

Committee:	Corporate Parenting Panel
Date:	23 October 2024
Title of Report:	Looked After Children 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:

- 1) Note the report; and**
 - 2) Agree the newly designed performance dashboard with a highlight report for future Committee meetings as set out in Appendix 1 of 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 The data attached at Appendix 1 of the report 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. There has been another significant increase in the overall number of Looked after Children from 684 on the last day of June 2024 to 696 on the last day of September. This equates to an overall increase of 12 children. There have been strenuous efforts focussed on returning children to the care of their families during this period as outlined by the increase in all family placement options described below. Nonetheless there has been a significant increase in admissions to care over this quarter. There were 61 children admitted to care and 44 children discharged from care during this period. The admissions were made up of several large sibling groups including a sibling group of 7, increased numbers of children being accommodated under Section 20 of the Children's Act and 19 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) being transferred via the National Transfer Scheme (NTS).

2.2 A total of 341 children were living in foster care at the end of September 2024, this is 49% of the total number of looked after children and is a decrease of 10 since the last quarter. Of that number, 232 (68%) were living with approved ESCC carers. This is a decrease of 7 from the previous quarter. 5 children were placed with foster carers who were also approved adopters as part of the Fostering for Adoption pathway, this is an increase of 1 since the last quarter, and there is also 1 child placed in a Foster to Adopt placements with an agency adopter that is not part of the Regional Adoption Agency. 101 children (30%) were living with agency carers, this has decreased by 4 since the previous quarter where there were 105 living with agency carers. In addition, there were 2 children placed with Other Local Authority foster carers, this has remained the same since the last quarter. The improved financial offer that ESCC made to support the recruitment of local foster carers is continuing

to drive up our recruitment success. During Q1 and Q2 this year there was an increase of 21 fostering enquiries up to 138, as compared to 117 from the same period in 23/24. Again, the initial visits increased by 17 to 43 this year compared to 26 in the same period last year. The number of approvals rose by 6 in Q1 and Q2 this year to 12 compared to 6 in the same period 23/24.

2.3 There were 12 children placed for adoption at the end of September 2024 which is an increase of 2 since the previous quarter.

2.4 There were 99 young people living in supported housing options, homes or hostels, which is a decrease of 1 since the previous quarter. The figure of 99 also includes 4 children who were under the age of 16, and who were placed in unregistered provision, this has decreased by 3 since the previous quarter. 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 once again from 78 to 86, a total of 8, and 19 children from the end of March 24.

2.6 The number of children living at home with their parents whilst remaining subject to a legal order to ESCC, increased from 24 to 29 and increase of 5. 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 September 2024, the number of children living in regulated residential children's homes has increased to 122, a total increase of 9 in the quarter. This represents 17% of all looked after children. 24 children were living in ESCC run children's homes, which is an increase of 3, and 98 were placed in external residential homes, an increase of 6 since last quarter. 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.

2.8 At the end of September there were still 3 ESCC child placed in Secure Children's Homes but these are all placed in Lansdowne Secure Children's Home rather than external units, and an internal recharge is made to cover the costs.

2.9 At the end of the quarter there were 2 children remanded into youth detention accommodation.

2.10 At the end of September there were 2 children placed in a Family Centre or Mother and baby units.

2.11 At the end of September there were 0 children placed in Residential Schools.

2.12 ESCC fully participates in the NTS for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). The number of UASC was 84 at the end of September which is an increase of 7 from the previous quarter. In addition, there were 149 Asylum Seeking young people who were Care Leavers during this period, which is an increase of 26 (123 18-21 year olds and 26 21-25 year olds)

2.13 The number of children subject to Child Arrangement/Residence Orders was 351, an increase of 1 since the last quarter, and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order increased to 472 from 471.

2.14 There were 2 complaints from Looked After Children during this period. These are currently being investigated and not yet concluded.

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 again during this period. However, of this cohort there are higher numbers of children being looked after in their wider family arrangements either through Child Arrangement Orders, Residence Orders, Special Guardianship Orders, kinship foster care or placed with parents. Nonetheless there has continued to be an over reliance on the use of residential placements when fostering placements are not available due to the national placement sufficiency issues, and this has continued to place significant pressure on the Children's Services budget. Many of the children who have remained in care, or were newly admitted to care during this quarter, had complex care and health needs and required 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. In addition, ESCC has joined the regional commissioning pilot with the aim of driving greater opportunities to collaborate and manage the market more effectively across the region. It is to the credit of the newly formed placement commissioning team that the service has been able to source Ofsted or Care Quality Commission (CQC) registered placements for the majority of our Looked After Children and there has been an overall reduction in the number of under 16 year olds living in unregistered placements.

3.2 There has been significant progress on the design and accuracy of a new Looked after Children's dashboard which will assist the Corporate Parenting Panel to scrutinise the overall performance of the Looked After Children's service in future.

4. Recommendation

4.1 The panel are recommended to note the report and to replace the current snapshot report format of the Looked After Children's Statistics report, with the new dashboard and accompanying highlight performance report.

Carolyn Fair
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Kathy Marriott
Tel: 01273 481274
Email: Kathy.marriott@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None