

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

DATE: 30 January 2017

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

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 educational outcomes and the use of Pupil Premium is noted alongside this report.

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 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 CHILDREN IN CARE

- 4.1 Please see attached performance report for more detail (Appendix 1). This report is prepared on a quarterly basis and covers children in care, care leavers and adoption and is for Qtr 2 June –September 2016. The next report is due in mid-February for Qtr 3 but current data is referred to in this report and will be updated verbally at the meeting.
- 4.2 Numbers of children in care in Halton have increased over the last 3 years (1.1). (251 31 December 2016). All in the North West and our statistical neighbours have seen an increase in children in care but in Halton this has been at a sharper and higher level. In 2013 and 2014, the increase was largely due to teenagers entering care but since 2015, this has now reduced with the younger age group under 11 being the primary age group entering care. This reflects improved understanding and recognition by all partners of the long-term impact of neglect in particular and the impact of children living with carers who are experiencing domestic violence, and who may also be affected by substance misuse issues or mental health needs. Currently, 22% of all new cases opening to social care are related to neglect, with a further 20% relating to domestic abuse and physical abuse. At the end of assessment, 60% had domestic abuse as a factor and parental mental health issues were a factor in a third of assessments.
- 4.3 The majority of children are cared for in foster placements (1.3). Some children have very complex needs arising from their experiences at home which mean that foster care is not able to meet provide the level of support and management of risk that they require, and there has been an increase in children placed in residential care where they can receive higher levels of care and specific work can be undertaken with them in response to their individual needs. 2 children are currently in secure placements; 1 in a welfare secure placement because of the level of risk they were experiencing and 1 under the LAPSO Act.
- 4.4 Placement with parents have increased. This is where the local authority has a care order but the child remains living at home with their parents. This has increased since the introduction of the Public Law Outline (PLO) which sets a time limit for the conclusion of care proceedings of 26 weeks. As a result, the courts and CAFCASS guardians are more reluctant to endorse a plan for the child remaining at home without a care order ensuring the local authority continues to share parental responsibility. This is an issue that local authorities continue to raise with the judiciary and with CAFCASS as this should be for the cases with the highest level of risk but this is not always the case.
- 4.5 There is no pattern or trend with children entering care (1.5); re-entrants to care are also monitored as if a child returns to care, then this should raise

questions about how effective the plan for discharge and ongoing support has been. Halton's number remain low for this indicator (1.6).

- 4.6 Placement stability remains strong, despite the pressure in the system with the numbers of children in care (1.10, 1.11). Independent Reviewing Managers chair all reviews for children in care, and the performance report reflects their role in particular with the amount of contact they have with a child outside of the review process (1.13) and the level of scrutiny and challenge which they undertake in raising issues about the plan and outcomes for children in care (1.14).
- 4.7 Children leave care in line with their plan. By the end of December 2016, 68 children had left care from 1 April. Of these, 13 left because they were placed for adoption, 14 under a Special Guardianship Order to live with a family member, 1 under a Child Arrangement Order to live with a family member, 9 because of their age and becoming a care leaver and the remaining children returned home to live with either a parent or both parents.
- 4.8 Children in Care can be more vulnerable to being exposed to criminal activities. At the end of Qtr 2, 11 children in care were known to the youth offending service, 2 of whom have re-offended. 2 young people are currently serving custodial sentences and 1 young person is currently in remand under LAPSO (refer para 3.3).
- 4.9 We also closely monitor children in care as a vulnerable group and their missing reports because as a group they are more vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. In the year to date, 40 children in care have been reported as missing – the vast majority because they have failed to return on time to their placement and for periods of less than 4 hours. There are some young people who go missing on a regular basis; the majority of these are young people aged 16/17 who live in semi-supported accommodation. Currently, there are 4 young people in care who have been assessed as at risk of child sexual exploitation whose plans are closely overseen by senior managers.

5. CARE LEAVERS

- 5.1 Care leaver numbers are increasing which is expected given the number of teenagers aged 14plus who were accommodated in 2013/14 and currently stands at 73. We are in touch with 99% of our care leavers, and 92% of them are in suitable accommodation. 75% at the end of Qtr 2 were in Education, Training or Employment which is a significant increase, particularly for those in full-time employment. (2.1-2.5).
- 5.2 The government has announced its intention in the Children and Social Work Bill, currently before Parliament to raise the age for care leaver support from 21 to 25 and a number of recommendations about improving support with housing, employment and training.

6. HEALTH

- 6.1 A Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is completed for all children in care in order to identify areas where they need support with their emotional health and well-being. All children who enter care have an initial health medical in the first 28 days to identify any immediate health needs that they may have.
- 6.2 The Children in Care Nurse scores all the SDQs completed and then tracks the recommendations and actions. As at the end of December, 100% of children in care had a completed SDQ and the average score was 13, which indicates that additional support is required. An Annual Health report for children in care is produced, and this was completed by June 17.
- 6.3 Barnados is commissioned to provide therapeutic support and intervention for children in care and are currently working with 17 children and young people. A number of young people are also open to CAMHS for more specialist services.
- 6.4 Children and Care Leavers access a number of social and leisure activities which are reviewed as part of their care plan on a regular basis. Children have used the leisure pass to go to swimming and gym classes, but also a range of activities in the community such as boxing, majorettes, scouts, brownies, and after school activities.

7. RECENT ACTIVITIES

- 7.1 The Children in Care Council have reviewed the Pledge for children in care and also the information booklets for children on admission to care. Care Leavers have reviewed and re-issued the information booklet for care leavers.
- 7.2 The Children in Care Council have also presented to the Corporate Parent Partnership Board a proposal for a Corporate Parenting Pledge and for corporate parents to be more visible and vocal in advocating for children in care. This was endorsed by the Corporate Parent Partnership Board and will be formally launched in the spring under the banner "Proud to be a Corporate Parent."
- 7.3 In response to the SDQ average, a monthly multi-agency panel for the emotional health and well-being of children in care has been established from January 17. This panel consists of social care, Barnados, CAMHS, Young Addaction and the CIC nurse and will review children who require additional support and advise on the appropriate response/agency to undertake the work. It will also monitor the outcomes for those children and will report to the Corporate Parenting Partnership Board.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

8.1 Children & Young People in Halton

As corporate parents, we have a duty to ensure children in our care are supported to achieve to their best of their ability with their education, physical and emotional health and succeed as adults.

8.2 Employment, Learning and Skills

As corporate parents, we have a duty to support and advocate for our children in care and care leavers to have access to and participate in a full range of education, training and employment opportunities.

8.3 A Healthy Halton

Children in Care may have experienced a number of issues before care that may impact long-term on their emotional health and well-being which need appropriate support and services in response. If these issues are not addressed, they may act as a barrier to successful outcomes in education and employment and later adult life.

8.4 A Safer Halton

Stable placements and support reduce the risk of children in care becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and crime and also reduce their vulnerability to exploitation.

8.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified

9.0 RISK ANALYSIS

9.1 We have a statutory duty for children in care and care leavers under the Children Act 1989. As corporate parents, our responsibility is to ensure that children are cared for well in the most appropriate placement with the right support for their needs. However, the number of children in care can exceed our in house capacity for fostering and result in increased financial costs which represents a financial risk to the local authority in the context of the current budget.

10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

10.1 Children in Care will have a range of issues because of their identity and their needs which require an appropriate response and access to a range of specific services as required.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Appendix 1 – Journey of the Child report Children in Care April 16- September 16	Municipal Building, Widnes	Tracey Coffey 0151 511 6790