

3 December 2015		ITEM: 6
Corporate Parenting Committee		
Recent External Placements for Young People		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non-Key	
Report of: Simon Shardlow , Interim Service Manager, Placements & Support		
Accountable Head of Service: Andrew Carter, Children's Social Care (CATO)		
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 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 some detailed 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 It has been agreed that because of concerns about the possible identification of individual young people, an appendix previously provided will no longer be included.
- 2.3 As members will be aware this report is regularly completed by the Service Manager for Placements and Support. The specific period I shall report on is from the 1.8.15 until the 31.10.15.
- 2.4 Reports have varied in content, depending on any specific issues in focus, so that officers can respond within the report and within the meetings, to

additional queries raised by members. However a consistent and understandable thread has been a focus on the more expensive external placements and how decisions that these are required are arrived and this updating report will continue to provide you with information that enables you to feel confident about the direction of travel in terms of our placements and the scrutiny and robust manner in which we manage the budget and the placements for our children and young people.

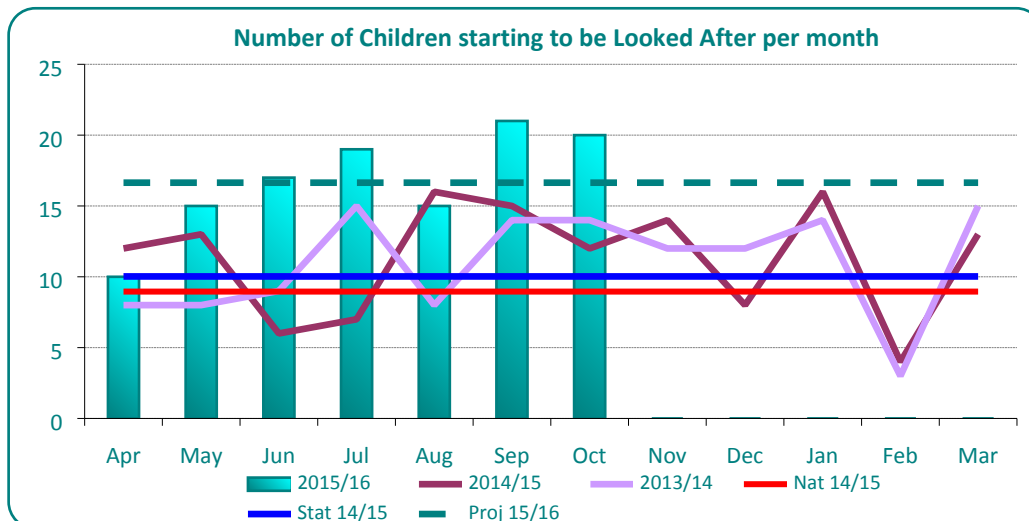
- 2.5 To help contextualise this report the numbers of Children becoming looked after in Thurrock is detailed below in a comparative data breakdown.

Children Looked After Year to date comparative data 2014/15 & 2015/16

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	YTD
2014/15	287	293	292	297	302	299	294	294	290	286	276	283	283
2015/16	282	289	298	306	316	325	339						339

- 2.6 At the end of 2014/15 there were 283 children (71.6 per 10,000 children) in care. This represents 0.7% of all children and young people in Thurrock and is a decrease of 2 children from 2013/14. From the total number of children in care at year-end (2014/15) 41 were recorded as UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) the current numbers of total UASC are 79 in the year to date within the period reporting on.

- 2.7 Children entering & ceasing to be looked after 1.8.15 - 31.10.15:



There has been a steady rise of young people becoming looked after, with the largest age group of children continuing to be aged 16+. The 16+ age group is disproportionately increased by the number of UASC who tend to be in the age range of 14 -17.

Our UASC population has seen a sharp 126% increase in referrals who subsequently become looked after in 2015/16.

- 2.8 The period I will be covering in this report in more detail is from the 1.8.15 to 31.10.15. In this period we have had 56 new children who became looked after, with 18 ceasing to be looked after during this period. Of those becoming looked after since August, 14 were UASC.
- 2.9 The numbers in age groups entering and ceasing care are as follows:

AGE GROUP	ENTER	CEASE
0-5	15	5
6-11	12	1
12-15	12	3
16+	17	9

The children entering care have done so for many reasons due to significant harm concerns relating chiefly to abuse and neglect and the legal status of these 56 children was that 44 of these children were initially placed under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 (CA89), 14 of whom were UASC.

Several children were placed initially under Police protection during this period and the remaining 12 children are subject to Interim Care Orders and in Public law proceedings (Family Court).

CEASE REASONS	Numbers
Adoption	2
Special Guardianship	2
Return to family	7
Leaving care 18 th Birthday	6
Custody	1

2.9.1 Breakdown by age of Children becoming looked after 1.8.15 - 31.10.15

Age of child	In house Fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other	Total by age
Under 1	3	3	0		6
1 – 5	6	3	0		9
6 - 11	7	5	0		12
12 – 15	4	7	0		11
16+	2	5	0	11	18
Total by provision type	22	23	0	11	56

- 2.9.2 The total number of children and young people placed in foster placement in this period is 45 (80%). Of this cohort 33 were placed within a 20 mile radius of their home address (a key performance indicator), the remainder being placed further afield due to various reasons including safe guarding, matching and availability considerations such as cultural needs and we have a higher

number of UASC placed outside the Thurrock boundary generally in London but the furthest placement in this period was of 58 miles (placed in Kent).

- 2.9.3 The numbers in the other category in the above breakdown table will include those young people who are in a range of semi supported accommodation, which specifically relates to the 16+ category (UASC/Older Adolescents).

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 As you can see the percentage of children and young people placed in foster placement and within a 20 mile radius of home has been positive in this period, but there has been a similar level of the use of in-house and external foster placements within Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA). Thurrock's in house capacity currently is for 120 placements with very few vacancies and any such in house options are reviewed daily by the Fostering team and our Access to Resources Manager.
- 3.2 There has been continued reduction in the use of residential, which indicates that young people have been placed in other forms of accommodation such as foster care or semi-independent units or returned home to family. This is a very positive outcome as this protects children's rights to Birth or alternative family life. Residential placement however remains appropriate for some children due to the complexity of their needs generally due to risk or health reasons and the use of Residential can only be agreed by the Head of Service. In this period only one existing adolescent looked after child has been placed in residential provision (August) from a high support Independent fostering agency due to the level and complexity of need and this placement is jointly funded with Education.
- 3.3 Whilst the reduction in residential placements is positive the numbers of looked after children are rising, and the budget forecast for 2015/16 is projected for an overspend. The demand for placements to protect and safeguard children is a statutory requirement and whilst every effort is made to maintain children in their birth families and when needed the most appropriate placements are available as part of our Sufficiency strategy.
- 3.4 There continues to be on-going negotiations with Health as to their financial contribution to placements that require Health input which may impact on the overall service spend if the current financial support from Health towards the cost of placements is reduced.

Additionally our Commissioning team is consistently sourcing the type of provision based on demand with a particular focus on 16+ provision and ensuring that we achieve the best contractual arrangements and value for money to ensure the best outcomes for these vulnerable children and young people.

There is also a renewed effort in our fostering recruitment, our aim is to increase the numbers of in house foster carers, again giving us better options

and outcomes when identifying placements for our children and young people who are in need of our care and protection.

- 3.5 The local authority continues to scrutinise and challenge all recent placements through the Placement Panel weekly and regularly brings back ongoing placements throughout the year for review based on need. There continues to be robust management oversight and there are a number of other Panels that ensure such management oversight is consistent throughout the Service, such as Threshold Panel, which addresses the request for children and young people to become looked after, chaired by the Head of Service.

There are Child in Need and Children Looked After surgeries, chaired by the respective Service Managers that ensure there is no case management drift in respect to care planning, and the Permanency Panel that addresses permanency plans for our looked after children, thus identifying those young children who may require adoption as their primary plan.

- 3.6 A further strand of enquiry from members has been for some additional detail on the circumstances surrounding decisions to use Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements rather than in-house resources, and whether these decisions were made on the basis of specific need or simple unavailability of a local carer.
- 3.7 In practice these decisions normally include a balance of both of the above factors, unless there is a very specific safeguarding or welfare issue which indicates placement further away from the home area is in the best interest of the child.
- 3.8 As well as internal management audit and scrutiny of our Section 20 CA89 cases, each case is independently and individually reviewed at the 28 day point of becoming looked after, then at the 3 month stage and subsequently six monthly (unless there are concerns where reviews can be brought forward or can continue to be held 3 monthly). These are chaired by Independent Reviewing Officers who although employed by the Local Authority have the capacity to escalate any concerns about the decisions made relating to placement or care plans for individual children and also seek their own legal advice as well as being able to escalate significant concerns to the Children & Family Court Advisory & Support Service (CAFCASS).
- 3.9 Within this reporting period we have placed 23 young people in IFA placements of which 17 have been placed within 20 miles of home.
- 3.10 As reported previously use of external foster placements is managed as far as possible within the boundaries of the "Eastern Region" agreements to which Thurrock has been party since 2008; with the Sub-Eastern Region Foster Care Framework Agreement (ER5) and now with the Eastern Region Select List (ER Select List).

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

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

None

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

None

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Kay Goodacre**
Consultant, Corporate Finance

As previously 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, and reduction in contribution from Health will amplify this concern.

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: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

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)

N/A

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):

N/A

9. **Appendices to the report**

N/A

Report Author:

Simon Shardlow

Interim Service Manager, Placements & Support

Children's Services, Care and Targeted Outcomes