

Report to: **Corporate Parenting Panel**

Date of meeting: **24 July 2024**

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

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

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

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel are recommended to note and discuss 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 an increase in the overall number of Looked after Children from 655 on the last day of March 2024, to 684 on the last day of June 2024. This equates to an overall increase of 29. Whilst there has been a continued focus on returning children to the care of their families during this period, there has been a significant increase in admissions to care over this quarter. There were 67 children admitted to care and 38 children discharged from care. This was made up of several large sibling groups being admitted to care, increased numbers of children being accommodated and a group of unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) being transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). The sufficiency of any placements either in-house, or in the independent sector continued to be extremely challenging. However, our placement data has begun to show some improvement in the number of children being placed with foster carers both in-house and with agency carers. The improved financial offer that ESCC has made to support the recruitment of local foster carers is continuing to drive up our recruitment success. During this quarter the number of enquiries rose to 69 from 47 in the same quarter last year. The initial visits rose to 20 from 12 last year, and the number of approvals rose to 8 from 3 in the same period last year. Nonetheless the reliance on the use of residential placements to supplement fostering placements becoming available in a timely way, continues to place significant pressure of the Childrens Services budget. ESCC has agreed to become part of a regional commissioning pilot with the aim of driving greater opportunities to collaborate and manage the market more effectively.

2.2 A total of 351 children were living in foster care at the end of June 2024 which is 51% of the total number of looked after children and is an increase of 13 since the last quarter. Of that number, 239 (68%) were living with approved ESCC carers. This is a slight increase of 4 from the previous quarter. 4 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway, this is a decrease of 1 since the last quarter, and there is also 1 child placed in a Foster to Adopt placement with an agency adopter that is not part of the Regional Adoption Agency.

105 children (30%) were living with agency carers, this has increased by 9 since the previous quarter where there were 96 living with agency carers. In addition, there were 2 children placed with Other Local Authority foster carers and this has increased by 1 since the last quarter.

2.3 There were 10 children placed for adoption at the end of June 2024 which is a decrease of 6 since the previous quarter.

2.4 There were 100 young people living in supported housing options, homes or hostels, which is an increase of 5 since the previous quarter. The introduction of a new Ofsted regime for the regulation of this type of provision in October 2023 appears to have bedded down locally with very little loss of provision. The figure of 100 also includes 7 children who were under the age of 16, and who were placed in unregistered provision. These placements are only used in exceptional circumstances where no suitable alternative regulated provision is available. In these circumstances robust risk assessments and monitoring plans are made to ensure children are cared for safely.

2.5 At the end of the quarter, the number of children who were living with kinship foster carers, increased significantly from 67 to 78, a total of 11 children.

2.6 The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, also decreased by 3 from 27 to 24. 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.

2.7 At the end of June 2024, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes has increased to 113, a total increase of 5 in the quarter. This represents 17% of all looked after children. 21 children were living in ESCC run children's homes, which is an increase of 4, and 92 were placed in external residential homes, an increase of 1 since last quarter. Exhaustive attempts are made to place children within 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 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.

2.8 At the end of June 2024 there were still 3 ESCC child placed in external Secure Units and there is now 1 child placed in Lansdowne Secure Children's Home.

2.9 At the end of June there was 1 child remanded into youth detention accommodation.

2.10 At the end of June there was still 1 child placed in a Family Centre or Mother and baby unit.

2.11 At the end of June there were 2 children placed in Residential Schools.

2.12 ESCC fully participates in the NTS for UASC. The number of UASC was 77 at the end of March, which is a decrease of 1 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 123 Asylum Seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period, which is a decrease of 10 (112 aged 18-21 and 11 aged 21-25).

2.13 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders remained as 350, and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order decreased from 472 to 471, a decrease of 1.

2.14 There were no complaints from any Looked After Child during this period.

### **3. Conclusion**

3.1 It is concerning that there has been such a significant rise in the number of looked after children being admitted to care during this period. However, of this cohort there are higher numbers of children

being looked after in family arrangements either through fostering, or in their wider family arrangements, which has limited some of the pressure for the use of agency residential placements and supported housing options. The increase in the use of residential in-house placement options has also had a significant impact. There is a sharp focus locally on promoting the reunification of children to their families where it is safe and appropriate to do so. This programme is gaining momentum and should begin to impact on the overall numbers of looked after children during 2024/2025. Many of the children who have remained in care continue to have complex needs and require high levels of skilled care. The Looked After Children's system has continued to be very pressurised during this period with the national and local shortage of care placements, although there are grounds for optimism in the upturn in fostering enquiries and recruitment locally, and the increased capacity that the newly formed commissioning team has been able to access in the independent fostering market. 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