

REPORT TO: Children, Young People and Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 13 January 2014

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Children & Young People

PORTFOLIO: Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Children in Care and Care Leavers

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report is to inform members about the current children in care population and the outcomes for children in care and care leavers. As Corporate Parents, it is important all members have an understanding of the needs of children in our care, and exercise their role in supporting them and advocating for them in all areas as parents do for their own children.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 **Members note the contents of this report**

2.2 **The report of the Virtual Head Teacher on the educational outcomes for 2012/3 for children in care be presented to members.**

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The aim should be to strive to keep children within their families where this is consistent with their safety and welfare. However, where this is not possible and the level of risk of harm to a child is significant and increasing despite support, the Local Authority has a duty under the Children Act 1989 to safeguard their welfare.

3.2 Children can come into care for a variety of reasons, and for varying periods of time. This can be by voluntary agreement with the parents under s20 of the Children Act 1989, where the parents maintain their legal parental responsibility for the child. Where the risks to a child are so high and the Local Authority is not able to work effectively with the parents to reduce any risks, an application can be made to the court for a Care Order. If the court's judgement is that the threshold criteria is met, a Care Order means the Local Authority share legal parental responsibility but can make the primary decisions in relation to ensuring a child's needs are met.

3.3 Recently, under the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) a young person who is in criminal proceedings may be remanded into custody by the court which now makes that young person a child in care. This has been implemented to ensure vulnerable young people who are remanded into custody receive the support and planning required by the Local Authority

4.0 CURRENT PROFILE OF CHILDREN IN CARE

4.1 All figures date from October 2013. A total of 187 children were in care, which is an increase from 134 at October 2012. The population is as follows:

Male	81
Female	98
0 – 4 years	52
5 – 11 years	60
12 – 15 years	50
15 + years	17

4.2 The majority (118) are placed in foster care. Other placements include with family or friends who are approved as connected foster carers (14), or with parents under a Care Order (4); the others are in a mix of placements including residential care. 4 young people who are the most risk to themselves or others are placed in welfare secure units, and one young person has come into care under the LASPO act.

4.3 The rising population does present some challenges in ensuring that they have the right placement to meet their needs; the increase in older young people means their needs are many and complex and can present difficulties for foster carers, and increase placement breakdown, which is why we are prioritising recruiting foster carers for teenagers.

4.4 The aim of care is to achieve permanence for the child or young person in a timely way, either by returning home or to family, staying in one placement or via adoption. The average length of time in care was 2.6 years which is a reduction from 4.07 previously. For placement stability, where a child in care for longer than 2.5 years has been in the same placement for 2 years or longer, of 89% of children have been in stable placements which is a significant increase from 78% in the previous 2 years.

5. CARE LEAVERS

5.1 We currently have 67 young people who are care leavers. Dependant on

their age when they entered care and the length of time they have been in care, we have varying duties to support them under the Leaving Care Act (2000). This varies from providing them with a pathway assessment and plan which supports them leaving care, financial support in moving into independent living, support with employment, education or training and living in suitable accommodation.

6. RECENT ACTIVITIES

6.1 Council has recently endorsed its Pledge to Children in Care; a charter for Care Leavers has also been approved. Both of these outline the Council's commitment to our children and young people. A "Moving On" booklet is

being produced for young people before they leave care so they are aware of duties towards them and the support available; a Care Leavers Action Plan has developed with our partners to increase the focus on group.

6.2 The Virtual Head Teacher has recently presented her annual report which outlines the progress that child in care are making in terms of their education and outcomes. It is suggested that this report is presented separately to members so they can scrutinise the educational outcomes.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

7.1 Children and Young People in Halton

This service is critically in ensuring that children and young people are safeguarded in Halton.

7.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Children in Care may have been adversely affected by their previous care and may need additional support in their education and being prepared for employment education or training.

7.3 A Healthy Halton

Children in Care may have been adversely affected in terms of their physical, emotional and mental health by their experiences before care and may require additional support and targeted access to specialist services

7.4 A Safer Halton

Children in Care dependant on their age and experiences prior to coming into care may have issues with drugs, alcohol, anti-social behaviour, offending behaviour and their vulnerability may expose them to increased risk of harm and exploitation. Stable and experienced care and support

from partner agencies is necessary to manage risks to the children and young people themselves and the wider community.

7.5 Environment and Regeneration in Halton

There are no immediate implications

8. RISK ANALYSIS

The service provides critical intervention and support for children who may be or are at risk of significant harm in line with statutory guidance and legislation. Failure to ensure the service has appropriate staffing and management, and that front-line staff have the necessary capacity to meet the needs of children would mean that children may be exposed to unnecessary risk, and would lead to a negative inspection outcome from the regulator Ofsted.

9. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

The service has in place support services for families where there are equality and diversity needs, to ensure they are fully involved in their assessment and plans, with support from advocacy of required.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Increasing numbers of children in care will lead to rising costs for placements, both for foster care and residential placements which will cause budget pressures.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None under the meaning of the Act.