

Committee: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date: **17 October 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 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 1 is drawn as a snapshot on the last day of the month and some changes occur as data is cleansed within the system. Once again, this quarter has seen the rising trend in the number of Looked after children continuing to increase, the figure rose by 9 children, and on the last day of September 2023, there were 686 children in care. The service remained very busy and the sufficiency of any placements either in-house, or in the independent sector, was extremely challenging. This is a national issue across the UK. Strenuous attempts were made to place children within their family networks which can be seen in the following data which supports this practice during this period.

2.2 A total of 337 children were living in foster care at the end of September, a decrease of 5 since the last quarter. Of that number 245 were living with approved East Sussex County Council (ESCC) carers, this is a further decrease of 5 from the previous quarter, and a trend which is very concerning. 5 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway, this has reduced by 3 since last quarter. 90 children were living with agency carers, this remains the same as the previous quarter. In addition, there were 2 children placed with Other Local Authority foster carers, which also remains the same as the last quarter. There were 95 young people living in supported housing options, homes or hostels, and this has seen an increase of 7 since the previous quarter, it also includes 1 child under the age of 16 placed in a Z1 placement (other placements) where there was no alternative regulated provision available. There were 17 children placed for adoption at the end of September which is a decrease of 3 since the previous quarter.

2.3 At the end of the quarter, 13 more children were living with kinship foster carers, this increased significantly since the previous quarter from 77 to 90.

2.4 The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, also increased from 30 to 34. Planning for placements of this sort is always monitored rigorously to mitigate any risk factors. Agreement and authorisation for this type of placement is given at a senior level, unless it is court mandated.

2.5 At the end of September, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes decreased slightly from 113 to 108, a total decrease of 5 in the quarter. Of the overall figure of 108, 18 children were living in ESCC run children's homes and 90 were placed in external residential homes. Exhaustive attempts are made to place children in our in-house provision prior to referring out to an agency placement. There are rigorous negotiations on both quality and price when placement searches are made with external providers. Wherever possible ESCC attempts to find family-based placements for our children either within their own networks or with foster carers. Where this is not possible and external residential homes are commissioned there remains a commitment to step the children down into a family arrangement at the right time.

2.6 At the end of September there was 1 ESCC child placed in an external Secure Unit.

2.7 At the end of September there were 0 children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

2.8 At the end of September there were 4 children placed in a Family Centre or Mother and baby units.

2.9 ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The number of young people seeking asylum was 81 at the end of September, which is an increase of 10 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 113 Asylum Seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period, 103 aged 18-21 and 10 aged 21-25. This is a slight increase from the previous quarter.

2.10 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders increased from 342 to 345 and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order decreased by 1 to 474.

2.11 There was 1 complaint from a Looked After Child during this period. This complaint arrived on the last day of the quarter and therefore there has not been time to progress any actions on it at this point.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The Looked After Children's system has continued to be very pressurised during this period with a national and local shortage of care placements. All key Local Authority commissioning groups have reported similar issues and that they are under intense pressure to find suitable regulated placements for their Looked After Children. It is to the credit of the ESCC fostering placement service that they have continued to find Ofsted or Care Quality Commission registered placements for the majority of our Looked After Children.

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LOCAL MEMBERS
All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
None