

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date of meeting: **25 July 2023**

Title of Report: **Looked After Children (LAC) Statistics**

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

Purpose of Report: **To update the Panel on changes in the last quarter.**

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

1. Background information

Financial Appraisal

1.1 Services for Looked After Children (LAC) are predominantly funded from the Children's Services base budget with some additional smaller funding streams supporting specific activity e.g. Virtual School activity from the Pupil Premium Grant and the Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children's grant from the Home Office.

2. Supporting information

2.1 Data found at Appendix A is drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month therefore some changes may occur as data is cleansed. There was an increase of 13 children in the number of LAC during the first quarter of 2023. On the last day of June, there were 677 children in care which is the highest number of children East Sussex County Council has cared for in the last 20 years. Delivering a statutory service to this number of children is extremely challenging, and this is compounded by the lack of placement options either in-house, or in the independent sector.

2.2 A total of 342 children were living in foster care at the end of June, a significant decrease of 15 since the last quarter. Of that number 250 were living with approved East Sussex County Council (ESCC) carers, a decrease of 10, this figure includes 8 children placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway. 90 children were living with independent agency carers, which is a decrease of 5 since the last quarter, and 2 with other local authority carers. In addition, 88 young people were living in supported housing options, homes or hostels. This figure has increased by 3 since the previous quarter. This figure included 2 children under the age of 16 placed in unregistered placements where there were no alternative regulated placements available. Ofsted are informed whenever we place an under 16 year old in an unregistered provision and searches continue for registered placements as a priority. There were 20 children placed for adoption at the end of June which is an increase of 4 since the previous quarter.

2.3 At the end of the quarter, 77 children were living with kinship foster carers and this has remained the same since the previous period.

2.4 The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, has decreased from 33 to 30. Planning for placements of this type is always monitored rigorously to mitigate any risk factors, and authorisation is given at a senior level.

2.5 At the end of June, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes increased dramatically from 92 to 113, a total increase of 21 since the last quarter alone. 21 of these children were living in ESCC run children's homes, and 92 were placed in external residential homes. This steep increase in children living in independent children's homes was due largely to the lack of fostering placements either in-house or in the independent sector both locally and nationally. The

financial consequence of the lack of fostering provision and the high cost of external residential provision is significant for Children's Services and the local authority.

2.6 At the end of June there were 2 ESCC children placed in external Secure Units.

2.7 At the end of June there were no children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

2.8 ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The number of young people seeking asylum was 71 at the end of June. In addition, there were 109 Asylum Seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period. It is anticipated that this figure will potentially see further increases when the adult dispersal accommodation is opened in Bexhill this autumn. Experience to date has shown that approximately 10% of adult asylum seekers in hotels, present as children requiring age assessments.

2.9 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders remained the same at 342 and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order decreased by 3 to 475.

2.10 There were no complaints from Looked After Children during this period.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The Looked After Children's system has continued to be very pressurised during this period with rising numbers of children coming into care, and the national and local shortage of care placements. It is to the credit of the fostering placement service that ESCC has been able to find suitable regulated placements for the vast majority of our Looked After Children. Nonetheless, the increase in children being placed in agency residential provision is creating a significant financial pressure for the council.

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Local Members
None.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
None.