

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date of meeting: **16 January 2024**

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

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

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

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

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## **1. Background**

### **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. Any changes made to the system will update the data as at the correct date of the activity not the date of entry, therefore the end of year figures produced for the Department of Education 903 collection will show the finalised East Sussex County Council (ESCC) figures. This quarter has seen a decrease in the overall number of Looked after Children from 686 on the last day of September 2023, to 671 on the last day of December. This equates to an overall decrease of 15. The decrease has resulted from a combination of factors; data cleansing and a strenuous focus on reunification work with children and their birth families. The service remained very busy in order to achieve this outcome, and the sufficiency of any placements either in-house, or in the independent sector, continued to be extremely difficult. The national sufficiency challenges have shown no sign of improvement and the Local Government Association (LGA) and Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) have all made representations to government regarding this issue, and the impact it is having on budget pressures for Children's Services across the country.

2.2 A total of 329 children were living in foster care at the end of December, which is a decrease of 8 since the last quarter. Of that number, 233 were living with approved ESCC carers. This is a further decrease of 12 from the previous quarter, a trend which continues to be concerning. 3 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway, this reduced by 2 since the last quarter. 91 children were living with agency carers, this has increased by 1 since the previous quarter. In addition, there were 2 children placed with Other Local Authority foster carers, which remains the same as the last quarter. There were 19 children placed for adoption at the end of December which is an increase of 2 since the previous quarter.

2.3 There were 100 young people living in supported housing options, homes or hostels, which is an increase of 5 since the previous quarter. This period has seen the introduction of a new Ofsted regime for the regulation of this type of provision. The service has worked hard to assist the sector with advice and support regarding the new process, and the majority of the providers used by ESCC have applied to be registered. This has meant there has been no disruption to children already living in these types of placements. The figure of 100 also includes 6 children under the age of 16 placed in a Z1 placements

where there was no alternative regulated provision available. In these circumstances robust risk assessments and monitoring plans are made to ensure children are cared for safely.

2.4 At the end of the quarter, the number of children that were living with kinship foster carers, decreased significantly from 90 to 77.

2.5 The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, also decreased from 34 to 30. 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.

2.6 At the end of December, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes increased slightly from 108 to 111, a total increase of 3 in the quarter. Of the overall figure of 111, 20 children were living in ESCC run children's homes, which is an increase of 2, and 91 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.

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

2.8 At the end of December there were 0 children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

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

2.10 ESCC fully participates in the National Transfer Scheme (NTS) for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children. The number of children seeking asylum was 82 at the end of December, which is an increase of 1 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 113 Asylum Seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period, 101 aged 18-21 and 12 aged 21-25. This is the same overall number from the previous quarter.

2.11 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders increased from 345 to 348, an increase of 3, and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order decreased from 474 to 470, a decrease of 4.

2.12 There was 1 complaint from a Looked After Child supported by an advocate during this period. This complaint has now been resolved and is closed.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 It is very pleasing that there has been an overall reduction in the number of Looked after Children during this period. However, the children who have remained in care continue to have some complex needs and require high levels of skilled care. The placement data reinforces this with fewer children in fostering/kinship type placements and some small increases in the placement types for children with more complex needs. Hence, 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 how difficult it has become to find suitable regulated placements for their Looked After Children. It is to the credit of the ESCC duty placement service that they have continued to find Ofsted or Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered placements for the majority of our Looked After Children.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None