser and Chair to agenda at first opportunity	SQ/RM SQ (Team Admin)	Minutes of meeting, with recorded timescales Minutes of meeting
Clarification of Adoption / Permanency Team roles in relation to maintenance of records on LCS	Completion of existing work on refining LCS process in relation to Children’s Cases, followed by roll out of training	RM/PC/SQ/AC/Lesley Tabrett	Accurate performance reports can be drawn down from LCS
Development of LCS recording in relation to recording of applicants to adopt	Exploration and development of LCS module on Adopters, and roll out to team	SQ/RM/Lesley Tabrett	Accurate performance reports can be drawn down from LCS
Expansion of the pool of applicants to become Adopters: Target for 2014-2015 = 20 new approvals by 31.3.15	Review of Advertising Strategy Deployment of additional funding from ARG Implementation of local information sessions to supplement Consortium Open Evenings Increase in frequency of Adoption Workshops Continued attendance of Business Development Officer at Monthly Adoption Team Meetings Active pursuit of opportunities to engage support of local faith based groups in heightening the positive profile of adoption	RM/ SQ/ Business Development Officer RM SQ SQ SQ /KD RM/SQ/KD	Renewed strategy Use of different media generating additional applicants Delivery of sessions producing more enquiries Delivery of workshops reducing delays for applicants Minutes of meeting Increase in appropriate enquiries
Effective and professional production of good quality Prospective Adopter Reports	Ensure all staff are familiar with new assessment process and timescales	SQ and team	Assessments presented at Panel within appropriate timescales

Ensure all Adoption Procedures and documentation, including Statement of Purpose, are updated	Identification of deadline dates of priorities for revision and allocation of responsibilities for each one	RM / SQ	All necessary procedures are updated and available
Appropriate use of funding available from Central Government	Plan to be devised to utilise 2014-2015 Adoption Reform Grant. Likely to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for additional worker to increase assessment and Family Finding capacity Expenditure incurred on refresh of marketing materials (and possible additional expertise from Corporate Comms Team) Review potential to maintain additional admin support 	RM / AS (workforce development) RM / SQ	Production of training “brochure” and evidence of service wide attendance at training Worker in post, and minimal delays in allocation of new Assessments and Family Finding
Adoption Service generates income through inter-agency fees to sustain increased staffing capacity	Development of Business Case for use of ARG to provide capacity to increase Adopter Recruitment and Approval	RM / SQ	Sale/Purchase of Inter Agency Adopters balances to generate surplus
Review our capacity to deliver appropriate post adoption support	Meet with AT to look at current workload Ensure maximum use of 3Ts service for Adopters under pressure Possible use of external review of our “offer”	SQ RM (via MALAC) / AT /SQ RM / SQ	Consolidation of AT workload into manageable caseload Appropriate referrals being made and progressed Proposals on how to increase available supports

Review our current practice in making decisions about the appropriateness of placing siblings together or apart	Explore possible funding of attendance/buying in of training on sibling placements provided by Family Futures or similar	RM/AS	Evidence of more nuanced discussion in minutes of LPM and LAC reviews
Respond to recent decision by Havering to withdraw from current Consortium arrangements	Explore alternative partners for Consortium or possible joining with another existing Consortium	RM/SQ	New arrangements in place

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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

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**Corporate Parenting Committee
Work Programme
2014/15**

Dates of Meetings: 3rd July 2014, 4th September 2014, 4th December 2014, 12th March 2015.

Standing Item: Placements (Roland Minto)

Topic	Lead Officer	Date
Electronic Personal Education Plans	Nicky Pace, Keeley Pullen	4 th September 2014
Achieving Permanence/Adoption Report	Roland Minto	4 th September 2014 - 12 th March 2015
Independent Review of Officers Annual Report	Nicky Pace	4 th December 2014
Housing for Looked After Children	Richard Head (Havering)	4 th December 2014
Education Results of Looked After Children	Keeley Pullen	4 th December 2014
Fostering Service	Roland Minto	4 th December 2014
Health of Looked After Children	Roland Minto	12 th March 2015
Children in Care Council and the voice of the child.	Opendoor/CIC Council	12 th March 2015
The Pledge	Opendoor/CIC Council	TBC
Looked After Children's Strategy	Paul Coke	TBC
Troubled Families	Teresa Goulding	TBC
Enhancing Access to Apprentiships for Looked After Children	TBC	TBC

Updated: 13 May 2014

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