

<b>18 June 2015</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Corporate Parenting Committee</b>		
<b>Information on Recent External Placements for young people</b>		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Non-Key	
<b>Report of:</b> Paul Coke – Service Manager, Through Care Services		
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Andrew Carter, Children’s Social Care (CATO)		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Carmel Littleton, Director of Children’s Services		
<b>This report is Public</b>		

## **Executive Summary**

This report updates members of the Committee on a range of issues regarding the placement choices made for looked after children

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

- 1.1 That the members of the Committee scrutinize the efforts made by officers to choose appropriate resources for looked after children, including our more difficult to place children.**

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

- 2.1** Reports for previous meetings of the Corporate Parenting Committee have provided elected members with appropriate information about the placement choices being made by officers for looked after children. These reports have included information on new external placements made in the period immediately preceding them and commented on a number of the presenting issues which influence decision making.
- 2.2** The period covered in this report is from 05/2/15 – 27/5/15. During this period there have been 24 new entrants / children who have become looked after. Over the same period 19 children have ceased to be looked after.
- 2.3** The numbers in age groups entering and ceasing care during the above period are as follows:

<b>AGE GROUP</b>	<b>ENTER</b>	<b>CEASE</b>
0-5	8	6
6-11	2	1
12-15	4	4
16+	10	8

- 2.4 As of the 27 May 2015 we had 276 looked after children (0-17). The comparative figure for the previous period reported to the Corporate Parenting Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2015, are indicated in brackets.

<b>Age of child</b>	<b>In house Fostering</b>	<b>Independent Fostering</b>	<b>Residential</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total by age</b>
Under 1	3 (4)	7 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)	10 (6)
1 – 5	13 (12)	9 (11)	1(0)	4 (15)	27 (38)
6 - 11	34 (33)	28 (32)	2 (4)	4 (1)	68 (70)
12 – 15	27 (29)	38 (35)	2 (5)	22 (32)	89 (101)
16+	17 (18)	22 (21)	3 (5)	40 (32)	82 (76)
Total by provision type	91 (92)	104 (101)	8 (14)	70 (80)	276 (285)

- 2.5 The total number of children and young people in foster placement is 195 (70.6%) as opposed to 71% in the last report.
- 2.6 The numbers in the other category will include those young people who are in a range of semi-supported accommodation, which will especially highlight the 16+ category. This will also include those that are in custody.

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

- 3.1 The percentage of children and young people in foster placement has remained relatively stable over the last 2 reported periods, but there has been a slight rise in the number of IFA (independent fostering agency) placements. The department is in the process of exploring a Service Level Agreement with Essex County Council to provide high quality foster placements within 20 miles of Thurrock at a competitively reduced price in comparison to IFA placements.
- 3.2 The department successfully recruited 11 professional fostering households over the 2014/15 period (4 short of the target of 15 fostering households). A further target of between 15-20 fostering households has been set for the 2015/16 period and a new Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Board has been introduced to monitor and drive the recruitment of foster carers and prospective adopters.
- 3.3 The recruitment of foster carers able to accommodate large sibling groups; children with significant disabilities, teenagers with emotional and behavioural difficulties and teenagers subject to remand continues to present significant challenges for local authority fostering services locally, regionally and

nationally. Through the Fostering and Adoption Recruitment Board we aim to drive our targeted recruitment in these areas as well as our generic recruitment. The department's aim is to reduce the number of children placed with IFA foster carers and increase those placed with in-house carers (or via SLA arrangements with Essex) whilst maintaining placement choice and effective matching for children.

- 3.4 The department is committed to ensuring that large sibling groups are only split (separated) where this is based on the needs of the children and not based on the availability of placements.
- 3.5 As part of our performance improvement we are reviewing a sample of cases of newly accommodated children to ensure that options in terms of placements with Connected Carers (family and friends) have been fully and appropriately considered in the best interest of the child. Also that family group conferences are being effectively used to identify extended networks that can provide permanency, short or medium periods of care as appropriate to the child's needs. During 2014/15, six households were approved as Connected Foster Carers.
- 3.6 There has been a drop in the use of residential placements, from 14 in the last reported period to 8 in this current period. All new residential placements need the agreement of the Head of Service. For some children a residential placement will remain the most appropriate option and the department remains committed to effectively matching children based on their needs, quality of placement and value for money.
- 3.7 Whilst there has been a reduction in residential placements and in the number of looked after children, with current placement levels the budget forecast for 2015/16 would project an overspend of £590,259. Part of this will be due to the fact that the calculations made for all placements will be for the whole of the financial year. Apart from this the high unit costs of residential placements, the current number of IFA placements, the cost of remands to custody (which are met by the local authority), the significant number of young people in 'Other' placements (70) and in particular 16+ semi-independent placements, are causing budget pressures.
- 3.8 To ensure that every child has the best possible outcomes, is being provided with quality placement provision and to mitigate the budget pressures, the department is:
  - a) ensuring through the Threshold Panel and Placement Panel that only those children who need to be looked after (based on needs and risk) are, and that permanency planning for children avoids unnecessary drift and delay.
  - b) ensuring that families are able to access appropriate early intervention; prevention and support services to maintain children safely within their families and promote positive outcomes.

- c) reviewing and improving the Fostering Recruitment Strategy to increase the number of in-house carers and the range of placements that can be offered.
- d) developing a Service Level Agreement with Essex County Council to access their pool of foster carers at a preferential rate (compared to IFAs).
- e) limiting the use of residential placements where appropriate.
- f) reviewing the commissioning and procurement of placements within the Eastern Region framework and individual arrangements, to achieve greater value for money and better outcomes.
- g) only using residential placements where the provider is rated 'Good' or above at the point of placement.
- h) strengthening provision available to support the rehabilitation of children to their birth families, where this is in the interests of the child (and avoid repeat episodes of accommodation).
- i) reviewing the effectiveness of early permanency planning to reduce the period children remain looked after once an adoption care plan is agreed by the courts, and from the point that they become looked after to the point they are placed for adoption.
- j) exploring with the voluntary sector means to increase the pool of available adopters, targeted to meet the needs of our children, who require permanency. Also exploring with the voluntary sector the ability to develop 'foster to adopt' as a means of reducing delay.

#### **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 and scrutiny of the issues involved. Officers accept there is a very real challenge in balancing the need to find the best possible placement option for children and young people, whilst simultaneously working within the financial resources available.

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 None

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1 Financial**

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

From this report, as indicated, the numbers of looked after children has decreased, as has the number of residential placements which is a positive direction of travel. However in line with significant Council funding reductions external placement budgets have been allocated robust savings targets which all are working to achieve over the full financial year. The cost of placements will continue to be an area of significant budget risk during 2015/16.

### **7.2 Legal**

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

The Children Act 1989 is very clear that 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 to evidence that placement decisions were being made purely on the basis of financial considerations.

### **7.3 Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Karen Wheeler**  
**Head of Strategy and Communications**

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.

### **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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Children's Services, Care and Targeted Outcomes