

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

DATE: 11 June 2018

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, People

PORTFOLIO: Children, Education and Social Care

SUBJECT: Children In Care - Placements

WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report is share with members the Children in Care Scorecard for the end of year on 31 March 2018 with a particular focus on children's placements

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Members note the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The categories for Children's placements are set by the Department for Education.

3.2 The majority of children in care are in foster placements. These are a mix of in-house foster placements (54% of the foster care population) and external independent foster placements (IFAs). We have 76 fostering households with Halton and currently we have 19 households at various stages of the assessment process. We have recently launched a collaboration with Warrington, Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester to improve the marketing, recruitment and assessment of foster carers via a co-ordinated recruitment and marketing hub. This launched in April 18 and we have already seen an increase in enquiries to Halton to be assessed as foster carers.

3.3 We have been revising our training and support to foster carers to develop their skills and abilities to care for children with more complex and challenging behaviour as a result of attachment difficulties and trauma by implementing SafeBase and attachment training and also revising the support and supervision framework for supervising social workers so foster carers receive increased support.

3.4 This is important as by ensuring we have sufficient foster carers in Halton it means children can be placed in borough and we can better match children to foster carers. In particular, we need foster carers who can care for larger sibling groups, teenagers and children with disabilities as these are the

groups of children who we either have to commission an IFA placement or a residential placement.

- 3.4 We have 41 children in a residential placement. The majority are placed within 20 miles of Halton, and are teenagers. We do have 7 children under 13 placed in residential; these are children who struggled with foster placements and experienced a number of placement breakdowns and have needed a period of stable residential care to work with them on the impact of the harm they have experienced.
- 3.5 We had 2 young people in welfare secure. These are young people who were exposed to a high level of risk to themselves or others and were formally detained following an application to court. One of these young people has now moved on to an intensive therapeutic residential setting.
- 3.6 We had 6 children placed with their adopters before an adoption order is made, and we currently have 25 with a placement order with a plan for adoption for whom we are still seeking families. We are reviewing a number of these currently as we have not been able to find adopters for them, and their plan is likely to change to long-term foster care.
- 3.7 32 children are placed with parents under a care order. This is for various reasons, where parents have made progress in meeting the needs of the their child but this progress is very recent, or there are significant risk factors which means that the local authority needs to share parental responsibility as there is a high likelihood that the children may be at risk of removal in the 12 months post the care order being made. A number of these parents however have been able to sustain and embed the necessary changes with support and there are plans to discharge 12 of these orders currently. We have also brought back 4 of these children into foster care.
- 3.8 24 children are placed with family and friends as foster carers. This means that the family member (or connected person) has put themselves forward to care for a member of their family and we have assessed and approved them as foster carers. The child's legal status is they have a care order; we do support and encourage family and friends carers to consider becoming special guardians but initially they may need support with managing contact arrangements with birth parents and also accessing speciality support for the child and training for themselves to be able to meet their needs.
- 3.9 Placement stability is a key measure for seeing how effectively we are meeting children's needs in their placement. This shows that we have reduced the number of children who move 3 or more times in 12 months since entering care and placement stability (remaining in the same placement for 2.5 years or longer) is at the England and NW average at 66% but not at the same higher level it was on the previous years.
- 3.10 We have refreshed our sufficiency strategy for placements and identified a number of actions as the capacity in fostering and residential services, both in-house and via agencies has been reducing. We will shortly be establishing

a placement team with dedicated roles to manage the identification and sourcing of independent fostering and residential placements, to build better relationships with the independent sector so they can match their recruitment activity to the needs identified for more complex children and young people and also to manage the contract process more robustly to ensure the identified outcomes for children, in particular for those children who are in residential for a specified period with a plan to step down into foster care.

- 3.11 We have been piloting the above approach for 3 months and so far out of 11 requests for residential care, we have diverted 7 of them either into our own in-house fostering or Independent Fostering Agency placements.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

4.1 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. Having access to a range of placements means that we can match children to a placement that meets their needs, reducing the risk of placement breakdown.

4.2 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.

4.3 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.

4.4 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.

4.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None identified.

5.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 5.1 Having fewer in house foster placements means that there is increased costs in the use of the independent fostering sector or residential placements. The

approaches outlined above are designed to improve our capacity and also manage the independent sector more robustly in terms of their ability to meet the needs of Halton children but in in their outcomes and costs.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

6.1 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.

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

None.