

<b>3 July 2014</b>		<b>ITEM: 5</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Looked After Children and Care Leavers</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of: Paul Coke, Service Manager, Through Care Services</b>		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Nicky Pace, Interim Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Carmel Littleton, Director of Children's Services		
<b>This report is</b> To provide the Committee with an overview of the services for looked after children and care leavers, and provide information as to the statutory and legislative changes that may have an impact on the service		

## **Executive Summary**

This report provides information about Thurrock's looked after children and care leavers.

It also provides details of the current statutory and legislative changes that will have an impact on the service, and data that is required by Government in respect to Thurrock's performance on looked after children.

### **1. Recommendation(s)**

- 1.1 Corporate Parenting Committee to consider how best to address the review of the Pledge, the Looked After Children Strategy and new ways of working that will provide challenge to the Committee, CiCC and Officers.

### **2. Introduction and Background**

- 2.1.1 Children who come into care of the local authority are those who are the most vulnerable and at risk of harm when all other interventions have been unable to generate sufficient positive change in their immediate and wider family.
- 2.1.2 Wherever possible, children who come into care are placed with their own relatives if parents are unable to provide a home. This approach is expected by all legislation and court processes.

2.1.3 There is no single reason for children being in care. Disabled children may be looked after because their disability requires such a high level of support that their needs can only be met in a highly specialised residential resource. Otherwise, a range of social problems including poverty, poor parenting, poor mental health, drug and alcohol misuse and unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children are common background features.

## 2.2 Legislation

### 2.2.1 Children and Families Act 2014

- This deals with changes to court proceedings such as completion of proceedings within 26 weeks
- The use of expert reports
- Private proceedings and the role of family mediation
- Adoption and contact
- The role and responsibilities of The Children’s Commissioner
- ‘Staying Put’ – Arrangements for young people to remain with their foster carers up to 21

### The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2013

- This deals with the responsibility of the Director or nominated person to authorise placements of children placed outside of the borough
- The ‘home’ authority must notify the authority where the child will be living and provide them with a copy of the care plan.

## 2.3 Thurrock’s Looked After Children and Care Leavers

### 2.3.1

Year	Number of LAC	Age	Gender	Legal Status
<b>June 2013</b>	272	0 - 4: 59 (22%) 5 -11: 75 (28%) 12 – 16: 111 (41%) 17: 27 (10%)	Male: 159 (58%) Female: 113 (42%)	ICO: 87 (32%) CO: 108 (40%) S.20: 76 (28%)
<b>June 2014</b>	297	0 -4: 53 (18%) 5 – 11: 86 (29%) 12 – 16: 121 (41%) 17: 37 (12%)	Male: 179 (60%) Female: 118 (40%)	ICO: 54 (18%) CO: 154 (52%) S.20 86 (29%) Other: 3 (1%)

2.3.2 As you can see from the figures in respect to our looked after population (ie 0-17), the numbers have continued to increase. The increase in the numbers has been within the adolescent age group 11 onwards.

2.3.3 Nationally, the majority of looked after children, 62% in 2013, were provided with services due to abuse or neglect.

2.3.4 The reason for children becoming looked after in Thurrock in 2012-13 were due to abuse and neglect (65%), families in acute distress (12%), family dysfunction (7%) and absent parenting (9%).

#### 2.3.5 Stability of Placements, 3+

2.3.6 This reflects the number of placements children/young people have had within the year.

- Year 13/14 – Provisional figure: 8
- Current as at May 2014 – No young people on 3+ placements
- National Average 12/13: 11.07
- Statistical Neighbours 12/13: 11.44
- Thurrock 12/13: 13.64

2.3.7 This statistic reflects well for our looked after population in terms of stability for the period 13/14, despite the fact the numbers of looked after children have increased. The data for 13/14 is due to be sent to the DFE by June 2014, with the data being published around November 2014.

#### 2.3.8 Care Leavers

- June 2013 – 108 cases
- June 2014 – 98 cases : there is also a further 10 cases to be transferred into the team from the Through Care and Adolescent Services

#### 2.3.9 Suitable Accommodation

19<sup>th</sup> Birthday – Cohort: 23

- 19 – Suitable Accommodation
- 3 – Not recorded as we are not in touch with the young people
- 1 – Unsuitable accommodation

20<sup>th</sup> Birthday – Cohort: 15

- 14 – Suitable accommodation
- 1 – Not recorded

21<sup>st</sup> Birthday – Cohort: 7

- 6 – Suitable accommodation
- 1 – Not recorded

### 2.3.10 Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET)

19<sup>th</sup> Birthday – Cohort: 23

- 1 – Full time Higher Education
- 3 – Full time Education
- 5 – Full time Training or Employment
- 8 – NEET
- 1 – NEET due to illness
- 1 – Part time Education
- 3 – Not Recorded

20<sup>th</sup> Birthday – Cohort: 15

- 1 – Full time Higher Education
- 6 – Full time Education
- 1 – Full time training or employment
- 6 – NEET
- 1 – Not Recorded

21<sup>st</sup> Birthday – Cohort: 7

- 2 – Full time Education
- 2 – Full time training or employment
- 2 – NEET
- 1 – Not Recorded

### 2.3.11 Comparative Data – Year 2012/13

Suitable Accommodation

- National Average: 88.0
- Statistical Neighbours: 89.0
- Thurrock: 72.0
- Provisional Thurrock 13/14: 81.8

NEET

- National Average: 58.0
- Statistical Neighbours: 53.3
- Thurrock: 38.0
- Provisional Thurrock 13/14: 31.8

- 2.3.12 The comparative data is for those young people aged 19 only as the data for 19, 20 and 21 will be submitted end of June 2014, the first time all this information has been required by the DFE.
- 2.3.13 The data referred to in this report is from the year 13/14, which is due to be submitted to the DFE by the end of June 2014.
- 2.3.14 In summary the Department's performance in respect to the provision of suitable accommodation is improving.
- 2.3.15 In terms of our performance for NEET, we clearly need to improve dramatically in this area. Funding has been approved to continue the Diversity in Apprenticeship scheme, we have a worker in the After Care Team that spends a proportion of his time working on the area of employment, but we also need to build our relationships with key partner agencies who have access to work opportunities, both within the Council and in the community, plus working with our young people at an earlier age, through the schools etc.
- 2.3.16 Within the Corporate Parenting Committee Work Programme more detailed reports will be available on specific topics such as health, adoption, housing, education and the Children in Care Council.

### **3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options**

#### **3.1 Issues**

- 3.1.1 The Department is aware of the budgetary constraints within the Council as a whole and the need to continue to find ways of reducing our spend within Children's Services, which includes looked after children.
- 3.1.2 Senior managers have met to discuss this challenge and recognise the need to reduce the numbers of looked after children and address the issue of placements.
- 3.1.3 Along with the Interim Head of Service, senior managers will be reviewing the residential placements, focusing on specific areas, reviewing cases to see if there are children that can return home to their families or extended family members and working with our front line services to embed the Early Offer of Help so that children and families receive the help and support needed, in order to prevent things escalating to either court proceedings and/or eventually children becoming looked after.
- 3.1.4 Open Door continue to run the Advocacy Service for our looked after children and now also arrange and co-ordinate activities for our looked after children during the school breaks.
- 3.1.5 The CiCC will be reviewing the Pledge within their work plan, and it maybe useful for the Committee to consider how this links in with the Looked After

Children Strategy and possible new ways of working that can provide challenge to both the Committee and the CiCC.

- 3.1.6 The Welfare Reforms continue to progress, but there is currently no start date for the implementation of Universal Credit. The predicted start date is 2016. The Welfare Reform Working Group is addressing all issues in respect to the changes and working closely with key partners such as the DWP especially around vulnerable groups such as care leavers.
- 3.1.7 It has been agreed that care leavers can now complete their application for JSA or IS six weeks prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- 3.1.8 The After Care Team and the DWP need to develop its relationship in order for this to be maximised.
- 3.1.9 As mentioned 'staying put' is now part of legislation. The DFE are developing statutory guidance and have mentioned that it will provide £40m to cover the first three years
- 3.1.10 The Department will need to develop a policy that addresses this area, as it is quite complex in terms of what this means financially for foster carers and placements for the Department being filled with young people post 18.
- 3.1.11 The Department continues to prepare for the Ofsted Single Inspection. Meetings are taking place on a weekly basis to ensure we are as ready as possible when the time comes.
- 3.1.12 Ofsted have informed all local authorities of the process, which will be a telephone call to the Director of Children's Services on the following dates:
- 24 June 2014
  - 1 July 2014
  - 9 September 2014
  - 30 September 2014

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 4.1 The reason for the recommendation is that as a corporate parent we understand the needs of our looked after children, and that there is challenge for all involved in ensuring the provision of services is moving in the right direction.

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 The Council's responsibilities for looked after children and care leavers are unique and sit at the heart of all priorities.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**  
**01375 652466**  
[kgoodacre@btinternet.com](mailto:kgoodacre@btinternet.com)

The Department is aware along with the Council as a whole to reduce its spending in order to meet the budgetary requirements.

The Department is aware of the additional money put into the children's placement budget, and the continual rise of looked after children over the past year which again will have an impact on the budget situation.

Senior Managers within the service are meeting to discuss plans on how the service can meet the challenge of our budgetary requirements for this year and the years ahead.

### **7.2 Legal**

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

The implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014, makes it a requirement to have a 'staying put' policy that sets out the way the Local Authority will support young people to stay in their foster placement post 18, up to 21. This may have an impact on foster placements and finance for the carers.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Teresa Evans**  
**Equalities and Cohesion Officer**  
[tevans@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:tevans@thurrock.gov.uk)

Looked after children and care leavers by their very nature are a vulnerable group which also within it has children and young people who are from different cultures, races, some with disabilities, English will not be their first language and sexuality may be an issue. The protected characteristics (Equality Act 2010) of the individual children will be monitored ensuring the best outcomes are achieved for all groups.

**7.4 Other implications** (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

- 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):

- Not Applicable

**9. Appendices to the report**

- Not Applicable

**Report Author:**

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Care and Targeted Outcomes