

4 October 2016		ITEM: 7
Report to Corporate Parenting Committee		
Overview of Children Looked After Placements and Demand Management		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Andrew Carter – Head of Children’s Social Care		
Accountable Head of Service: Andrew Carter, Children’s Social Care		
Accountable Director: Rory Patterson, Corporate Director of Children’s Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report provides members with a synopsis of the iMPower, Demand Management analysis of Children Looked After Placements.

- 1. Recommendation(s)**
 - 1.1 Committee members receive regular updates on the effectiveness of edge of care and prevention services.**
 - 1.2 Committee members scrutinise the quality of placements and sufficiency of local placements.**
 - 1.3 Committee members continue to review the value for money and effective commissioning of placements.**
 - 1.4 Committee members continue to engage with the Children in Care Council to obtain the views of children and young people re: placements and services to prevent children and young people needing to become looked after.**
- 2. Introduction and Background**
 - 2.1 iMPower were commissioned to analyse demand and demand management within Thurrock Children’s Social Care. The work of iMPower is focused on supporting Children’s Social Care to improve quality of provision and value for money of the service. The analysis of looked after children**

within the report did not include unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) or children with disabilities.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

iMPOWER Report

3.1 A summary of the purpose of this report is as follows:

- Establish a baseline for current high demand
- Identify areas of opportunity to better manage demand in the system
- Identify areas of opportunity to safely reduce demand
- Identify areas of opportunity to reduce costs in the social care system
- Model demand against cost to identify where the pressure points are currently and where they may be in the future

3.2 During the period covered by the report 1st April 2015 – May 2016:-

- There was an increase of 8% in the use of Independent Foster Agencies (IFA) and placements
- 9% of placements were spot purchased
- 63% of looked after children are placed outside of Thurrock

3.3 The report informs the department that in terms of placement stability and number of moves the majority of looked after children in 15/16 had only 1 or 2 placement moves. This confirms to the Dfe measure of 3+ placement moves which was 3% for 2015/16 and is 1.9% year to date. Thurrock continues to perform well re: 3+ placement moves as reflected in the recent Ofsted Report.

3.4 Within the group of young people moving placements the report highlights those young people moving due to placement breakdown and suggested that there was a high number of placement breakdowns (as opposed to planned moves). Most placement breakdown were due to placements being ended by carers due to behaviour management issues.

3.5 The department have responded to this by increasing the monitoring and support to placements that are considered to be at risk of breakdown. Wherever possible the focus has been on what additional support can be put into a placement rather than the placement end.

3.6 The department requires that a placement stability or disruption meeting is held to co-ordinate support to placements that are fragile and where a placement has broken down to ensure lessons are learnt that will prevent the pattern of breakdown continuing in any future placements.

3.7 iMPOWER's analysis echoed that of Ofsted and the department's own data in highlighting the high number of out of borough placements (63%). iMPOWER found that the number of placements outside of the authority increases costs in terms of travel expenses and the time taken in travelling to placements.

- 3.8 The low proportion of available in-house foster carers is identified as resulting in an increased reliance on independent fostering agency (IFA) placements. The particular pressure points in finding suitable in-house placements remains around placements for teenagers, large sibling groups, parent and child and children with complex and challenging behaviour.
- 3.9 The authority has focused its recruitment of foster carers on teenage and sibling placements. Current Thurrock provision and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) mean that sufficient planned placement provision can be accessed for babies and younger children.
- 3.10 iMPOWER are working with the Fostering Service to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers to increase year on year the levels of in-house capacity inside and surrounding the local authority. A greater number of in-house carers will improve placement choice and matching for children and young people and reduce the cost pressures of using the current volume of independent fostering agency placements. Children's Social Care is seeking to achieve an effective mixed market placement base that promotes quality, placement choice and value for money.
- 3.11 Better performance management and the continued refining of targeted recruitment are being progressed with the assistance of iMPOWER.
- 3.12 While in-house capacity is yet to increase significantly, the usage of current capacity has improved with carers being supported to manage a wider range of children, reduce breakdowns and increase where appropriate their age ranges.
- 3.13 Ofsted had identified that a high number of placements were made in an emergency. As would be expected iMPOWER have also mirrored this theme. For children the disruption of being placed in an emergency should always be avoided where it is safe to do so. The need to place in an emergency reduces the ability to carefully match and prepare children and carers for placements.
- 3.14 The impact of emergency placements on demand management is the increase in the use of spot purchased placements (placements with fostering agencies or residential providers where there is no pre-existing contract). The placements are normally needed on the same day or within a few days which means the ability to negotiate the best value for money is reduced. Reduced rates agreed with the contracted providers are not available when purchasing single placements from agencies / providers.
- 3.15 All initial placements of unaccompanied minors by their very nature tend to be unplanned emergency placements that need to be made on the same day.
- 3.16 The average age of unaccompanied minors needing assistance tends to be between 16-17years of age. The greatest shortage of suitable placements

locally, within our statistical neighbours and nationally, tends to be for older teenagers.

- 3.17 On average Thurrock accommodates about 2 unaccompanied children per week and this has at time reached 5-9 young people within 1 week. This does place incredible amounts of pressure on the placement finding team and social workers in responding to the needs of this vulnerable group.
- 3.18 Thurrock Council is currently looking after 90 unaccompanied children under the age of 18. This number fluctuates as young people turn 18, are aged assessed to be adults and not children and new arrivals are provided with accommodation.
- 3.19 The Home Office has increased the payments to local authorities to cover the cost of caring for unaccompanied asylum seeking children but there remains a shortfall between the Home Office payment and the cost of placements and staffing to the department.
- 3.20 While unaccompanied minors were outside of the scope of the iMPOWER analysis it is important that members are able to understand the overall demand position within Thurrock.
- 3.21 The current looked after children rate per 10,000 as of 1st September 2016 is as follows:
- Thurrock – 84 per 10,000
 - National – 60 per 10,000 (last published data)
 - Statistical Neighbours – 66 per 10,000
 - Rate excluding unaccompanied asylum seeking children – 64 per 10,000

Due to the higher number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children Thurrock has one of the highest per 10,000 rate of looked after children across the Eastern Region.

- 3.22 To better manage the support to unaccompanied asylum seeking children, manage caseloads within the looked after service and promote a high quality of care and permanency for all looked after children; the department has introduced an unaccompanied asylum seeking team (UASC Team).
- 3.23 Caseloads within the two Through Care Teams were becoming unmanageable with the increase in the number of looked after children. In order to meet the improvements set out in the recent Ofsted Inspection report capacity needed to increase to ensure that plans for all children could be progressed within reasonable caseloads and managerial spans of control.
- 3.24 The Home Office has introduced a new regional transfer system to allow authorities like Thurrock with high numbers of unaccompanied asylum

seeking children to transfer these children to other authorities within the region with lower numbers.

- 3.25 The introduction of the UASC Team means that Thurrock is in a position to make maximum use of the scheme as it is developed. This would not have been possible within the existing Through Care Teams given the demand within these teams.
- 3.26 The Home Office have introduced a formula that calculates the number of unaccompanied asylum seeking children an authority should have based on the 0.07 percentage of the area's population that is under the age of 17. Based on these calculations Thurrock would have a commitment to provide looked after services to 28 unaccompanied asylum seeking young people.
- 3.27 The current scheme is voluntary and work is taking place across the Eastern Region to progress with the transfer of children.
- 3.28 As part of the work with iMPower the Department reviewed approximately 50 looked after children's cases (excluding UASC and children with disabilities), with the following findings:
- 49% of looked after children cases could have been avoided according to the case reviewers (reviewers were Thurrock Managers and Social Workers) – this could have been avoided through earlier and more effective interventions.
- 3.29 The department with iMPower are undertaking a restructure of the Early Offer of Help. This is likely to see a bringing together of Early Help provision across Children's Services to reduce any potential for duplication and focus interventions at the earliest possible opportunities.
- 3.30 The successes that the department has had to date within the Troubled Families Programme will form the centre of the revised Early Offer.
- 3.31 Effective prevention is seen as the key to reducing demand across the social care system and providing effective support to children and families. The analysis from the iMPower work is that the current Early Offer is too close to the social care threshold for intervention and needs to be aligned further 'downstream' to assist families and prevent higher and more costly levels of demand.
- 3.32 The analysis also focuses on the need for ongoing work with partner agencies to ensure that they understand the social care thresholds and are able to work in partnership with social care to effectively manage the continuum of need and promote best outcomes for children and their families.
- 3.33 Partner agencies need to ensure that they are addressing children's needs at a universal and Early Offer level. A series of engagement events are planned

to assist with timely interventions to meet the needs of families and avoid children becoming looked after where this is in the best interests of the child.

- 3.34 The department are exploring the commissioning of specialist therapeutic provision to support children remaining with their families and rehabilitating children where it is safe to do so.
- 3.35 Thurrock continues to have a dedicated Adolescent and Edge of Care Team and the recent Ofsted report recognised the effective work done with adolescents. The aim is to continue to build on this work to reduce the need for adolescents to become and remain looked after (while fully meeting our safeguarding responsibilities).

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
- 4.2 The focus of interventions needs to be driven by prevention and the provision of the right service to the right children and families at the right time. Increasing effective prevention will lead to better outcomes for children and their families and reduce costs. Where high cost interventions and provision is needed this can be better focused and targeted on those families most in need.
- 4.3 Increasing the number of in-house placements, reducing the number of emergency placements and having more local resources will increase the placement options for children and young people and promote better outcomes.

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
Children and Adults

The numbers of looked after children in this report have increased. The numbers of unaccompanied children have increased, which reflects in the number of placements provided by supported accommodation providers. Whilst it has been acknowledged that there has been a reduction in the cost of some individual placements, it is also important to acknowledge how volatile the business is in terms of numbers of looked after children and the differing needs they present, that may change the type of accommodation required.

The work by iMPower had been commissioned as an invest to save programme with savings on the management and reduction of demand over a 2 -3 years period. Ongoing savings and efficiencies are being pursued by the department in year and over the next financial year.

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 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 protected characteristics including gender, religion, ethnicity/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:

Andrew Carter

Head of Children's Social Care