



## CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

FRIDAY, 27 JULY 2018

10.00 AM COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNTY HALL, LEWES

MEMBERSHIP - Councillors Charles Clark, Chris Dowling, Kathryn Field, Jim Sheppard, Colin Swansborough, Sylvia Tidy and Francis Whetstone

### A G E N D A

- 1 Election of Chair
- 2 Minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2018 (*Pages 3 - 6*)
- 3 Apologies for absence
- 4 Disclosure of Interests  
Disclosure by all members present of personal interests in matters on the agenda, the nature of any interest and whether the member regards the interest as prejudicial under the terms of the Code of Conduct.
- 5 Urgent items  
Notification of items which the Chair considers to be urgent and proposes to take at the end of the appropriate part of the agenda. Any members who wish to raise urgent items are asked, wherever possible, to notify the Chair before the start of the meeting. In so doing, they must state the special circumstances which they consider justify the matter being considered urgently.
- 6 Exclusion of Press and Public  
To consider excluding the public and press from the meeting for the next two agenda items on the grounds that if the public and press were present there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as specified in Category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.
- 7 Children's Home Regulations 2015, Regulation 44: Inspection reports for the period March 2018 - April 2018
  - 7a Acorns at Dorset Road (*Pages 7 - 48*)
  - 7b Brodrick House (*Pages 49 - 104*)
  - 7c Hazel Lodge (*Pages 105 - 142*)
  - 7d Homefield Cottage (*Pages 143 - 192*)
  - 7e Lansdowne Secure Unit (*Pages 193 - 240*)
  - 7f The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive (*Pages 241 - 300*)
- 8 Any other exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.
- 9 Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2017/18 (*Pages 301 - 326*)

Report by the Director of Children's Services.

- 10 Annual progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service (*Pages 327 - 336*)  
Report by the Director of Children's Services.
- 11 Annual progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service. (*Pages 337 - 342*)  
Report by the Director of Children's Services.
- 12 Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics (*Pages 343 - 346*)  
Report by Director of Children's Services.
- 13 Any other non-exempt items considered urgent by the Chair.

PHILIP BAKER  
Assistant Chief Executive  
County Hall, St Anne's Crescent  
LEWES BN7 1UE

19 July 2018

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## CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Corporate Parenting Panel held at Committee Room - County Hall, Lewes on 27 April 2018.

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PRESENT Councillors Charles Clark, Kathryn Field, Jim Sheppard, Sylvia Tidy and Francis Whetstone

ALSO PRESENT Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care  
Teresa Lavelle-Hill, Joint Head LAC Services  
Janet Fairless – Registered Manager – Homefield Cottage  
Ian Williams – RHM Hazel Lodge  
Scott Lipa – RHM Brodrick House  
Helen Simmons - RHM Lansdowne Secure Unit  
Charlotte De Retuerto – RHM The Bungalow  
Shirin White – RHM Acorns, at Dorset Road  
Dr Susan Leather – Designated Doctor for LAC  
Lisa Schrevel – Operations Manager – Housing and Accommodation

### 29 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 JANUARY 2018.

29.1 RESOLVED to agree as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2018.

### 30 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

30.1 Apologies were received from Councillor's Colin Swansborough and Chris Dowling. It was noted that Councillor Colin Belsey was substituting for Councillor Dowling.

### 31 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

31.1 Councillor Belsey declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in item 9 (see minute 36) on the agenda. Councillor Belsey is a trustee of the YMCA, Eastbourne and Wealden.

### 32 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

32.1 The Panel agreed to exclude the press and public for the next three agenda items on the basis that if they were present there would be disclosure to them of information considered to be exempt by virtue of Category 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), namely information relating to any individual.

### 33 OFSTED INSPECTION REPORTS FOR THE FOLLOWING HOMEFIELD COTTAGE AND LANSDOWNE SECURE UNIT.

33.1 The Panel considered reports received from Ofsted on the following services:  
(a) Homefield Cottage; and

(b) Lansdowne Secure Unit.

33.2 The Panel discussed the use of sanctions and their effectiveness in changing a child's behaviour; as well as the way in which records of restraint are documented.

33.3 The Panel welcomed the positive outcomes of the Ofsted reports and praised the hard work of the staff.

26.3 RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the reports; and
- 2) request that the Panel are provided with the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) report of Lansdowne Secure Unit.

#### 34 CHILDREN'S HOME REGULATIONS 2015, REGULATION 44: INSPECTION REPORTS FOR THE PERIOD DECEMBER 2017 TO FEBRUARY 2018.

34.1 The Panel considered Regulation 44 Reports for the period December 2017 to February 2018 for the following Children's Homes:

- (a) Acorns at Dorset Road
- (b) Brodrick House
- (c) Hazel Lodge
- (d) Homefield Cottage
- (e) Lansdowne Secure Unit
- (f) The Bungalow, Sorrel Drive

34.2 Each Registered Homes Manager gave an oral update on activity at the home covering the period since the last Panel meeting.

34.3 The Panel discussed the challenging behaviours faced by some of the young people in the homes and how this is dealt with through the Youth Offending Team and Police Community Support Officers. The Panel were advised that local police officers have been to the homes on occasions to give talks to the young people concerning safety and risk.

34.4 The Panel praised the hard work of the staff and RHMs within each of the homes.

34.5 RESOLVED to note the reports.

#### 35 VULNERABLE YOUNG PEOPLE'S HOUSING AND ACCOMMODATION PROJECT

35.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which presented an update on the Vulnerable Young People's Housing and Accommodation Project. This project was launched in June 2017, with an aim to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people and care leavers by moving away from the ongoing use of Bed and Breakfast (B&B) accommodation.

35.2 The Panel were advised that since launching the project no care leavers under 18 years old have been placed in B&B accommodation, there has also been a 95% reduction in the number of 16/17 year old homeless young people using B&Bs in 2017/18 as compared to 2016/17 and duration has also been reduced. This has been achieved through the use of 'crash pads', increased supported lodgings providers and supported housing options. The department is also working to establish 'staying close' support in the locality of Registered Children's Homes which will focus on young people leaving residential care.

35.3 The Panel discussed the range of accommodation available to care leavers and considered how these options may be matched to an individual. Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care advised the Panel that the Department are working with District and Borough Councils to increase the types of provision available to care leavers and homeless young people which will meet their needs and support them with living independently.

35.4 The Panel praised the hard work of the Department and noted the success of the project.

35.5 RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

## 36 INTERIM REPORT ON HEALTH OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

36.1 The Panel received a report and presentation from Dr Susan Leather, the Designated Doctor for Looked After Children (LAC). The report identified the health needs of children and young people coming into care and the way in which these needs are managed. The Local Authority have a duty of care under section 22(3)(a) of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard and promote the welfare of LAC. This includes the physical, emotional and mental health of a young person.

36.2 The Panel were informed of the statutory guidance 'Promoting the health and well-being of looked after children' 2015 which sets out the major role the NHS has to ensure the effective delivery of health services to LAC. In April 2017, East Sussex Health Care Trust (ESHT) took on responsibility for providing LAC health services. In doing so, experienced Community Paediatricians have been employed to undertake initial health assessments and provide Named Doctor LAC and Designated Doctor LAC roles. The quality of reports and medical advice has been consistently good since ESHT started the contract.

36.3 The Panel discussed the launch of both a Strategic and an Operational Health of Looked After Children Forum and the benefits both of these forums bring to the service, namely improving and monitoring the health outcomes for LAC and young people. The Panel also discussed access to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) for Looked After Children and whether any priority was given to this vulnerable group of children.

36.4 RESOLVED to:           1) note the challenges with meeting statutory timescales and related requirements and the progress that is being made; and to note the increasingly collaborative work on improving pathways and communication between ESCC and ESHT Looked After Children's medical and nursing services; and  
  2) note the launch of a Strategic Health of Looked After Children's Forum and the further development of an Operational Health of Looked After Children's Forum.

## 37 LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN (LAC) STATISTICS

37.1 The Panel considered a report by the Director of Children's Services which provided an update on Looked After Children (LAC) statistics.

37.2 The Panel were informed by Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care about the rise in the number of East Sussex LAC since the last quarter. The Department are working to identify the underlying reasons for this rise and will report back to the Panel at its next meeting on 27 July 2018.

37.3 The Panel discussed the number of young people who were remanded to custody for serious criminal offences. These young people attain LAC status by virtue of being remanded which has therefore caused part of the rise in the number of LAC in East Sussex.

- 37.4 RESOLVED to:
- 1) note the contents of the report; and
  - 2) request that an update on the rise in LAC numbers is brought to the next meeting of the CPP.

The meeting ended at 11.55am.

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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**Report to:** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date of meeting:** 27 July 2017

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title:** Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report 2018/19

**Purpose:** To update the Corporate Parenting Panel on the contribution of Independent Reviewing Officers to Quality Assuring and Improving Services for Looked After Children

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**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report

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## **1 Background**

1.1 This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance.

## **2 Supporting information**

2.1 The report is attached as Appendix 1.

## **3. Recommendations**

3.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report.

**STUART GALLIMORE**  
**Director of Children's Services**

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### Local Members

All

### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Annual Independent Reviewing Officer Report April 2017 – March 2018

### Background documents

None

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## Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Annual Report April 2017 – March 2018

This Annual IRO report provides quantitative and qualitative evidence relating to the IRO Services in East Sussex as required by statutory guidance. The IRO Annual Report must be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel.

### Purpose of Service and Legal Context

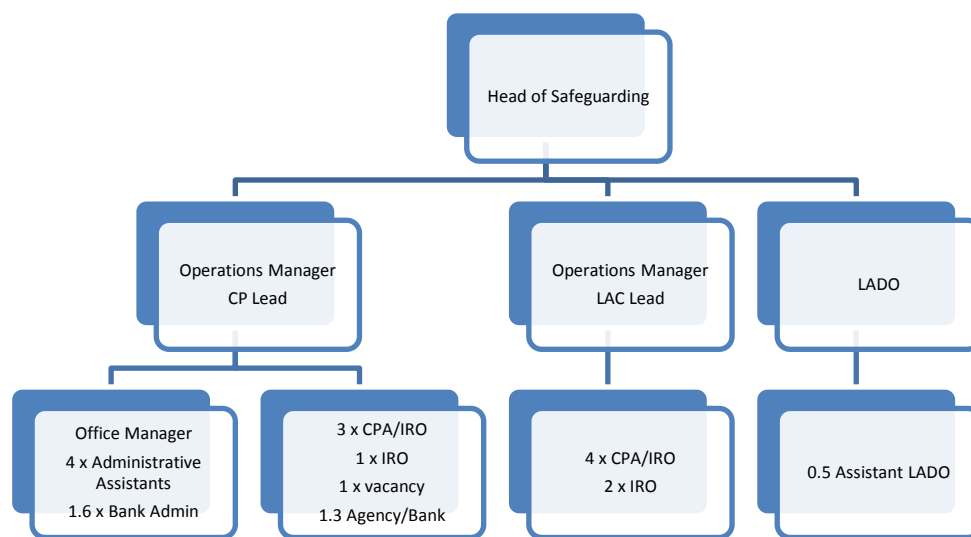
*It is vital that children's care plans are reviewed by individuals who are not directly involved in providing support to either the child or the foster carer. IROs need to be objective, to scrutinise and hold to account the individuals and agencies who are charged with meeting the needs of the child.*  
BASW 2018

1.1 The Independent Reviewing Officers' service is set within the framework of the updated IRO Handbook, linked to revised Care Planning Regulations and Guidance which were introduced in April 2011. The IRO has a key role in relation to the improvement of care planning for children who are looked after and for challenging drift and delay. The responsibility of the IRO has changed from the management of the review process to a wider overview of the case including regular monitoring and follow-up between reviews.

- 1.2 The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. IROs quality assure the care planning process for all Looked After Children (LAC) and ensure that their wishes and feelings are understood.
- 1.3 The statutory duties of the IRO are to:
- Monitor the Local Authority's performance of its functions in relation to the child's case
  - Participate in any review of the child's case
  - Ensure that any ascertained wishes and feelings of the child are given due consideration by the appropriate authority
  - Perform any other function as prescribed in the regulations
- 1.4 724 children have been accommodated by ESCC throughout or for some part of 2017/18 with 603 LAC at year end. Each of these were required to have a review within the first 28 days of becoming accommodated; a second review within 3 months and thereafter a review no less than every six months. In addition reviews should take place if there has been, or if there are proposed significant changes e.g. a change of placement, educational provision, legal status etc.

## Professional Profile of the CPA and IRO Service in East Sussex

- 2.1 The IRO/CPA Service sits within the Performance and Planning Directorate of Children's Services. The Head of Safeguarding is Douglas Sinclair, there are two Operations Managers; Sue McGlynn and Fiona Lewis who have the leads for Child Protection Advisors (CPA) / Safeguarding and for IROs / LAC respectively. The LADO also sits within the Safeguarding Unit; management cover for this role is provided by the two Operations Managers.



- 2.2 When the unit was created the CPA and IRO were separate specialisms; today the majority of staff exercise a dual role; this is common practice across much of England and Wales. There is a long standing debate regarding the benefits and disadvantages of combining the two functions; specifically there is a concern that it dilutes the independence of the IRO. The two roles are separated by different legislation and regulatory protocols; they each require a depth and breadth of expertise. Whilst this debate is kept under review; operating the combined role allows the Unit greater elasticity and ensures that staff retain a sense of the child's holistic experience. The separate management streams ensure a focus on legislative / practice developments and quality assurance of each function.

- 2.3 The Unit has a relatively diverse staff who bring a wealth of personal and professional skills and experiences to their role. The IRO/CPAs are all registered social workers with extensive experience. They have the confidence and knowledge to bring a critical perspective to the care plans for the most vulnerable children in our county.

- 2.4 At the end of March 2018 the Safeguarding Unit comprised 9.6 fte IROs /CPAs. This was the same

*The IRO should be an authoritative professional with at least equivalent status to an experienced children's social work team manager.  
IROH*

staff complement as at the start of 2016/17. During that year a reduction in caseloads had resulted in agreement to reduce Unit staffing by one IRO/CPA. However, in response to increasing demand throughout 2017/2018, resulting in consistently high caseloads, the Senior Management Team (SMT) gave agreement to the post being reinstated.

- 2.5 Higher than expected caseloads and the long-term absence of one member of staff meant that the Unit was reliant on bank / agency staff and a seconded locality manager throughout 2017/2018 of which 1.3 fte staff have continued short term into Quarter 1. Agreement was given in April 2018 to recruit a CPA/IRO to a twelve month contract; in addition two CPA/IROs agreed to temporarily increase their hours from 0.8 to fulltime to increase capacity within the Unit. This equated to an in-work staff complement (including agency) of 11.3 fte at the start of the new financial year.
- 2.6 The Unit made savings in the year 2017-2018 by a significant restructuring of the administrative functions within the team. This has had an impact on timeliness and tracking of the LAC review process as well as a reduction in administrative support for IROs. The Operations Manager for the IRO Service and the Office Manager are currently working with the Business Solutions to develop a more robust system.
- 2.7 IRO/CPAs have continued to undertake a number of different activities although this is currently constrained due to their increased caseloads:
- 1 IRO has a specialist lead for children with disabilities
  - IRO/CPAs have lead on specific training for the LSCB and newly qualified social workers.
  - 1 IRO/CPA chairs PREVENT meetings
  - 2 IROs lead on asylum seeking children and young people

## Key Messages

- As a Local Authority our IRO/CPAs represent a well-qualified, experienced and diverse resource. A key quality identified by carers, professionals and young people is for the IRO to be consistent and reliable. ESCC IROs are a relatively stable staff group with many children having had the same IRO throughout their journey through care.
- ESCC IRO/CPAs are knowledgeable and are able to share their expertise to ensure a consistent approach across county. IRO/CPAs offer critical oversight of cases to inform care planning and ensure best practice.
- Most reviews are held well within timescales, are flexible, fitted to the child's needs and are compliant with at least minimum standards.
- IRO/CPA's fulfil most of their expected functions to at least minimum standards and evidence areas of good practice. However high caseloads impact on the broader functions of the IRO role and do not allow for the level of scrutiny which the County should aspire to.
- IRO/CPAs have retained a sense of the importance of challenge and continue to exercise this role.



## Risks

### Capacity

- 3.1 Numbers of LAC have increased significantly throughout the year from 563 to 609. This has a corresponding impact on caseloads and the ability of the IRO/CPAs to undertake the breadth of scrutiny required of their role.
- 3.2 At the same time the service as a whole has faced challenges in recruitment and there is a national shortage of foster carers.
- 3.3 25% of children in East Sussex were living in poverty (25 351 children) in September 2017 (latest figures available) with the highest concentration in Hastings and Rother at 32.6%. Nationally, the twenty Local Authorities with

the highest levels of child poverty ranged between 36% and 53%, whilst the lowest were between 5% and 13%.<http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/poverty-in-your-area-2018/>. A corresponding study by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that 30% of children were living in poverty across the UK at the end of 2017.

- 3.4 There is a strong link between childhood poverty/deprivation and becoming looked after. Children from the most deprived wards in East Sussex are almost 5 times more likely to enter the Care system than those from the least deprived wards. (ARDPH 2017/2018). With childhood poverty predicted to increase by around 4% between 2017 and 2020 (Hood and Waters 2017) we should expect an associated rise in demand for placements.

### **Legal Challenge**

- 3.5 The Unit has seen an unprecedented increase in examination of the IRO/CPA's role in care planning and effective challenge. Across the year both within care proceedings and in cases which have been referred back to court for review the courts have required statements from the IRO/CPA in respect of the challenge they have brought to the case and their view on the legality/professional practice of the local authority. In some cases these statements have been prompted by CAFCASS. There is a concern that if this trend continues it will become expected practice which will impact on capacity and associated legal costs (IRO's independent legal advice is bought in from Brighton and Hove)
- 3.6 Legal challenge has focussed on delay in bringing cases to court, returning Placement Orders for revocation; changes to contact without recourse to court and failing to properly consult birth parents. The balance between strict adherence to a legal mandate and the softer workings of cases in children's best interests is a complex one.
- 3.7 It is of note that those cases challenged to date are not exceptional, in the event that the courts are critical of ESCC practice then it is likely that further claims will follow. There is potential for financial compensation in these and future cases.
- 3.8 This scrutiny of the role requires an increasingly forensic approach to practice by IRO/CPAs who are having to evidence challenge more formally than in the past. This has a potential impact on relationships with LAC and Locality teams and on workload.

### **Uncertainty**

- 3.9 The Fostering Stocktake was undertaken by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers and published in February 2018; this report makes a number of recommendations which, if acted upon will have significant implications for children within the care system. The report is controversial and would require legislative change in order to enact many of its key points. Those opposed argue that *'recommendations 4, 6, 7, 8 and 33 would greatly weaken the legal protections enjoyed by our country's most vulnerable children and young*

*people. They each advocate a dilution of legal safeguards; together they communicate a lack of understanding for the origins and importance to children's welfare of existing policy. We are doubtful that any of the legislative proposals would be compliant with the UK's human rights obligations, both within the Human Rights Act and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.'* Together for Children – Letter to the Minister March 2018.

- 3.10 However others believe that *'in principle it is right that LAs are given the flexibility to put in place arrangements that best suit local children, recognising that not all LAs would use such flexibilities. Many LAs would welcome the opportunity to reinvest potential savings from these areas into other parts of the business according to local needs and priorities.'* (ADCS Feb 2018)
- 3.11 The Government response was expected this spring; whatever the outcome of the negotiations that follow it is likely that there will be a period of uncertainty and change across the Care System. There is a potential impact on staff confidence, retention and development of the IRO service.

## Practicing Effectively

### Caseloads

- 4.1 It is recognised that IRO/CPAs have been operating with caseloads significantly in excess of those recommended in the IRO Handbook. The capacity required for the service was calculated based on forecasted numbers of LAC and CP plans. Although LAC numbers remain below IDACI, CP numbers have been higher than forecast.
- 4.2 The IRO Handbook recommends that Independent Reviewing Officers hold a maximum caseload of 60 children. ESCC caseloads have consistently been in excess of this and we are aware that we have higher caseloads than neighbouring authorities. The unit sets a target of a maximum caseload of 90 alongside consideration of how many meetings it is reasonable to expect an IRO/CPA to chair in a week. At the end of March 2018 caseloads averaged 102.
- 4.3 High caseloads impact on IRO/CPA's capacity to undertake the robust, nuanced monitoring of care plans that is their primary function. In addition to chairing reviews for LAC the IRO is required to maintain contact with the child between reviews and to track the case between reviews; to prevent drift and to challenge decisions/practice as appropriate. Higher than expected caseloads through 2017/18 have impacted on the fulfilment of these requirements; most IRO/CPAs report minimal contact with children between meetings, IRO/CPAs have continued to monitor cases and to raise challenge but most would acknowledge that their capacity to offer effective oversight across their caseloads is limited. The impact of this is that some children may

*1549 LAC Review Meetings for  
724 children were held in the  
year compared with:*

1529 in 16/17

1229 in 15/16

remain LAC for longer than is necessary due to a delay in permanency planning or rehabilitation. IROs do prioritise and have scrutiny of the most vulnerable and unstable children within the system.

### **Supervision and training**

- 4.4 Continuing Professional Development has long been a challenge for CPA/IROs due to workload/diary pressures and a shortage of relevant training. The Unit has devised an enhanced CPD programme to take advantage of existing opportunities, mandate a level of formal training and commission bespoke courses. It is anticipated that training will be offered in conjunction with LMG2 and LMG3 from Fostering and Adoption and Youth Justice services. The Social Work Education Team have responded positively to this initiative and are helping to build an inspiring programme.
- 4.5 CPD over the next year will focus on enhancing IRO/CPA's depth of knowledge in key LAC circumstances such as Remand Placements and Children with Disabilities. Enhanced legal training regarding s20 voluntary care placements, permanence and drift will also form part of the programme.

## **Knowing our Looked After Children**

### **Looked After population and the IRO service**

- 5.1 CLA numbers have been high across the year starting at 563 and hovering over the 600 mark throughout the year ending on 604. Numbers of LAC are higher than had been expected with more children and young people becoming accommodated than leaving.
- 5.2 LAC demographics have been impacted by trends in legislation particularly in terms of s20 guidance and addressing options for permanence with Special Guardianship Order (SGO) carers. Increasing numbers of UASC have also pushed up East Sussex LAC although to date these have been fewer than expected.
- 5.3 ESCC target for LAC in 2017/18 was 57.2 per 10000 population; this was up from 51.6 in the previous year. The actual figures for LAC were 57.2 and 53.3 per 10,000 child population respectively.
- 5.4 LAC admissions have remained relatively stable across the past three years although the final quarter of 2017/18 saw a marked increase in admissions. Children leaving care (discharges from care) have been significantly fewer in 2017/18 than in the previous two years.
- 5.5 The gender profile of LAC has remained consistent with previous years. The BME profile is slightly raised; this is in line with CP returns and will also reflect increased numbers of UASC.
- 5.6 Children with disabilities are a relatively small percentage of the LAC population but present very different demands in terms of planning to address

complex needs; often needing to be placed out of their local area, negotiating multi-agency packages of care and working in partnership with families generally without a discrete legal mandate. IRO/CPAs bring a wealth of knowledge to this area with one IRO in particular taking a lead for this vulnerable group.

March 2018	March 2017	March 2016
45% Female 55% Male 12.5% BME	44% Female 56% Male 11.9% BME	42% Female 58% Male 9.2% BME

## Legal Status & Care Applications

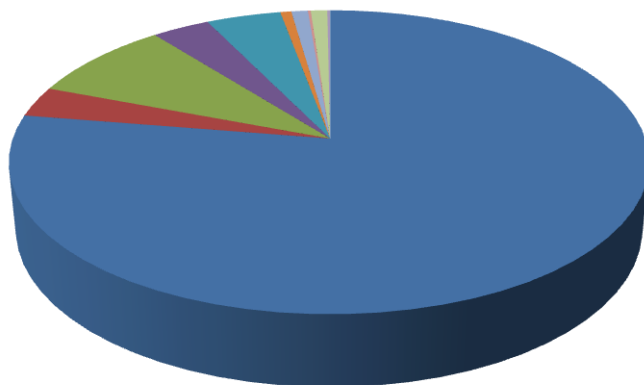
- 6.1 ESCC issued 91 sets of Care Applications in 2017/2018; this was down slightly on the preceding year (104). The National data set is not available for 2017/18; in 2016-17 East Sussex made applications at the rate of 9.1 per 10,000 population; this was slightly below the National figure of 12.5 but in line with statistical neighbours.
- 6.2 60% of Care Proceedings are concluded within the statutory 26 week target with all proceedings averaging 31 weeks. It is right that some proceedings will extend beyond the 26 week timetable in order to ensure that every option to support a child remaining within their family and to enable parents to make necessary changes is explored. However for most children a timely conclusion allows them to be safeguarded and for plans to be made for their longer term care.
- 6.3 The figures above are testament to the commitment and skill of staff in LAC and Locality teams when placing cases before the courts. The 26 week timetable presents significant challenges to all involved. The views of the IRO are required to inform the final order and should be included in the Final Care Plan; the scheduling of expert reports and statements can mean that IROs have a very limited window in which to consider all evidence and provide a thoughtful response. This will be a key area for development in 2018/19.

## Where Do Our Children Live Whilst We Are Caring For Them?

- 7.1 The majority of LAC in East Sussex are in foster care; for most children who are unable to live with birth family, foster care offers 'the next best thing'; the opportunity to live within a family and to experience enduring, individual relationships with the adults who care for them.
- 7.2 IRO/CPAs are key to monitoring these placements; they are generally the most senior professionals to spend time in the child's home with them and

their carers. The breadth of placements that IRO/CPAs visit over the years provides them with a unique perspective and depth of knowledge which underpins the review process.

*'a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity ... a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond' (DCSF, 2010).*



- 7.3 The majority of children in the care of East Sussex experience stable placements, however there is increasing pressure on placements which is resulting in a higher number of children experiencing less than optimum matches and subsequent placement moves. Across 2017-2018 an average of 10.4% of children experienced 3 or more placements within the preceding twelve months; this was up from 9% in 2016/17. 3% of children had experienced 5 or more placements, up from 2% in the preceding year.
- 7.4 IRO/CPAs should review any change of placement to ensure that moves are in the child's best interests. The team are increasingly using opportunities within our Management Information System, Liquid Logic (LCS) to scrutinise the matching process and bring challenge when appropriate

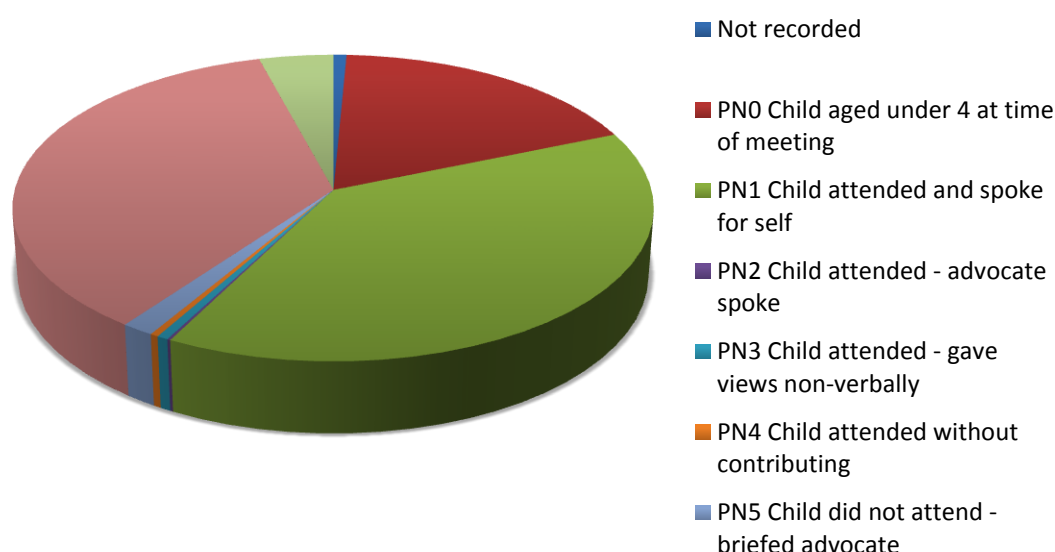
## Where Do Children Go When They Leave Our Care?

- 8.1 29 children were adopted through East Sussex last year. Adoptions are one of the most enduring and serious interventions that the Local Authority makes in a child's life. IRO/CPAs are key to this process, providing a bridge between birth, foster and adoptive carers. The IRO/CPA is often the one professional who has had involvement throughout the child's journey; they are skilled and experienced in managing these transitions.
- 8.2 50 children who were discharged from the care of East Sussex in 2017/18 returned to their families. This is a positive reflection on the work which is undertaken by LAC and Locality teams in cooperation with the IRO/CPAs.

- 8.3 19 children were made subject to a Special Guardianship Order with family/friends; 4 other children achieved permanence with existing foster carers through the same order.
- 8.4 21 young people moved out of Local Authority care into independence with formal support; 11 others moved to independent living with no formal support in place. 13 young people reached the age of eighteen but remained living with their existing carers under Staying Put arrangements. The intention of Staying Put arrangements is to ensure that young people can remain with their former foster carers until they are prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition akin to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown. (OICS – Staying Put in Foster Care - Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010, Planning Transition into Adulthood for Care Leavers Guidance and Government Staying Put Guidance (2013.) IRO/CPAs review each child's plan prior to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to ensure that young people have appropriate support in place for their move to independent living / adult services.
- 8.5 4 young people who had been remanded into care were subsequently sentenced to custody and so were no longer LAC. 4 Young People became the responsibility of another Local Authority and 1 18 year old UASC was discharged having been missing for a significant period.

## Participation

- 9.1 Participation in reviews has remained level with last year; approximately 40% of LAC contribute actively to their review; 4% of LAC did not attend or contribute their views in any way; this is up slightly on the year before.



- 9.2 Whilst the majority of LAC are aware of their right to an advocate, take up of this service is inconsistent. Only 2% of children who did not attend their review had briefed an advocate
- 9.3 The Children In Care Council (CICC) and others have commented that LAC Reviews have drifted away from being 'the child's meeting', becoming overly bureaucratic with too many people in attendance. Alternative approaches and a new name were requested. The Unit is working with the CICC, LAC Managers and Business Support to develop a creative document and to relaunch the approach to reviews in East Sussex.
- 9.4 LAC Reviews have a legal mandate and statutory functions which must not be lost within these changes. However a method has been arrived at which will allow meetings to be differently presented with less bureaucratic paperwork and adopting the CICC proposals regarding branding.
- 9.5 Children in care did not seem to be aware of their rights within the review process; not all children understood their right to determine who comes to their review; some did not have a copy of The Pledge and not all could name their IRO. These continue to be key challenges for the unit which will be addressed over the coming year.
- 9.6 A further challenge for the unit is to improve the level of communication with children between reviews. IRO/CPAs will generally meet with children immediately prior to their review but this is not an alternative to the more frequent visiting expected within guidance. Whilst some IROs meet some children between reviews this is well below target and must be improved as caseloads reduce.

*IROs ensure that children participate in their reviews and that their voices are heard. IROH*

### **Timeliness of Reviews**

- 10.1 It has become evident that an improved tracking system for Reviews is needed to ensure reliable data in this area. This issue is due in part to the way in which LCS operates with reviews sometimes flagging as late due to having taken place after the 'scheduled date' but in fact still within statutory timescales. There is also a problem whereby reviews do not show as having occurred until the closure of a number of LCS functions; this means that the data collected on any one day will identify a number of 'late' meetings which have in fact taken place within timescales but have not yet passed through the full administrative process. With around 30 LAC Reviews taking place each week and IROs experiencing substantial administrative backlogs the data error for this figure is significant.
- 10.2 Historically the Unit kept a spreadsheet of all ILAC / LAC reviews; this was abandoned under the Management of Change process as it was thought to be

redundant. Options for tracking LAC will be prioritised in 2018/19 following the outcome of the current LEAN review.

10.3 167 reviews were showing as late at the end of March 2018; 10% of all reviews up from 5% in 2016/17, however:

- 13 were a miscalculation and were not late
- 30 were less than a week late
- 34 were more than a week but less than a month late
- 21 appear to have been held more than a month late and will be followed up.
- 6 Children's legal status had not been updated so were included in error
- 63 were awaiting outcome only but had been held on time.

10.4 This data will be followed up with individual chairs and will inform the administrative review. Comparisons with previous years cannot be relied upon as the data was not subjected to the same analysis.

## **Quality of Care Planning**

### **Role of the IRO within Care Proceedings and beyond.**

11.1 There is an increased emphasis within Care Proceedings on the role of the IRO. This has been demonstrated nationally with a number of articles/calls for formalisation of the IRO contribution and experienced locally in an increased demand for court statements and evidence from IROs in individual cases. This enhanced scrutiny of the oversight applied by the IRO does demand a more forensic approach to issues resolution and escalation. The Unit has seen a number of requests for statements to Court from IROs in cases where there is drift and post-proceedings where there has been a delay in securing permanence or where Care Plans/Contact have been changed without recourse to the Court.

11.2 A recent article in Family Law Week called for a greater emphasis on the views of the IRO within Care Proceedings citing the December 2017 CAFCASS Practice Note. This article and others reflect a national picture where the views of the IRO are inconsistently and ineffectively represented in Court. Practice in ESCC would appear to be stronger in this respect with IROs reporting consistent communication with Guardians (CAFCASS) within Care Proceedings. Inclusion of the IRO's view in LA documentation continues to be problematic however, with timescales and workload pressures meaning that social workers often do not provide IROs with sufficient time to respond to statements and care plans. The National Association of Independent Reviewing Officers (NAIRO) and the South East Regional group have discussed development of a stand-alone form for IROs to better evidence their experience, qualifications and involvement in the case.

## **Ensuring Management oversight**

- 12.1** The revised statutory guidance states that operational social work managers must consider the decisions from LAC Reviews before they are finalised. This is due in part to the need to ensure any resource implications have been addressed. Once the decisions have been completed by the IRO/CPA the Locality/LAC Manager has 5 days to raise any queries or objections.
- 12.2** A screen of LAC reviews identified that the above process was not being routinely followed and new guidance is being issued to ensure that the service is compliant. In practice such queries are rare due to the high level of communication between social workers and IRO/CPAs but this remains an important balancing exercise within the review cycle.

## **Progress on Priorities set for 2017-2018**

### ***IROs have had an increased focus on monitoring and reviewing statutory requirements- e.g. Initial Health Assessments and Personal Education Plans***

- 13.1** IRO/CPAs monitor compliance with Health Assessments and Personal Education Plans at each review. There is an expectation that these documents are available for scrutiny prior to the meeting and that the IRO follows up on any recommendations or delay. These meetings are essential tools in the Local Authority's exercise of its Corporate Parenting. It is the role of the IRO to ensure that social workers understand the value of IHAs and PEPs, the importance of timely review and of progressing identified needs.
- 13.2** The Unit is working with Locality teams to streamline and track the Initial Health Assessment (IHA) process. There have been changes to the delivery of Health Assessments which will be important to embed across the Service. Whilst targets for achieving assessments within timescales have almost been met for 2017/18 there should be an ambition to drive up this expectation and to ensure more detailed examination of individual plans.
- 13.3** The Operations Manager with responsibility for IROs is part of the newly formed 'Health of LAC Strategic Forum' which aims to drive forward health outcomes for LAC. This is a multiagency forum bringing together processes, knowledge and innovation to streamline services and broaden take-up.
- 13.4** The IRO outcome document should have enabled a more robust focus on statutory requirements. However IROs are not routinely gathering / recording qualitative or quantitative data. This will be a performance priority for the coming year.

### ***IROs have continued to monitor Section 20 placements to address drift in planning***

- 13.3 IROs have continued to monitor children placed under s20 to ensure that such placements are legal and that drift is minimised. S20 challenge represents one of the most common areas of debate between IROs and Locality teams; it is an issue of national prominence with increasing scrutiny by the courts. See Appendix.

***Half-day workshops and audits focussed on diversity needs, pathway plans and sibling contact were planned for 2017/18.***

- 13.4 A detailed audit of all UASC's files was undertaken in conjunction with the Equalities and Participation Unit. See Appendix.
- 13.5 IROs have attended a range of diversity training and development activities to enhance knowledge, skills and practice within the Unit.
- 13.6 Audits in respect of sibling contact and pathway plans will be priority areas in 2018/19. ***Improved performance for reviews being held on time***
- 13.7 See above

***Reduced IRO / CPA caseload***

- 13.8 See above

***IROs have contributed to driving forward expectations in respect of Pathway Plans and the uptake of Passports to independence.***

- 13.9 The application and quality of Pathway Plans has significantly improved over the past two years; up from 74 plans in March 2016 to 230 plans as at March 2018. Young people's views are now much more clearly recorded and there is a stronger sense of their participation in planning for their future.

***Identifying good practice, problem resolution and escalation***

- 13.10 Providing independent challenge whilst recognising the pressure that social workers are operating under and not adding unfairly to their workload is not an easy task. Quantifying the challenge provided by IROs is therefore complicated by the extensive efforts most make to resolve issues informally in the first instance. This approach is in line with guidance in the IRO Handbook which recommends recourse to formal dispute resolution and escalation only after informal professional discussion has failed.
- 13.11 IRO/CPAs do however offer a high level of professional questioning and challenge to ensure that plans for children and young people are robust and timely. The unit operates a system of Issues Resolution and escalation; there is an increasing move to evidence the early stages of this process and to capture ongoing monitoring of the same.

13.12 No cases have been referred to CAFACSS during 2017/18.

### **Actions For The Year Ahead**

- Development of a standalone form for IRO contribution to Care Proceedings
- Embed and develop the CPD programme
- Enhance the profile of IROs through lead areas and facilitating training
- Ensure robust, consistent scrutiny of care plans with use of the issues resolution process where necessary
- Roll out of a more child friendly LAC Review process/document in line with statutory duties and the requests of the CICC.
- Driving up of standards within the unit to ensure that review decisions are circulated within timescales.
- Increased expectation that IROs will visit or at least communicate with all LAC aged 5 and over between reviews.
- IROs to routinely record the quality of Health Assessments and PEPs.
- Dental Health amongst LAC in ESCC has been identified as being a particular cause for concern. This will be a focus for improvement across the LAC Service in 2018/2019. IROs will contribute to this target through pre and post review monitoring / discussions with carers, social workers and young people.

*There are 70,000 children in the care of the state and they have faced more challenges in their short lives than most of us will ever know. Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England.*

## Appendix - Thematic Audit Summary

### Two LAC themed audits were undertaken relating to Section 20 Placements and Care Planning for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) in East Sussex.

#### Section 20 Placements

- 1.1 Children placed under s20 may be disadvantaged in terms of their legal protection or there not being an appropriate adult exercising parental responsibility for them. Families may be disadvantaged due to a lack of clarity regarding their legal rights.
- 1.2 However families do not always want to formalise s20 placements through court, particularly where the child is living with relatives. Social work teams can be reluctant to destabilise fragile relationships or to expose the child to immediate risk in a bid to achieve long term security. IROs are increasingly using their independent challenge to ensure that proper scrutiny and balance has been applied to s20 decision making. Evidencing this challenge is essential to reduce the possibility of misuse of the power.
- 1.3 An audit of all s20 placements as at 30/03/2018 was undertaken; in drilling down on the data those records where the child is an UASC or where they have been remanded to LA care were screened out due to their unique legal status.

#### Findings

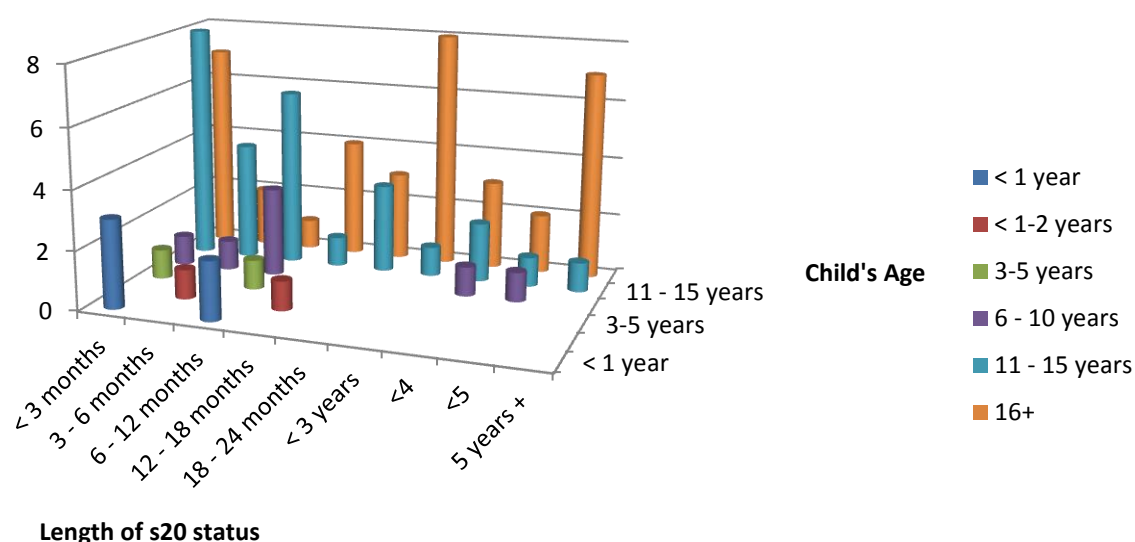
- 1.4 Delays updating the child's legal status mean that some children show as being subject to s20 when in fact this status has been superseded by other orders or they have left the care system.

#### CONTEXT

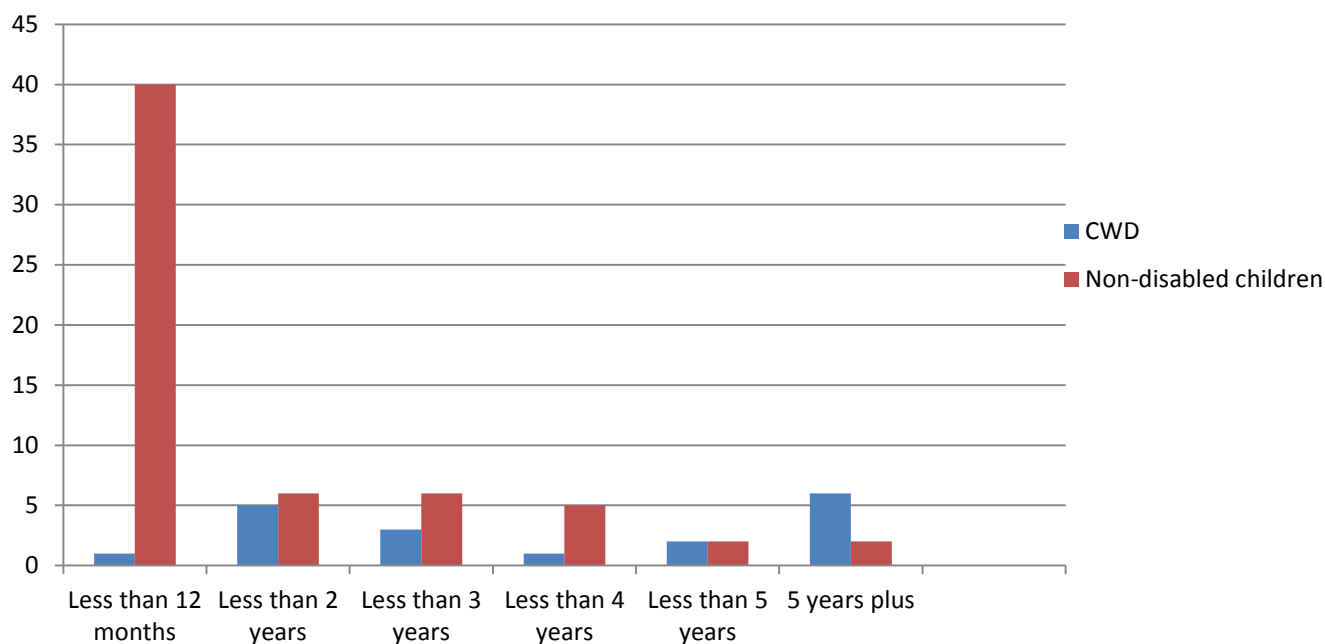
In 2015 the President of the Family Court Division stated:

*"The misuse and abuse of section 20 in this context is not just a matter of bad practice. It is wrong; it is a denial of the fundamental rights of both the parent and the child; it will no longer be tolerated; and it must stop. Judges will and must be alert to the problem and pro-active in putting an end to it. From now on, local authorities which use section 20 as a prelude to care proceedings for lengthy periods or which fail to follow the good practice I have identified, can expect to be subjected to probing questioning by the court. If the answers are not satisfactory, the local authority can expect stringent criticism and possible exposure to successful claims for damages. N (Children) (Adoption: Jurisdiction) [2015] at para 171 of HHJ Munby's judgment.*

- 1.5 S20 is most commonly used to provide short term respite or safeguarding with the majority of s20 placements lasting less than 12 months. NB this figure is artificially lower in this audit as it would be more affected by the annual 'churn' than the longer term placements.



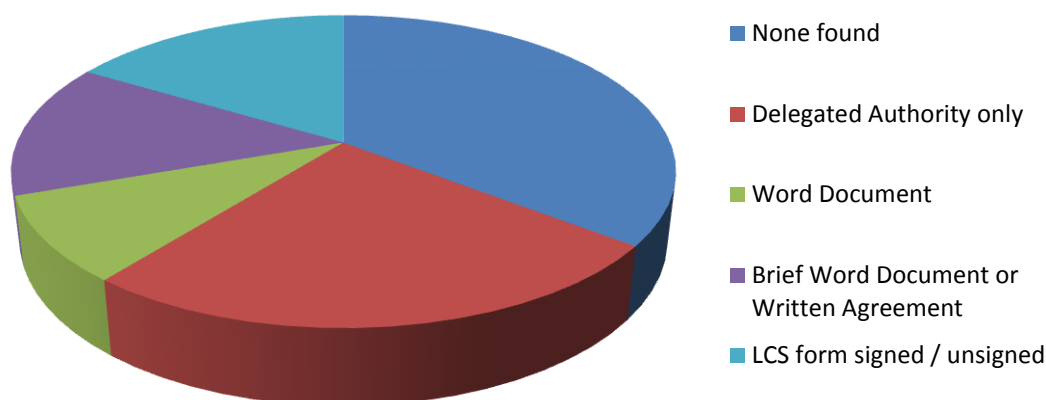
- 1.6 Children aged 16+ constitute the majority of s20 placements.
- 1.7 A relatively small number of children in East Sussex have been subject to s20 for more than 5 years; the majority of these are children with complex and enduring disability.
- 1.8 Children with disabilities represent approximately 25% of the s20 cohort (excluding UASC and remand). These children were least likely to have a signed s20 agreement at a level that complies with current guidance. However there was good evidence across these files of IRO oversight and in most cases there was good evidence of an effective working relationship with families.



**CWD / Non-Disabled S20 Split**

- 1.9 S20 regulation has evolved over the past 3 years. There has been clear guidance from CSCMT/ Legal Services; however social workers are not using a consistent process to record parental agreement to s20. Historically parents signed a Placement Agreement which did not set out their legal rights; some children have remained accommodated without this agreement being brought into line with current guidance.
- 1.10 Whilst some historic variation is to be expected the system now needs to be clearer. Word documents uploaded to ecasefile are not always easy to find; a range of different templates are being used, not all are compliant; in some cases the child's name did not appear on the signed document. The LCS form will not contain the parents' signature unless it is printed off and a hard copy uploaded; this is a significant risk within the system which needs to be addressed.

## S20 Consent Document



- 1.11 It is not unusual for parents to challenge s20 status but then not pursue return of the child to their care. In those circumstances the legal mandate for the LA can become confused. Some of the files reviewed evidenced a request for the child to be returned but did not formalise the parent's subsequent consent. In the event of future legal challenge these cases would be vulnerable.

### Recommendations

- 1.12 The agreed procedure for obtaining and recording parental consent to s20 must be re-circulated.
- 1.13 Social Workers should use the LCS s20 agreement as this will be the current version; they should record on that form the date of upload to ecasefile a signed copy of the same. All ecasefile uploads should have a standard referencing format.
- 1.14 Where, in exceptional circumstances a handwritten or other note of the parents' consent is taken this should be followed up as soon as possible with the formal documentation.
- 1.15 Those children who have been subject to s20 for a significant period of time should have consent revisited at least annually. The IRO should satisfy themselves at each review that the above procedure has been followed and that s20 status remains the appropriate legal mandate. The child's legal status should be explicitly referenced in the review documentation.
- 1.16 Parental consent to s20 should be reviewed following any formal (abandoned) request for the child to be returned home.
- 1.17 It may be appropriate for a bespoke s20 form to be devised for CWD in acknowledgment of the different needs/motivation for these children becoming looked after.

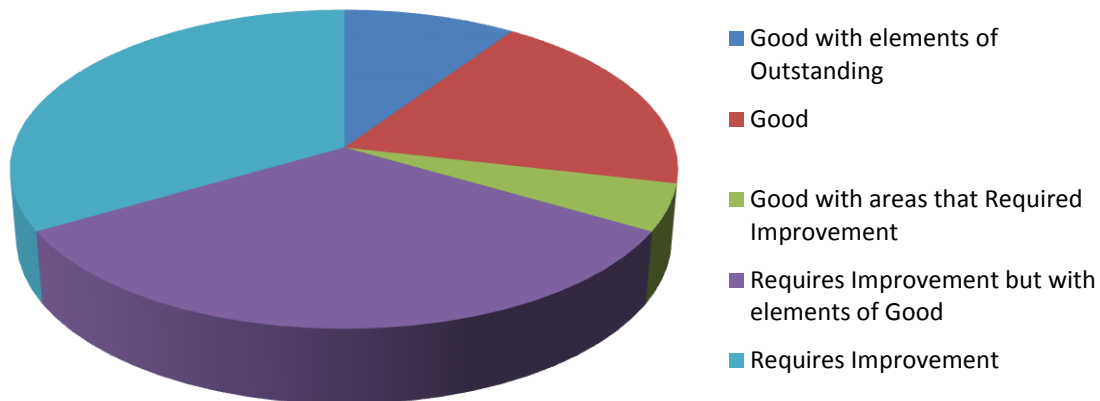
## **Audit of Assessment and Planning for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children**

- 2.1 Responding to the needs of UASC has become increasingly pertinent as numbers increase due to conflict elsewhere in the World and changes under the government dispersal scheme. At the end of March 2018 there were 20 UASC open to ESCC; cases were held across LAC, YST and ThroughCare teams with some variation in practice. Many of the UASC were placed outside of the County boundary with evident implications for Care Planning and Review. Changes to the ESCC offer for UASC including a discrete team and efforts to bring placements back within County are a positive development and can reasonably be expected to address many of the findings below.
- 2.2 Two IROs within the Unit lead on UASC and undertake the majority of these reviews; this has ensured development of a secure knowledge base which is evident in the quality of outcome documents.
- 2.3 Understanding and meeting the diverse needs of the children in our care was an area for development that was identified during the 2014 Ofsted Inspection. Maintaining a focus on the child's experience – including continuing to address diversity remains a priority for Children's Social Care in 18/19.
- 2.4 As a result of this priority an audit of UASC case files was agreed in February 2018 to ensure assessments and plans demonstrated an explicit understanding of diverse needs arising from the child's cultural and heritage background, disability, or other equality characteristics, as well as specific needs arising from their status as UASC. This audit was undertaken jointly between the Safeguarding, and Equalities and Participation Units.

## **Findings**

- 2.5 Mental Health / Emotional Wellbeing were observed to be neglected areas; this is common across other LAs and Agencies. LAC CAMHS do not routinely pick up these children, their needs are quite distinct and they are often reluctant to take up services.
- 2.6 Use of placements in more diverse communities has benefits however it also places a geographical distance between the UASC and their social worker which was evident in the quality of relationship on some of the files.

## Quality of Assessment and Planning for UASC



- 2.7** Family assessments did not always explore the child's diverse needs. Faith was usually explored, although it appears that less attention is paid to cultural needs when the child does not identify as Muslim. In some cases the social worker had relied on the age assessment rather than completing their own assessment; whilst providing useful detail of the child's experience in their home country and journey this doesn't explore needs.
- 2.8** The child's needs in relation to faith had usually been mentioned in the plan. Sometimes links to the country or culture of origin had been explored, but other diverse needs did not feature. Where the child had expressed a wish to assimilate into Western culture, this had been readily accepted, however links to diverse cultures should have been continued to ensure that the child develops a coherent identity. The identity section was not always complete on the Pathway Plan. It is easier to evidence that diverse needs have been considered if clear headings are used within the plan.
- 2.9** Social workers identify the experience of the child 'back home' and journey either through Age Assessment, Home Office interview or Family Assessment. Where there is evidence of trafficking, this did not always appear to have been explored. Mental health needs as a result of trauma had often been acknowledged but not fully explored.
- 2.10** Social workers had encouraged UASC to make contact with family back home using the Red Cross family seeker service. Sometimes social workers had attempted to access mental health support for child through LAC CAMHS or the Refugee Council. Updates re asylum claim were not always clear in the plan.

## Recommendations

- 2.11 A number of 'quick wins' were identified in terms of consistency and guidance re the LCS process and reporting parameters.
- 2.12 Family Assessments and Reviews should ensure that the UASC's holistic experience has been captured and their diverse needs identified. The child's journey and experience should be evident throughout the file so that this is not lost.
- 2.13 Asylum claim/immigration and identity to be explicitly discussed at all UASC reviews. IROs to record in LAC Review outcome document.
- 2.14 Future planning re pathways to independence and contingency in the event of asylum claims being refused needed to be better evidenced on file.
- 2.15 All UASC should have an allocated, qualified social worker who is actively working the case.
- 2.16 Placement matching should be better evidenced. Where an UASC is placed with a provider with expertise in that area this should be identified on the file rather than just naming the resource.
- 2.17 Legal advice was recommended in respect of data re sexuality as there is a risk of this information being passed back to the country of origin by the Home Office which could place the UASC or their relatives at serious risk of harm. There has been recent legal precedent in this area and significant financial compensation claims.

Report Author: Fiona Lewis

Co-Author: Susan McGlynn

<https://www.basw.co.uk/news/article/?id=1702>

'Getting the Most Out of Independent Reviewing Officers in Care Proceedings' 20/04/2018; Gabrielle Jan Posner, Barrister and Recorder, Trinity Chambers Chelmsford; <http://www.familylawweek.co.uk/site.aspx?i=ed189418>

Anne Longfield, Children's Commissioner for England, response to Department for Education's publication of 'Foster Care in England'; 6th February 2018; <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2018/02/06/anne-longfield-childrens-commissioner-for-england-responds-to-department-for-educations-publication-of-foster-care-in-england/>

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'UK Poverty 2017'; JRF Analysis Unit; Joseph Rowntree Foundation



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**Report to:** Corporate Parenting Panel

**Date:** 27 July 2018

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title of report:** Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service  
1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018

**Purpose of report:** To outline the performance of the Fostering Service between  
1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018

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## **RECOMMENDATION:**

The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report

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### **1 Background information**

- 1.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service is attached as Appendix 1.
- 1.2 There are no increased costs arising from this report.

### **2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report.

## **STUART GALLIMORE**

Director of Children's Services

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### Local Members:

All

### Appendices

Appendix 1 - Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Fostering Service 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018.

### Background documentation:

None

## **Appendix 1 - The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Fostering Service**

### **1. Safeguarding**

1.1 This outcome is fundamental to the delivery of fostering services across East Sussex and is embedded in each of the core functions which are addressed fully throughout the report. The core functions are as listed:

- Recruitment and retention
- Assessment
- Supervision and review
- Foster carer training
- The matching and placing of children and young people with foster carers and supported lodgings providers.

### **2. Recruitment and Retention of Carers**

2.1 As in 2016-17, East Sussex County Council (ESCC) continues to be challenged by the number of foster carers it has been able to recruit. In common with last year, these challenges have been shared by neighbouring authorities. The 'National Stocktake' report, published at the end of this fiscal year, confirmed that there is a national shortage of foster carers.

2.2 Foster carers transferring from Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs), continue to provide ESCC's Fostering Service with experienced carers, often also bringing income to the authority via their existing placements from other authorities. As with last year, some carers initially wishing to transfer from IFAs have at a later stage withdrawn, after being offered financial incentives by their agency to remain with them, for example the offer of private medical care.

2.3 Approval timescale targets for the assessment of foster carers continue to be important as they remain a significant incentive for carers choosing to foster for ESCC. Our assessment timescale of 6-8 months is below that of both our neighbouring authorities and many IFAs.

2.4 From 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018, 346 new enquiries were received which led to 157 screening calls and 86 initial visits to prospective foster carers. This year the Fostering Service has introduced a text enquiry service so that applicants can either text, phone, email, or complete a web form to enquire about the service. These methods maximise enquiries at weekends and out of office hours.

2.5 There were 6 'Skills to Foster' pre-assessment preparation courses held during 2017/18 and 43 households attended. During the assessment process, the Children in Care Council (CICC) continued to play an active role by holding 6 sets of informal interviews with applicants and providing feedback for the assessment report.

2.6 19 households offering 37 placements were approved in 2017/18 compared with 21 households offering 50 placements in 2016/17. 1 of these households was a transfer from an IFA and with an East Sussex child and a West Sussex placed. There were a further 12 assessments that were allocated for assessment and booked for presentation to the Fostering Panel that did not progress. The reasons were as follows:

- 4 cases were due to changes in personal circumstances that could not have been predicted earlier.
- 1 case was due to the applicant not being able to provide sufficient Stage 1 information and referees for us to evidence their address, employment and relationship history.
- 2 cases were assessments of family members who did not wish to be assessed and approved as foster carers.
- 5 cases were closed by the Fostering Service due to Stage 1 information that was not evident or available at earlier stages.

There were 13 fostering assessments still in progress at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 compared with 6 on the same date on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017.

2.7 The retention of foster carers this year was a challenge for the service. Over recent years, it had been anticipated that the age profile of carers would lead eventually to a significant number of retirements within a short period. Accordingly 2017/18 saw 22 households retiring from the service, contributing to our overall figure of 30 households leaving ESCC. The context of these carers moving on, apart from retirement, included 6 changes in personal circumstances, one termination of approval, one transfer to an independent fostering agency, and sadly the death of 2 carers.

2.8 Considering these retention figures and the recruitment of 19 new households, the net loss of carers for ESCC Fostering Service was 4.3%. Although there are no recent national benchmarking figures for net gain/loss of carers (the last being 2015/16 putting the figure at 12%) we would consider ESCC's performance to be good.

2.9 Reports published over the last year both by 'Fostering Networks' and Sir Martin Narey's 'National Stocktake', would indicate that the recruitment of foster carers for local authorities has been particularly challenging.

2.10 The Fostering Service continues to employ the marketing strategy of 'continual presence'. This consists of wide-ranging and extensive advertising throughout the year using a range of different mediums. The Fostering Service marketing strategy for 2017/18 has focussed on its new strapline of '*foster with trust*'. This branding has been developed in partnership with the ESCC Communications team with the objective of promoting ESCC as the primary and most 'significant' Fostering Service within the geographical area. The Fostering Service is using foster carer profiles and 'real life' scenarios to illustrate the rewards of fostering. A significant strand of the strategy is the use of the internet; using social media, Facebook and Twitter to engage the e-generation.

**Below are some examples of the mediums used to recruit foster carers:**

- Information evenings promoted by advertising in the Herald, Hastings Observer, and Sussex Express running throughout the year
- Editorial in the Herald and Hastings Observer
- Roundabout advertising
- Your County
- Google 'ad words' (search engine marketing)
- Heart radio campaign
- Promotional merchandise 'giveaways' (Mugs, pens etc.)
- Banners across Eastbourne town centre and seafront
- Display board advertising (major routes into Eastbourne and Hastings)
- Magnet magazine
- Foster carer radio interviews
- ESCC intranet editorial
- Text communication and response to prospective applicants

### **3.0. The Fostering Panel**

3.1 The Fostering Panel meet on a monthly basis. Panel activity included 19 new approvals, 23 initial annual foster care reviews and 2 standards of care reviews. Panel benefited from the appointment of 6 new members to its central list, including a new medical advisor and a newly elected ESCC Councillor. New panel members also bring experience from operational social work and residential children's services. Panel members received training commissioned from Coram BAAF which focused on assessments.

#### **4.0. Recruitment Events**

4.1 This year has seen a significant shift from recruitment events to the use of more internet and social media. 'Live' events such as information evenings and venue based promotions have been less popular. Potential applicants now use the internet to get a 'virtual' understanding of what an agency or service may potentially offer them. In response to this shift, the Fostering Service now produces a regular e-newsletter as well as regular 'Twitter' service updates.

#### **Retention Events**

- In May 2017, an evening event was held at Powder Mills to say "Thank You" to our foster carers. This was attended by 120 carers and staff.
- In August 2017, all foster carers and their families caring for East Sussex children were invited to a picnic at Knockhatch. Both children's social workers and supervising social workers attended. Agency foster carers were also invited to give them the opportunity to meet ESCC foster carers and staff, and to find out more about our service.
- In October 2017, the children of our foster carers were invited to a weekend at PGL Activity Centre. This was organised by the East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA) who worked in partnership with the Fostering Service to facilitate the event. Staff and managers attended to spend time with the children of our foster carers in order to further forge the relationship between carers and social workers.

#### **5.0. Foster carer training**

5.1 From 1st April 2017 to the 31st March 2018, 773 training places have been taken up by foster carers (as compared to last year's equivalent of 796), evidencing strong and continued interest in training. Overall, the evaluations of the courses by participants were rated as excellent, although there has been a reduction of evaluations being completed since the introduction of the East Sussex Learning Portal.

5.2 New courses introduced this year have included:

- Understanding the 'angry' child
- The impact of childhood experiences on mind, body and brain
- Family Thrive
- Supporting readiness to learn the key to education success
- Advanced attachment theory
- "Ladies who foster" support group
- Understanding sensory attachment

5.3 The Fostering Service has continued in 2017/18 to use the extensive skills, knowledge and expertise in delivering a number of our courses as well as the use of experienced trainers. These courses included:

- Parenting traumatised children
- Practical skills to help children protect themselves
- Understanding self-harm
- Caring for children with additional needs
- Using visuals to help communication
- Supporting new carers workshops
- Creative ideas for digital photo albums

5.4 These courses have received excellent feedback. Foster carers have identified the value of having experienced carers who really understand the fostering task delivering specific expertise

training. This model of delivery also provides a more cost effective way to up-skill those foster carers that need further training.

5.5 To ensure the quality of training, there is an agreed framework of requirements and support identified with opportunities for continual professional development. 11 foster carers are undertaking a variety of qualifications. These include the level 3 diploma 'Children and Young People's Workforce' qualification, and Level 3 and 4 in 'Training and Education'. There are also 6 dedicated foster carers involved in the delivery and assessment of the 'Children and Young People's Workforce' qualification.

5.6 Foster carer training has also been central in promoting the carer's vital role in preparing young people for independence. All carers are now familiar with the 'Passport for Independence' programme with it being driven and promoted by supervising and children's social workers.

Planned courses for 2018/19 include:

- Mental Health courses
- Understanding the teenage brain
- Gang culture
- County lines and cuckooing
- Neuroscience – Theory of attachment
- Montessori method up to 7 years of age
- Understanding the principals of non-violent resistance theory (NVR)
- Caring for the child with hidden disability (Developmental trauma)
- Loss and grief, the child's view

5.7 Other courses that Foster Carers / Supervising Social Workers (SSW's) are being trained to deliver are:

- An introduction to Non-violent resistance
- An introduction to Theraplay
- Understanding sensory attachment
- Understanding the angry child
- The impact of childhood experiences on mind, body and brain

To try and compensate for reductions in the training budget, identified training will be actively promoted to other agencies for income generation opportunities.

## **6. Foster carer support and supervision**

6.1 East Sussex Fostering Service has experienced an unprecedented year of placement pressure with a significant number of households extending their approval preference to help respond to the demand. In turn, this has resulted in the need for increased support of foster carers by their SSWs. There is a recognised correlation between foster carers receiving good and appropriate support and the retention of these households.

6.2 As endorsed by the recent national 'Stocktake' report, peer support is a vital part of foster carer retention and The Fostering Service's 'Buddy' system has been utilised by an increasing number of foster carers during 2017/18.

6.3 Support groups continue to be a large part of the service's support strategy. There continue to be 4 localised groups in Uckfield, Rotherfield, Eastbourne and Newhaven. There are also three themed support groups: a parent and child foster carer's support group; a support group for carers of adolescents and a 'Men who Foster' support group. A new 'Ladies who Foster' support group has been developed which, similarly to the men's support group, discusses relevant themes

6.4 The Fostering Service has also developed a 'Pod system' for SSW's. This consists of 3 sub-teams of 4 SSW's overseen by senior social workers. This system has allowed carers to have

consistent support in the absence of their allocated SSW as fellow 'Pod' members will have a knowledge and understanding of each fostering household's circumstances. This system also allows for group supervision of SSWs and offers a further layer of support where SSWs can gain access to advice and direction more expediently.

6.5 Further support is provided for foster carers through the fostering advice line - an out of hour's service, available to all foster carers and supported lodgings providers for 365 days per year. This service is staffed by a team of 7 workers from the Fostering Service, working on a rota basis, to provide support and advice to all foster carers. The service deals with a range of issues such as placement disruptions children and young people missing from placement, police involvement or generally supports carers in managing challenging behaviours presented by our children or young people. The advice line has seen a considerable increase in activity in 2017/18 taking 378 calls in comparison with 2016/17's figure of 297.

6.6 There continues to be close working relationships with Looked After Children (LAC) teams, The Looked After Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (LACAMHS), The Virtual School and Placement Support Services (PSS); all of which are invaluable in supporting foster carers in sustaining placements and endeavouring to meet the children and young people's needs.

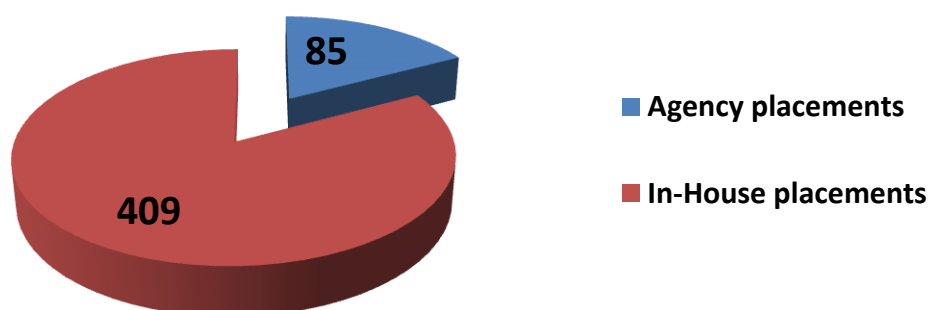
## **7. Health**

7.1 Meeting the health needs of LAC remains a high priority for the Fostering Service. Foster carers continue to prioritise the health needs of their children with SSWs monitoring foster carers contribution to timely Initial Health Assessments. There have been a number of training courses available which can be accessed by foster carers to focus on the health needs of young people. These include: autism, self-harm, first aid and healthy living.

## **8. Placement activity**

8.1 On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 there were 494 children in foster care. 409 of these children were placed with in-house placements as compared to 392 in the previous year. This includes in-house parent and child' placements, children subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with foster carers and those older young people remaining in their 'Staying Put' fostering placements through to independence. As a result of increased LAC numbers, the number of East Sussex LAC placed with agency foster carers has increased from 64 children in 2016/17 to 85 at the end of March 2018 reflecting increased numbers of children placed both with our in house foster carers as well as with agency foster carers. The Fostering Duty team will source and match all IFA carers with our children.

### **Placement Activity 2017/18**



8.2 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, 19 young people (over 18 years of age) remain with their foster carers under 'Staying Put' arrangements. There are also 26 children who are currently subject to Special Guardianship Orders placed with East Sussex foster carers.

8.3 Of the 534 referrals received between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018, 437 resulted in placements being made or matched. Of the 534 referrals, 97 were ultimately not required. On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 there were an additional 36 active referrals waiting to be matched with foster carers.

## **9. The Supported Lodgings Team**

9.1 East Sussex Supported Lodgings provision continues to be an invaluable resource for LAC, care leavers and homeless young people. 2017/18 saw the Supported Lodgings service benefit from Corporate Transformation funding for the Housing and Accommodation project to extend housing options for care leavers and homeless young people. As a result of this funding, the service has reviewed its recruitment strategy to focus on maximising the potential of all applicants applying to the service, encouraging people with a wide range of skills and experiences.

9.2 A new marketing strategy has been launched to recruit additional Supported Lodgings providers using a wider range of media formats, with plans to promote the service still further via social media. The website has been updated, including a new direct text service and the assessment process has been streamlined to reduce timescales whilst remaining sufficiently robust. Applications to date range from 'landlords' wanting to help a young person, to experienced carers who are looking for approval as a jointly registered foster carer/supported lodgings providers (hybrids).

9.3 Since June 2017 to end of March 2018, 61 Care Leavers (85%) and 11 16/17 year old homeless young people (15%) have been placed with Supported Lodgings providers. Through this project, providers have been encouraged to extend their approval potential to take more parent and child and more Emergency Duty placements. Focused support and training is being developed to help providers offer statutory placements to young people with more complex needs, thereby expanding local support and pathway options.

9.4 During this year, Supported Lodgings providers have demonstrated that, when appropriately matched, they can support young people 'stepping down' from expensive agency foster and residential settings. During 2017/18 2 young people moved from agency placements to Supported Lodgings carers making a saving of £212K.

9.5 As of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018 there were 38 Supported Lodgings households providing a total of 62 placements across the county. In the year 2017/18 there has been 9 new approvals, providing 12 additional beds. Recruitment of sufficient Supported Lodgings remains challenging because of the competitive nature of the local market. The revised marketing strategy allows the service to attract applicants who may have previously considered taking overseas and local students, households where their own children have recently left home (empty nesters), single carers and foster carers wishing to transition to Supported Lodgings instead of retiring.

9.6 Between 1st April 2017 and 31st March 2018, the Supported Lodgings team received 62 referrals requesting placements for young people. 30 of which were LAC, 31 were for homeless young people and 1 was unknown (out of county referral, no status given.) Of the 62 referrals, 27 were closed, 3 remain open (requiring placement) and 32 were placed.

## **10. User participation**

10.1 The Children in Care Council (CICC) continues to go from strength to strength. CICC members have participated in 89 opportunities to promote their work both locally and nationally and some examples are listed below-

- Meeting with the Children's Commissioner.
- Participating in foster carer preparation groups and advising recruitment panels for prospective foster carers.
- Attended a meeting with Minister of State, Robert Goodwill.

- Attended activity holidays representing CICC.
- Highlight issues and concerns made by looked after children.
- Promoted the need for more cyber safety and recognition of mental health issues for LAC.
- Published regular newsletter.
- Attended the national CICC Conference in Oxford.
- Taken part in work experience within Children's Services.
- Partnership working with the Through Care team.

## **11. Working in Partnership with East Sussex Foster Care Association (ESFCA)**

11.1 The Operations Manager attends the monthly evening meetings of the ESFCA management group to report on the developments of the Fostering Service and on Children's Services more generally. During 2017/18 the service has worked closely with the now established chair and trustees of the ESFCA. Consultation has taken place on a number of issues including young people's savings and foster carer allowances. They continue to provide support to foster carers who have raised concerns at the surgeries held in conjunction with both the Fostering and LAC Operational Managers.

## **12. The Placement Support Service (PSS)**

12.1 The PSS is currently supporting 91 young people. 74 reviews of packages of support were held throughout the year. During 2017-2018, 30 new pieces of ongoing work were commissioned including 6 pieces of life story work. The PSS also responded to 91 emergency or crisis requests from carers that resulted in 121 days support. PSS staff provide additional support to young people who are unable to sustain their school placements. Obviously a child not being in school creates additional pressures on foster carers. This additional direct work is funded by the Virtual School.

12.2 Despite some financial pressures and staffing capacity, the PSS has continued to provide holiday and weekend group activities for LAC aged 5 to 17. All activities cover all aspects of the national curriculum. The partnership with Bedes School continues to allow our young people to access sports facilities including the swimming pool free of charge at weekends. PSS has also been able to negotiate free tickets to Brighton and Hove Albion football matches.

During the year:

- 40 group holiday activities were provided
- PSS worked with 127 young people
- 458 holiday places were offered to children and young people
- 10 to 15 young people on average attend each activity

98% of young people who evaluated their activities rated them as either excellent or good. Foster carers highly value PSS support and holiday activities as illustrated by the comments below extracted from the service's annual evaluations.

*'Without PSS I could not have offered the young person a placement for the 7 weeks she was here.'*

*'As a new carer I have found PSS to be invaluable in supporting our children'.*

*'Having support allows me to have time with my own family and I know the children are in safe hands'.*

## **13. Summary**

13.1 The most significant challenge for the Fostering Service during 2017/18 continues to be the recruitment of sufficient foster carers and this is reflected both nationally and by our

neighbouring authorities. The recent 'National Stocktake' report by Sir Martin Narey evidenced that although we are seeing an increasing LAC population nationally, the number of people coming forward to be foster carers is not increasing. In East Sussex, although we have experienced better than average retention figures, these are negated to some extent by fewer numbers of carers recruited. However, despite this challenge, our numbers of in-house placements have increased significantly. This is partly attributable to the fact that there is poor availability of appropriate agency carers, leaving no option but to place with our in-house foster carers. It is crucial that placement is combined with increased support to our foster carers and robust risk assessments. The revision of our recruitment strategy for both Fostering and Supported Lodgings now focuses around the internet and social media. Early indications for 2018/19 would suggest that this change in strategy is showing positive signs, with the first quarter showing the highest number of approvals of new foster carers for the last 5 years.

13.2 Towards the end of 2017/18, an analysis regarding the drop in the number of foster carers transferring from IFAs to ESCC was undertaken. Traditionally, this had been a fairly fertile ground for recruitment. However, more recently the number of enquiries from carers wishing to transfer has reduced. Further investigations have revealed that carers who had expressed an interest in transferring have withdrawn due to financial incentives offered by the agencies. A recent comparison undertaken by ESFCA and The Fostering Service with our local authority neighbours showed ESCC allowances are less competitive. As the driver for agency carers wishing to transfer to local authority is based on local authority having more choice and placement availability it is essential that ESCC remains competitive when carers are considering transferring. The Fostering Service is now in the process of proposing a modest inflation uplift to foster care payments for 2018/19. This, coupled with the services excellent reputation for support and training, will hopefully attract more carers wishing to transfer from independent fostering agencies.

**The Key Management Priorities for 2018/2019 include:**

- Investment in Supported Lodgings via the Corporate Transformation funding to continue through 2018/19 to maximise the accommodation resources for young people who are homeless and leaving care.
- Recruitment and retention of foster carers. Positive partnership working between the service and corporate communications team in reviewing recruitment strategies should help to improve the potential numbers of carers being recruited.
- Improved preparation of young people for independence. The 'Passport to Independence' programme will continue to be a major priority for LAC services with foster carers taking a key role in the delivery of this programme.

Adrian Sewell  
**Operation Manager Fostering Service**

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Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **27 July 2018**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Annual Progress Report of East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service 1 April 2017 – 31 March 2018**

Purpose of report: **To outline the performance of the Adoption and Permanence Service between 1<sup>st</sup> April 2017 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018.**

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**RECOMMENDATION: The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report**

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## **1. Background information**

1.1 The Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service is attached as Appendix 1.

1.2 There are no increased costs arising from this report

## **2. Recommendation**

2.1 The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the contents of the report.

## **STUART GALLIMORE**

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Carole Sykes, Operations Manager, Adoption and Permanence Service Tel: 01323 747406

### Local Members

All

### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service.

### Background Documents

None

## Appendix 1 - Annual Progress report of the East Sussex Adoption and Permanence Service

### 1. Supporting Information

	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/8
1. Number of children adopted	43	45	38	<b>29</b>
2. Number of adoption matches (children)	56	32	38	<b>30</b>
3. Number of permanent fostering matches (children)	7	10	14	<b>5</b>
4. Number of East Sussex adoptive matches (children)	33	26	30	<b>30</b>
5. Number of ASE adoptive matches (children)	6	0	0	<b>0</b>
6. Number of inter-agency matches (children):				
Permanence:	3	2	0	<b>1</b>
Adoption:	17	6	8	<b>6</b>
7. Number of prospective adopters approved (households)	50	41	30	<b>25</b>
8. Number of permanent carers approved (households)	4	2	1	<b>3</b>
9. Number of children approved for adoption up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017 (including 2 re-approvals)	43	53	52	<b>69</b>
10. Number of children approved for permanence up to 31 <sup>st</sup> March 2017	26	14	32	<b>24</b>
11. Number of approved adopters waiting to be matched	20	22	20	<b>12</b>
12. Number of disruptions presented to Panel:				
Permanence:	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Adoptions:	0	1	0	<b>1</b>

### 2. Recruitment Activity

**2.1** East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has had a considerable reduction in recruitment activity over the past two years, particularly in relation to the number of applications started and approved. However, this reflects the national picture and what is being seen as the crisis in the sufficiency of adopters. It certainly reflects the situation with neighbouring authorities and local partners in Adoption South East (ASE). Nonetheless, the service has continued to receive positive feedback about the quality of the recruitment processes and the customer focused approach.

**2.2** During 2017/2018 the Agency received 198 household enquiries, 81 households attended information events and 43 households registered their interest in adoption. The conversion rate from Information event to registration remained high but unfortunately only 25 adopters were approved by the year end, this was a drop of 5 on 2016/2017. This was in part due to a significant number of the applicants having far more complex histories than the service had traditionally received. A number of assessments could not be completed and resulted in the applications being paused, whilst others were counselled out of adoption completely. This is the second year when the number of adopters being approved was lower than expected, and this has had an impact on the family finding element of the Service.

**2.3** The Government's regionalisation agenda has gained significant momentum with 5 pilot regions going live in autumn 2017, and a further 4 going live in autumn 2018. ESCC is committed to the ASE partnership which submitted a bid earlier in the year. This proposal was accepted by the DfE who awarded a grant of £750k to take forward the first stages of the development.

**2.4** Within ASE the work streams have continued to run across the four local authorities in an effort to develop common practice and shared events. While this has proved beneficial in many ways, it has also presented major challenges. The issue of adopter sufficiency and the implications of the inter-agency fee is a critical challenge for ASE going forward.

**2.5** There has been a tension within the adopter recruitment work stream during this transitional phase of ASE due to the imbalance of adopters recruited and children requiring placement. Surrey County Council (SCC) and ESCC are and have been key providers in relation to adopter recruitment and contribute a disproportionately higher number of adopters to the regional pool. In contrast, West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) and Brighton and Hove Council (B&HC) have either not prioritised or have struggled to recruit sufficient adopters and have consequently placed a significantly higher percentage of their children outside of their local authority boundary.

**2.6** Whilst there has been a drive to share resources across the region, each local authority continued to prioritise meeting local targets, especially in the context of the rising number of children with a plan for adoption.

**2.7** In 2017/18 in ESCC, 10 experienced adopters were reassessed as second time adopters and 3 sets of foster carers were assessed to adopt a child already in their care. In addition 8 sets of prospective adopters went through to offer Fostering to Adopt through an adoption match and 1 couple still await legal conclusion due to legal processes although the actual placement of the child has been made.

### **3. Family Finding and Matching**

**3.1** There was a sharp increase in the number of children with a plan for adoption (ADM) with 52 children in 2016-2017, to 69 in 2017-2018. Within this group there were 2 large sibling groups of 6 and 5 respectively, plus a sibling group of 3 and 8 sibling pairs. Of the single children between the ages of 0 – 2 years, a number of them had significant complex medical needs and developmental delay. This cohort of children was particularly challenging in terms of family finding.

**3.2.** Despite the increased numbers of children approved, there were a number of plans changed unexpectedly which caused some delay, this was primarily due to late removal from the family home or to medical and legal complications.

**3.3.** This year, 30 matches were completed which was largely consistent with previous years. The number of matches could have been higher as potential adopters were identified for this cohort of children. However, there was an increase in the number birth families who wished to appeal against the plan for adoption for their child/ren. This had a significant impact on fostering resources and consequently on the budget, whilst simultaneously delaying adoptive placements. ESCC continued to place the majority of children in the local area. Sadly there was 1 adoption plan which disrupted during the introductions stage.

**3.4** In terms of income generation, there were 11 children from elsewhere placed with ESCC adopters, this included one sibling pair and a number of single children. 7 of these were from

the ASE regional partners. Overall this exceeded the financial target set for the service and generated £263k.

**3.5** The challenge of placing siblings has been recognised as an increasing pressure both nationally and regionally, particularly as fewer sibling adopters are coming forward as they begin to recognise the increased challenge of being matched with siblings. ESCC Adoption Service is planning to review local practices and consider whether extra support and incentives can be put in place to support sibling placements.

**3.6** In the past year the service has been working closely with its ASE partners in relation to family finding and of the 4 events planned, 2 were undertaken, 1 in Horsham and 1 in East Sussex. At these 2 events ESCC had more adopters in attendance than the other three agencies, and also, along with WSCC, had greater numbers of children to be placed.

**3.7** The family finding strategy for the service concentrated on working with all key staff to identify potential children needing adoption placements as early as possible, whilst simultaneously identifying and prioritising adopters for specific children, siblings and Fostering to Adopt. Currently the service delivers a Fostering to Adopt workshop 3 times per year for potential adopters to encourage them to consider these types of arrangements.

#### **4. Staffing**

**4.1** There have been a number of staff changes during the past year, including 2 staff returning from maternity leave and 1 from secondment. However, of most significance was the retirement of the Practice Manager who had over 35 years of service within ESCC and who had made an enormous contribution to the lives of many children and to the Service overall.

#### **5. Permanence**

**5.1** The permanence tracking workshops have continued to meet regularly and in addition, the Practice Manager responsible for family finding has had regular meetings with the wider Children's Services staff to offer advice and guidance at an early stage in the planning for permanence. The majority of permanence placements continue to be 'home-grown' from current foster carers claiming and making a commitment to children in their care.

#### **6. Post Adoption Support**

**6.1** The demand for an assessment for post adoption support has continued to rise. ESCC has a legal duty to assess adoption support needs and to provide a service if necessary. The increased placement of children with complex needs, older children and sibling groups has significantly raised the challenge of adequately supporting these families. A number of adopters who requested assessments had moved into East Sussex from other areas and so were not previously known locally. Last year there were 55 referrals requesting an adoption support assessment with the majority of these requiring a range of support services to be offered.

**6.2** Some of the most complex family situations required the service to coordinate a multiagency, multidisciplinary approach. In these situations it was essential that the service worked closely with colleagues in Locality to manage risk and safeguarding concerns either through child protection plans or children whose needs were such that there was a high risk of imminent placement breakdown. In addition, there were an increased number of adopters who requested respite due to the complexities of their adopted children and the impact of their presenting behaviours. Several complicated young people have become LAC as a result of adoption breakdowns.

**6.3** Adoptive families have continued to greatly benefit from the services of the dedicated adoption worker in the Virtual School. Unfortunately the post holder retired earlier this year, but a replacement caseworker was recruited who recently started in the role. The remit has

continued to provide adoptive families with support for education and school based issues, as well as offering training to schools in relation to the attachment needs of adopted children affecting their ability to access learning. A caseworker in the adoption team also plays a key role in supporting adopters and their children in school, and works alongside the Virtual School.

**6.4** The adoption CAMHS service, AdCAMHS, has continued to offer a dedicated therapy and consultation service. The unique partnership model enabled clinicians and adoption social workers to think together to consider the therapeutic needs of children and their adoptive families. Undoubtedly the service contributed to the increased stability in adoption, promoted positive attachments and ultimately helped to prevent adoption breakdown for some families. Due to the limited clinical resource the service has considered therapists offering more consultations to social workers and doing less of the direct work, which could be bought in via the national Adoption Support Fund (ASF). AdCAMHS was offering therapeutic support to 64 children at year end.

**6.5** The ASF was launched nationally in 2015. The Government guaranteed ongoing funding, increasing year on year until 2020. The ASF is specifically for the provision of therapeutic support to children adopted from care, intercountry adoptions and children subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) who were previously Looked After. The types of work which have been funded are Psychotherapy, Non Violence Resistance (NVR), DDP, Play therapy, Music therapy as well as the commissioning of multidisciplinary assessments. East Sussex has worked closely with the administrators of the fund and has used this to complement the work of AdCAMHS. Sadly it has not proved possible to date to secure funding for AdCAMHS as a service from the ASF despite the fact that arguably this could be more cost effective.

**6.6** The ASE adoption support work stream has met regularly during the last year. The focus has been working on a joint offer of adoption support which would be consistent across ASE. There was also discussion about making regional bids to the ASF as well as looking at where resources could be shared. The challenge has been to try to identify where there is commonality across 4 very different adoption support services.

**6.7** The demand on the Contact Service has increased during this year, both in relation to indirect/letterbox contact and direct/face to face contact. Every adoptive match which was approved had a letterbox arrangement, often with multiple exchanges between the adopters and various birth family members. Facilitating direct contact was, and continues to be, a complex piece of work if the actual face to face meeting is to be successful for the child. Contact arrangements were regularly reviewed to ensure that they continued to be in the best interests of the child. There were 605 active letterbox arrangements at year end.

**6.8** The referrals from adopted adults seeking to access their records/information about their adoption remained consistent. In the last year there were 159 enquiries from adopted adults. Also relatives of adopted people were offered an intermediary service through a contract with CMB counselling.

**6.9** The Adoption Service held two social events for adoptive families during the past year which were well received. Through the contract with PAC-UK 4 different support groups for adoptive families were offered across the county. In addition a Children's Group, Teenage Group and Therapeutic Parenting Group were delivered in conjunction with AdCAMHS Adoption Support.

## **7 Adoption & Permanence Panel**

**7.1** There were a similar number of Panels convened during 2017/2018 to that of the previous year. However, the activity for the forthcoming year is anticipated to increase due to a higher forecast of assessments underway. The Panel membership remained relatively stable during this period with the addition of 3 new County Councillors. An induction programme will take place early in 2018/19, and a whole Panel training event is planned for the autumn of 2018.

**7.2** The contract for medical advice for Panel and Children's Looked After Services has continued to be delivered by East Sussex Health Care Trust. The feedback provided by staff and services users alike has been that the Senior Paediatrician and the team provided an excellent and reliable service. All adopters were offered face to face meetings with a Medical Adviser prior to a match, and given the increased complexity of children being matched, this was particularly helpful.

### **Management Priorities 2018/9**

- To continue to target recruitment for ESCC children and to manage the tension between the rising numbers of children and the challenge of adopter sufficiency.
- To continue to strengthen and build on ESCC's high national profile and to further expand the regional service together with our partners in SCC, B&HCC and WSCC.
- To update and revise policies and procedures in accordance with new regulations and strategy guidance.
- To maintain and extend adoption support developments including the revised CAMHS contract, close partnerships with the Virtual School and continued use of the Adoption Support Fund to good effect.
- To maintain the contract with East Sussex Health Care Trust and to ensure that the service continues to improve.
- To ensure ESCC's role in the regionalisation agenda brings added value and builds on success.

Committee:	<b>Corporate Parenting Panel</b>
Date:	<b>27 July 2018</b>
Title of Report:	<b>Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics</b>
By:	<b>Director of Children's Services</b>
Purpose of Report:	<b>To update the Panel on changes in the last quarter</b>

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**Recommendations:** The Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to comment on and note the report.

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## **1. Background and supporting information**

1.2 Services for LAC are predominantly funded from the Children's Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity eg Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant.

1.3 The past quarter has continued to see sustained pressure on the system and at the end of June, ESCC had 606 children in care. Work has taken place to drill down into the underlying reasons for the steady rise over a number of months, with the conclusion that while the number of children entering the system over the past year has remained fairly stable, children are staying longer in placement in the context of the following factors:

- Older children who are being exploited both criminally and sexually
- Improved practice on neglect identifying larger family groups with a spread of children of different ages
- Courts being increasingly reluctant to approve adoption for some young children and also protracted legal challenges to plans for adoption delaying the permanence process.

1.4 The rate in East Sussex is now 57.2 and closer to but still below the IDACI expected rate of 59 (which would equate to 625 children). A total of 425 children were in foster care at the end of June, with 85 of those children in agency placements, a rise of 8 over the quarter. In addition we have 50 young people in supported housing options, homes or hostels. 23 children were placed for adoption. 6 children were placed with foster carers who are also approved adopters under the Fostering for Adoption pathway.

1.5 The number of children with kinship carers now stands at 45, some of whom have been placed with family members at the direction of a judge.

1.6 The number of children placed at home with their parents whilst subject to a legal order has reduced by 4 to 17. Planning for placements of this sort is always monitored rigorously in order to mitigate any risk factors and agreement to begin or end a placement with parents is given at a senior level. However some of these children remain placed with parents on interim legal orders during ongoing proceedings and hence they are not subject to internal Placement with Parent processes.

1.7 At the end of the quarter 33 children were placed in agency residential placements, a rise of 6 over the period. Budget pressure has been mitigated to some extent but not eradicated by a step down from residential placement to Supported Housing, a return home etc.

1.8 At the end of the quarter 1 ESCC child remained secured at Lansdowne; the same young woman who was reported as secured at the last meeting of the CPP. Her behaviour is still very troubled. It had been hoped that she would leave Lansdowne within this quarter however staff applied in June for her Secure Order to be extended by a Court and the search for a suitable placement to enable her to leave Lansdowne continues. This will be a very delicate piece of work with few options being identified given her complexity.

1.9 We have had no new remands to custody during this quarter and, at the end of June, there were no young people still on remand and awaiting sentencing.

1.10 Overall the numbers of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking young people has remained stable because, although ESCC has continued to accept transfer of young people via the dispersal scheme when it is possible to allocate social work staff, some of our young people have turned 18 and become care leavers. As far as possible new young people already placed in or close to East Sussex continue to be prioritised for transfer to ESCC to facilitate staff contact etc.

1.11 There numbers of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders has risen by 1 to 331 and 439 children were subject to Special Guardianship Orders, a rise of 2. Sadly a number of children have become LAC due to a breakdown in SGO placements for them.

1.12 During Q1 of 2018/19 1 complaint was received from a young person in one of our Children's Homes who was complaining that she felt that a member of staff was singling her out and making false allegations of assault and trying to get her arrested. An internal investigation was carried out and it was found that the assault was witnessed by a third party and reported to the Police, which was considered appropriate. The young person was warned by staff about her behaviour and offered a further meeting if she so wished. The complaint was therefore not upheld.

## **2. Conclusion**

2.1 Pressure on the system continues, driven by the numbers of and costs for children and continued close oversight will be maintained.

2.2 1 complaint was received and investigated fully but not upheld.

### **Stuart Gallimore**

Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Liz Rugg, Assistant Director, Early Help and Social Care Tel: 01273 481274

### Local Members

All

### Appendices

Appendix 1 – Children's Services LAC Summary between 01/07/2017 and 30/06/18

### Background documents

None

## Children's Services LAC Summary between 01/07/2017 and 30/06/2018

Placement Type	Jul 17	Aug 17	Sep 17	Oct 17	Nov 17	Dec 17	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18
A3 - Placed for adoption with consent (under section 19 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2
A4 - Placed for adoption with consent (under section 19 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	19	17	17	12	9	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
A5 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) with current foster carer	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	
A6 - Placed for adoption with placement order (under section 21 of the 2002 Act) not with current foster carer	4	5	7	8	8	8	10	13	13	15	14	14
H5 - Residential accommodation	16	17	17	21	20	18	16	24	25	28	26	30
K1 - Secure unit	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1
K2 - Homes and Hostels	47	45	44	46	46	47	49	50	50	49	49	50
P1 - Placed with own parents	18	20	20	20	20	20	19	19	21	21	20	17
P2 - Independent living	2	4	4	5	6	5	5	5	4	4	4	3
R2 - NHS/Health Trust			1	1	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	1
R5 - Young Offender Institution or prison	3	2	1	1	4	4	3	5	4	2	2	1
S1 - All Residential schools	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
U1 - Foster placement with relative or friend- long term fostering	13	12	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	10	9
U3 - Foster placement with relative or friend- not long term or FFA	29	36	35	32	34	31	39	36	35	36	32	36
U4 - Placement with other foster carer- long term fostering	124	121	120	118	116	117	116	114	114	113	113	113
U5 - Placement with other foster carer who is also an approved adopter- FFA	2	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	7	7	6	6
U6 - Placement with other foster carer - not long term or FFA	273	276	279	282	276	277	287	291	306	306	318	312
<b>Total</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>569</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>571</b>	<b>566</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>576</b>	<b>590</b>	<b>605</b>	<b>607</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>606</b>

Immigration Status	Jul 17	Aug 17	Sep 17	Oct 17	Nov 17	Dec 17	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18
Asylum Seeker	1	1	1	1	1							
British Citizen	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Indefinite Leave to Remain in the UK (ILR)	1	1	1	1								
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child	22	22	21	23	22	23	21	21	20	22	24	20

Legal Status	Jul 17	Aug 17	Sep 17	Oct 17	Nov 17	Dec 17	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18
Child Arrangements Order/Residence Order S8(1)CA'89	331	332	331	331	331	331	331	331	333	333	333	334
Special Guardianship Order S14A CA 89	425	430	432	432	433	433	433	436	437	438	438	439

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