

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

DATE: 22 February 2016

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People & Economy

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People & Families

SUBJECT: Children & Families

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide members with a profile of the children in care population.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

i) Members note the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Children in Care Partnership Board is chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Families. This is a multi-agency group with representation from the Children in Care Council which oversees the quality of service and service development for children in care.

3.2 Attached to this report is the profile information at Qtr 3 2015/16 for Children in Care (Appendix 1).

3.3 Key points to note are:

- The Children in Care population has stabilised (up to date figure will be provided verbally at the meeting).
- The age profile for children entering care has increased in the 0-4 age range which mean we are recognising harm earlier and being proactive in supporting those children
- The majority of children in care are in care because of legal proceedings (Interim Care Orders and Full Care Orders). This means that the threshold for significant harm has been met and the local authority shares parental responsibility and is a corporate parent for these children
- There are low numbers who have a legal status of s20 which is a child is in care by a voluntary agreement. The majority of these children are teenagers who are in care because of abuse or neglect, family breakdown or because they are homeless and because of their vulnerability they are assessed as children in need

- There has been an increase in the numbers of children who are placed for adoption
- The majority of children are placed in foster care. The remainder are older children who tend to have complex needs and are either in residential care or are preparing to leave care and are in semi-supported accommodation.
- Children can be placed with parents under an interim or full care order. These are cases where there is a high degree of risk and parental responsibility needs to remain shared.

3.4 An Annual Report on the health of children in care is provided by Bridgewater Community Health Care Trust. In the most recent report (November 2015 Appendix 2) the following are key points to note:

- On admission to care 35% had unmet health needs (dental, continence, sexual health and outstanding immunisations)
- In relation to emotional health and wellbeing, 47% of children in care had problems with emotional health and well-being (which is below the NICE average of 60% of children in care should be expected to have emotional health and wellbeing needs)
- The Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a validated brief behavioural screening questionnaire for 4-17 year olds. The SDQ provides a potential score of 40. Scores of 13 or over may warrant further assessment and intervention.
- The average score for Halton's children in care was 13 which is considered borderline. We have invested in our service for children in care for those with emotional health and wellbeing needs and currently 36 children and young people are supported by this service.

3.5 Children in care who at risk of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and/or who go missing or absent, or who are absent without authorisation are monitored on a weekly basis. At the time of writing this report:

- 8 children in care had a reported missing episode in the previous week; 1 had 2 missing episodes.
- Overall, there are 11 Halton children in care who have been screened as at risk of CSE and this is managed in partnership with all agencies
- The average age profile for children in care who go missing tend to be from age 15 upwards.

3.6 The local authority has a duty to support children who leave care until they are 21 (25 if they have additional needs). The Qtr 3 profile information is attached for information (Appendix 3). Key points to note:

- There are 69 care leavers. The classifications relate to the length of time they were in care before their 16th birthday with different legal duties dependant on their status.
- With the exception of 2, all others are in touch with the children in care and care leavers team and their pathway advisors
- 96% are recorded as being in suitable accommodation
- 75% of Care Leavers are recorded as in Education, Employment or Training with a reduction in NEET numbers

4.1 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.2 The Local Authority shares parental responsibility for children in care and as a corporate parent we should actively promote and ensure they are able to meet their full potential.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 We aim to meet the needs of the majority of children and young people in foster care. However, for older children who may have complex and challenging needs a foster placement is sometimes not able to meet their needs resulting in more expensive residential provision. The foster care recruitment strategy is targeting recruiting foster carers for teenagers to ensure their needs can be met locally and in a family environment.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

This is outlined in the report.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Children will be supported to reach their potential in all areas

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Children's health needs are addressed and supported to help them reach their potential.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Children affected by domestic violence, anti-social behaviour and criminal behaviour are supported to meet their needs.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 It is essential to manage and prevent children coming into care where this is safe to do so. The early intervention strategic board is reshaping services at the early intervention level of need to ensure children and families are supported as early as possible to prevent needs increasing.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The service must be aware of and be able to demonstrate that it responds effectively to equality and diversity needs.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.