

3 March 2016		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, Head of Care and Targeted Outcomes		
Accountable Director: David Archibald, Interim 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 review 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 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 1.11.15 until the 31.1.16.
- 2.3 To help contextualise this report the numbers of children becoming looked after in Thurrock is detailed below in a comparative format:

Children Looked After Year to date comparative data 2014/15 & 2015/16 as at 6.1.16

	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	338	347	333			333

- 2.4 As at 31.1.16 there were 333 children looked after. From the total number of children in care at year-end (2014/15) 41 were recorded as UASC (Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) the current total number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children is 85.
- 2.5 There has been a steady rise of young people becoming looked after although lower intake than within the previous period reported on, with the largest age group of children continuing to be aged 16+ but a significant amount of children in this cohort are aged 0-5 & 12-15.
- 2.6 Children entering & ceasing to be looked after during period:

Children Starting to be Looked After

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	YTD	Year End Projection
CLA started (No.) 2014/15	12	13	6	7	16	15	12	14	8	16	4	14	137	
2015/16	10	15	17	21	15	20	24	14	17				153	203 ↓
CLA Started UASC (No.) 2014/15	2	2	2	1	5	2	3	1	1	3	2	6	30	
2015/16	3	6	10	5	6	2	7	4	4				47	78 ↓
CLA Started Non-UASC (No.) 2014/15	10	11	4	6	11	13	9	13	7	13	2	8	107	
2015/16	7	9	7	16	9	18	17	10	13				106	135 ↓

We continue to monitor those becoming looked after through the Threshold and Placement panels which happens on a weekly basis.

- 2.7 In this period (1.11.15 - 31.1.16) we have had 47 new children who became looked after and 29 who ceased to be looked after. Of those becoming looked after 13 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
- 2.8 The numbers in age groups entering and ceasing to be looked after within this period are as follows:

AGE GROUP	ENTER (47)	CEASE (29)
0-5	11	10
6-11	4	2
12-15	13	4
16+	19	13

The children entering care have done so for many reasons but primarily due to significant harm concerns relating to abuse and neglect; a small number of

children were placed initially under Police Protection during this period and 9 children were subject to Interim Care Orders.

2.9 Breakdown by age of children becoming looked after in period.

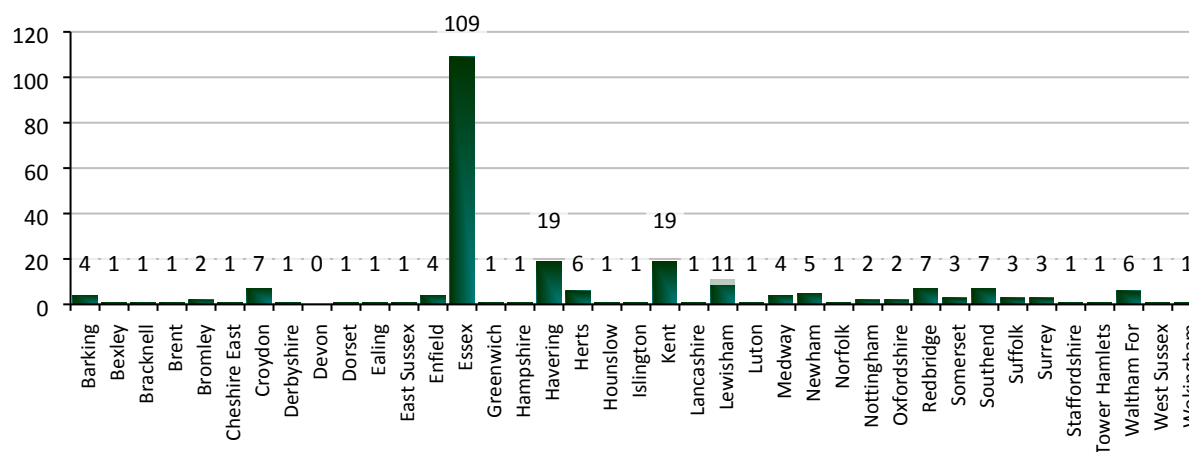
Age of child	In house Fostering	Independent Fostering	Residential	Other	Total by age
Under 1	3	1*	2**	0	6
1 – 5	3	1	1**	0	5
6 - 11	3	1	0	0	4
12 – 15	4	8	1	0	13
16+	4	1	1	13	19
Total by provision type	17	12	5	13	47

* Mother and baby foster placement ** Mother & baby Family Assessment Centre

2.10 The total number of children and young people placed in foster care in this period was 29 (62%) of which 17 were placed with in-house foster carers. The vast majority of these children and young people were placed within a 20 mile radius of their home address.

2.11 The spread of all placements outside of Thurrock up to 31.1.16 is shown in the table below:

Placements not in Thurrock



3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

3.1 Thurrock's in-house fostering service's current maximum capacity is for 153 placements (children) with very few vacancies.

3.2 There has been continued reduction in the use of residential generally. The current year to date Children's home population is 32 children, 10 of whom are children with disabilities.

3.3 In this period 3 children were placed in Mother & Baby Assessment Units, which are short term arrangements usually between 8-12 weeks as part of an agreed plan in court (or immediately preceding court and as part of the Public Law Outline).

3.4 Whilst the reduction in residential placements is positive the numbers of looked after children are rising (particularly regarding unaccompanied asylum seeking children), and the budget forecast for 2015/16 is projected for a significant overspend.

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

N/A

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Nicola Wright**
Finance Officer

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 Children's Safeguarding

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: **Becky 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.

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

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