

Meeting of:	<b>Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>Tuesday, 17 March 2020</b>
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Children and Young People Services Annual Placement Review – Six Month Activity Update
Purpose of Report:	To provide a six-month activity update to the Annual Placement Review
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Head of Children and Young People Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Cabinet Member for Social Care and Health. Operational Manager, Accountancy.
Policy Framework:	This is a matter for Executive decision
<p><b>Executive Summary:</b></p> <p>The Annual Placement Review Report is presented yearly to Scrutiny Committee. The most recent report was presented in September 2019 and outlined the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2018/19 and the first quarter of 2019/20 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After and the priority actions for 2019/20.</p> <p>Where Children and Young People cannot be supported to remain within their immediate families and need to become looked after, the Council will seek to provide a range of suitable placements.</p> <p>Formal kinship fostering arrangements will always be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the Council to share Parental Responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protecting children.</p> <p>Where a child’s needs cannot be adequately met through kinship arrangements, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family, preferably with in-house foster carers and, if not, with Independent Fostering Agency carers wherever possible living within the Vale of Glamorgan.</p> <p>Residential care placements are made only where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person’s needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject to a Court Ordered Secure Remand.</p> <p>Following the presentation of the Annual Placement Review to Scrutiny Committee in September 2019, Committee Members requested a six-month activity update report.</p>	

## **Recommendations**

That Scrutiny Committee:

1. Considers the content of the report.
2. Receives a further Annual Placement Review report in September 2020.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

1. To provide Members with an opportunity to exercise oversight of this key statutory function.
2. To ensure Members are kept up-to-date with the relevant issues associated with children's placements and have a regular opportunity to review the utilisation of placements for children.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 Resource management in children's social care is inherently problematic. This is particularly the case in the area of children's placements. Local authorities face considerable challenges in managing their populations of Children Looked After, finding appropriate placements, meeting children's support needs and ensuring the most effective use of placement resources.
- 1.2 The number of children with complex needs is increasing and meeting these needs within appropriate placements places pressure on budgets. This cohort of children relates both to those with challenging and complex behaviour and to those with disabilities. Some individual placements are very expensive. The costs of placements for children with complex needs can exceed £270,000 a year. For Children and Young People Services, the continuing pressure on placements for Children Looked After is a high priority. This is the Division's most volatile budget and the one most dependent upon levels of service demand which are not within the Council's direct control
- 1.3 Given this context, it is essential that the Council has in place a coherent strategy for meeting the needs of children within allocated resources. Approved by Cabinet, the current Corporate Strategy for Children in Need of Care and Support 2019 to 2023 outlines how the Council will meet a number of key objectives, two of which relate directly to children looked after. These are:
  - To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
  - To give children clearly planned journeys through care which remain focused on achieving care plans, prevent drift, enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.

## **2. Key Issues for Consideration**

- 2.1** The Vale of Glamorgan's Children Looked After population has steadily increased over the last three years from 193 in March 2016 to 282 in March 2019, in line with national trends.
- 2.2** Being able to safely reduce this population has become a key priority for Children and Young People Services commencing with a particular focus on an increase in kinship placements and placements with parents, and efforts to increase the discharge of Care Orders and the use of Special Guardianship Orders. This safe reduction work stream coincided with the intention of the First Minister that all local authorities successfully reduce the overall Children Looked After population in Wales and the expectation that local authorities, under a series of activity headings, commit to achieving levels of reduction within their local authority boundaries over the next three years, commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019.
- 2.3** In the Vale of Glamorgan this has involved efforts to both reduce the numbers of children becoming Looked After by supporting sustainable family arrangements, and increasing the numbers of children who have been Looked After, returning to their families. Where the Council is involved with families who may require care proceedings, we strive to conclude these proceedings with an alternative order to a Care Order wherever possible.
- 2.4** These expectations commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 and local authorities were asked to report on their reduction activity during the first six months of the year. At the end of quarter two, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019, the Vale of Glamorgan was one of only seven Local Authorities who had reduced their Children Looked After population and had the second highest reduction. We had reduced our numbers of Looked After Children by 14 with only Swansea reducing more, with a reduction of 20. It is expected that we will be asked to report again to Welsh Government at the end of March 2020.
- 2.5** With regard to our current performance, the following summarises our areas of activity for the first three quarters of the year, to 30<sup>th</sup> December 2019 and our intended activity.
- Care Orders discharged for 7 children placed with parents against a full year intention of 5. Also progressing for this year, a further 5.
  - Care Orders discharged for 5 children placed with kin against a full year intention of 6. Also progressing this year, a further 5.
  - Applications for Special Guardianship Orders in progress for 2 children placed with independent fostering agency carers against a full year intention of 2. Also progressing for this year, a Special Guardianship Order for 1 child placed with a mainstream foster carer.
  - An alternative Order to a Care Order achieved for 10 children against a full year intention of 5, with strong indications of our ability to positively approach these discussions within care proceedings and to ensure robust planning that gains the support of the Children's Guardian and the Court.
  - Adoption Orders granted for 7 children placed for adoption against a full year intention of 8, with the 8<sup>th</sup> on track for this year.

- Admissions to care prevented for 36 children through the provision of alternative support packages and an additional 10 children stepped down from pre proceedings. Both have exceeded our full year intentions and demonstrate a strength-based approach to working with families.

**2.6** In the context of a population that was forecast to further increase this year, the above activity is exceptionally positive. It doesn't of course represent a local authority that does not receive children into care and this activity has continued where it is necessary to safeguard a child.

As of the 6<sup>th</sup> January 2020, our Looked After Children population had reduced to **257**. Of these:

**127** are female

**130** are male

The distribution of the age of Children Looked After is:

**0 – 5 years = 71**

**6 – 10 years = 68**

**11 – 15 years = 77**

**16 – 17 years = 41**

The legal status of Children Looked After are:

Care Order – **208**

Interim Care Order – **14**

Placement Order – **24**

Section 76 – **11**

Secure Order – **0**

Remand – **0**

Children Looked After are placed with:

**69** are placed in mainstream foster placements

**43** are placed in independent fostering agency placements

**65** are placed in kinship placements

**53** are placed with parents

**13** are placed in residential placements (4 residential schools; 9 children's homes)

**0** placed in a secure unit

**0** placed in a YOI on remand

1 is placed in a parent and children assessment centre

3 are placed in independent living projects

10 are placed for adoption

### **3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?**

- 3.1** It is essential we recognise the importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard our ability to also meet long term needs. Children Looked After have their short and long term needs regularly reviewed through statutory Children Looked After reviews. Permanency plans for children are in place by the second Children Looked After Review.
- 3.2** Children and Young People Services work to the four integrated objectives of the Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support namely:
- To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to be looked after, by focusing on services which intervene early and prevent greater need arising across all provision.
  - To manage risk confidently and provide support at the 'edge of care' by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by supporting sustainable family arrangements within their wider family networks.
  - To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements which meet the diverse range of children's needs.
  - To jointly develop with children and young people a plan for the next stages of their lives which remains focused on achieving care and support plans, prevents drift, enables them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, to have stable placements and to exit the care system positively.
- 3.3** The Council and its partners are committed to involving those in receipt of its services and recognising protected characteristics. In the context of children and young people, this means involving children, young people, their families, their carers and their support networks in co-producing plans that can effectively meet identified needs. It means taking a strength-based approach that recognises the resources that exist within families themselves and empowering families to support themselves and to achieve change where this is necessary. It also means involving children and families in decision making, including the need to transparently articulate risks that may prevent the achievement of goals that the child or family are hoping for, and where possible managing risks confidently.
- 3.4** Acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse is central to the work of Children and Young People Services and is the first of our four objectives within the Corporate Strategy. The objective recognises the significance of us being able to collectively provide the right services at the right time and prevent escalation of need.

## **4. Resources and Legal Considerations**

### **Financial**

- 4.1** The Social Services Directorate is committed to achieving a balanced budget. The savings expectations associated with reducing spend on children's placements required £150k in cashable savings each year between 2014/15 and 2016/17 and this was achieved in those previous years. For 2018/19, the overall external placement budget for CLA was overspent by £957k. This is an increase on the previous year where in 2017/18 the budget was overspent by £556k. This reflects the increasing costs of residential placements and the complexity of young people placed in residential placements, alongside a small increase in the number of young people placed in residential placements. During 2018/19 Welsh Government provided a one-off in year grant of £513k which was allocated to the children's placement budget, therefore resulting in the final position for that year being an overspend of £444k. The budget for 2019/20 was increased by £500k to allow for growth and in addition a £500k one off Welsh Government grant was allocated to this budget. After both increases to the 2019/20 budget and the efforts of the service to reduce spend in the context of increasing demand, as at the end of January 2020, we are projecting a £585k overspend by the end of the financial year.

### **Employment**

- 4.2** There are no employment implications associated with this report.

### **Legal (Including Equalities)**

- 4.3** There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

## **5. Background Papers**

Annual Placement Review 2018/19