



**CABINET**

14 January 2013

**TITLE OF REPORT**

**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN SUMMARY REPORT 2011/12.**

**Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services**

**Open Report**

**Classification** - For information.

**Key Decision:** Yes

**Wards Affected:** All.)

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**1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 In line with our key objective to obtain permanent placements for looked after children, the overall number of looked after children continues to decrease, falling by 10% in the last year. The high turnover and complexity of looked after children's needs remains a challenge for social workers and their multi-disciplinary colleagues.
- 1.2 Outcomes for our children however remained good overall, feedback from children and young people is generally positive and the statutory duties and responsibilities of the service consistently met. The in depth Ofsted inspection of the looked after children service was carried out in 2011/12 and found that all elements of the service were either good or outstanding.
- 1.3 The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Service in conjunction with wider Family Services colleagues has strengthened it's

participation and listening strategies involving children and young people enabling them to better support the identifying of overall needs and planning services. Examples of this include the development of the Corporate Parenting Board, the Child in Care Council, annual surveys and most recently the instigation of a video diary project where young people expressed their views through video.

- 1.4 Future work will focus on improving the timescales for children – reducing the length of care proceedings and getting children placed more quickly into permanent adoption or Special Guardianship placements. This will benefit children by reducing the length of their period of temporary care and reduce expenditure in what is a high cost area. While there are already a series of checks and balances to promote this activity, including various Panels, enhanced tracking of cases using the Independent Reviewing Officers and FWI are being introduced.

## **2. RECOMMENDATION**

That the report to be noted.

## **3. NUMBERS AND TRENDS**

- 3.1 Looked after children are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in society. All will have experienced separation, loss and broken attachments. Many will have suffered from abuse, neglect and other negative life experiences. The significant aspects of family life we often take for granted will have often been broken, dysfunctional and subject to considerable destabilisation and change.
- 3.2 Hence caring for looked after children is one of the most important, challenging and positively rewarding roles the Council undertakes. It is therefore essential all departments and services in the Council should work together to achieve best outcomes while safeguarding the children and young people in our care.
- 3.3 The number of looked after children in Hammersmith & Fulham continues to decline following a trend which began in 2004 (see table 1). This trend runs contrary to national figures for looked after children (see table 2). Locally the reductions in numbers is a direct result of improvements to how we support children and families in the community, a tightening of “ front door “ arrangements, high numbers of children leaving care on permanency orders, and a decline in the number of unaccompanied minors.

**Table 1 The Numbers of LAC 2001 to 2012. All looked after children at 31<sup>st</sup> March.**

Year ending March	Citizen	UASC	Total
2001	404	34	438
2002	381	52	433
2003	339	58	397
2004	361	83	444
2005	315	98	413
2006	308	86	394
2007	305	59	364
2008	266	48	314
2008	242	43	285
2010	234	26	260
2011	227	21	248
2012	204	20	224

**Table 2 National Trend of LAC 2001 – 2012 All children looked after at March**

31<sup>st</sup>

2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
58,900	59,700	60,800	61,200	60,900	60,300	59,970	59,360	60,890	64,410	65,520

- 3.4 Each looked after child's needs and the resulting support provided is outlined in their individual care plan, overseen in regular review meetings by Independent Reviewing Officers and Children's Guardians if the case is in care proceedings. In these processes there are regular formal and informal opportunities for children to express their views about the care they receive and age appropriately influence their own care plan. All plans involve the child's parents, so far as it will benefit the child, their carer and the multi-disciplinary professional network supporting each child.
- 3.5 The type of all looked after children's placements as of 30/06/2012 is outlined in table 3 below, distinguished between citizen and unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young people. Following on from this is table 3a which shows the cost of placements by type and total number of placements made over a four year period, the final one projected.
- 3.6 The costs of looked after children's placements range from £9k a year to £250k a year. So maintaining control of expenditure requires attention not just to the volume of looked after children but also to the profile of placements that looked after children are in. Our aim is to reduce the overall number of looked after children through securing permanent placements (adoption and Special Guardianship) and for those in care for there to be a reduction in the higher cost placements (residential care and independent fostering agency placements) and an increase in in-house fostering and placements with relatives.

- 3.7 For the most challenging young people costs are even higher. For example, a residential placement for a challenging teenager can cost over £5k per week, double the average residential care cost. Where young people are a danger to themselves or others using secure placements is the last option but the most costly. Secure placements average out at over £6.5k per week. At any one time only a small number of young people fall into these highest costs categories (less than 10) but they have a disproportionate effect on our expenditure. As a Department we have very little choice in the way we intervene in such matters, particularly with teenagers, our interventions often being overseen by the courts and associated professionals.
- 3.8 The impact of looked after children total costs is significant; and as a result of our expenditure on placements, staffing, legal costs etc, more than 50% of the Children's services Social Care expenditure is on looked after children.
- 3.9 Regarding the profile of placements, the tables below show that this year progress has been made in reducing independent fostering agency placements. Residential placements are lower now than they have ever been. Numbers of relative placements have declined but this is mainly due to children in this placements leaving care on Special Guardianship Orders. As table 3a shows, agency fostering and residential placements have the highest unit cost, therefore efforts to maximise the use of relatives and scheme foster placements as apposed to using the former two types of placement will be financially efficient. Staff resources have been redirected to placement finding within the wider birth family to seek to increase our use of relative placements.
- 3.10 In order to achieve better use of such family and friend placements Children's Services are committed to holding Family Group Meetings at the earliest possible stage of our intervention in order to identify such possible arrangements, critically before they are actually required. By pursuing this strategy we can both better meet children and young people's needs within their own networks and operate more financially efficiently within a very challenging environment.
- 3.11 The new Tri Borough Fostering and Adoption Service also has a clear target of recruiting 25 foster carers in the initial year of it's formation, again supporting the move away from the use of agency foster care, where costs are higher and the Departments impact on the day to day care of the children and young people less, given we have no direct supervisory oversight of such placements.

**Table 3**

<b>PLACEMENT TYPE</b>	
<b>Citizen</b>	<b>Total</b>
Foster by LA / Agency	115
Foster with friend/relative	32
Homes and hostels	6
Independent living	7
Missing children	2
Placed with own parents	7
Pre Adoption	10
P&V	22
Secure Accommodation	2
Semi-independent	2
Temporary	1
Young offenders institution	0
<b>Citizen Total</b>	<b>206</b>
<b>UASC</b>	<b>Total</b>
Foster by LA / Agency	10
Foster with friend/relative	0
Homes and hostels	0
Independent living	11
Semi-independent living	0
P&V	0
<b>UASC Total</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>ALL Total</b>	<b>227</b>

**Table 3a**

Placement Type	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13 Projected @ P6	
	Placements	Total Cost	Placements	Total Cost	Placements	Total Cost	Placements	Total Cost
Scheme Fostering Agency	119	£1,212,803	116	£1,388,198	89	£1,093,780	78	£1,110,758
Fostering Kinship	61	£1,775,270	81	£2,304,491	93	£2,616,402	76	£2,518,175
Fostering Residential	93	£469,672	60	£321,704	55	£324,876	42	£335,947
Residential	34	£2,539,240	25	£2,413,714	27	£2,051,841	17	£1,870,792
Asylum placements	37	£872,307	21	£477,264	25	£532,901	25	£534,968
Semi- Indep placements	21	£607,077	22	£656,060	35	£496,332	25	£410,483
Long Term Fostering	23	£484,684	21	£336,754	13	£247,064	11	£234,815

Disabled Residential	13	£1,299,273	11	£1,225,136	9	£795,296	8	£902,935
Pre-Adoption	10	£92,358	9	£70,271	7	£68,666	8	£68,223
Secure	1	£45,327	2	£107,550	2	£133,256	1	£85,829
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>£9,398,011</b>	<b>368</b>	<b>£9,301,141</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>£7,785,674</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>£7,785,674</b>
<b>% Change</b>			<b>-11%</b>	<b>-1%</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-16%</b>	<b>-6%</b>	<b>-16%</b>

**Table 3b**

<u>Other LAC Expenditure-</u>	2012/13		
	2010/11	2011/12	Proj
<u>Legal</u>	1,453,182	1,740,377	1,600,183
<u>Salaries-</u>	1,939,080	1,783,104	1,548,306

- 3.12 Outlined above in table 3b are two areas of high expenditure on looked after children in addition to their placement costs. Legal expenditure arises from care proceedings and our care proceedings pilot seeks to reduce the length of care proceedings and will therefore impact on our legal costs.
- 3.13 Staffing reductions have been made in line with the reduction in the number of looked after children and to contribute to our MTFS requirements.

### **Looked after children – profiles and outcomes**

- 3.14 The looked after children population in Hammersmith & Fulham is far from static, during 2011/2012 a total of 336 children were at one time in the care of the Council. While the snapshot end of year (March 31<sup>st</sup> 2012 ) total number of children being looked after was 224 a decline of 24 in the year (a 10% reduction).
- 3.15 Of that population, 20 were unaccompanied minors presenting their own, often unique additional needs and challenges, they are almost uniformly 15 plus in age.

**Table 4 The ages of all looked after children 31/3/2012;**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Number of LAC</b>
0 -1	19
2 – 3	10
4 – 8	39
9 – 14	67
15+	66

3.16 The age at which children become looked after often can impact on the outcome they experience having been in care. The primary outcomes for all looked after children are:

- (a) rehabilitation home,
- (b) a permanent placement, secured via an Adoption, Special Guardianship or Residence Order with a family member, friend or stranger or
- (c) remaining in care until 18, while maintaining as stable a living arrangement as possible with an increasing focus on preparing for semi-independence as they approach 18.

3.17 Our adoption, special guardianship and residence order rates for the period 2004 – 2012 are clear testimony to our desire to achieve permanency for all the children we can outside the care system. Table 5 shows the national picture with Hammersmith and Fulham the leading Local Authority in the country over the three year period ending March 2011; and our performance last year exceeded our performance over the previous three years so will expect to remain one of the top performing Local Authorities.

This position is emphasised by the recent release of national statistics for the year ending 2012 where we were second in the national table for children ceasing to be looked after because of Special Guardianship. Our current annual performance thus far is outlined in Table 6 below.

3.18 The establishment of a substitute primary carer relationship and the benefits such an emotional attachment for life can bring is widely acknowledged as a key factor in positive outcomes for all looked after children; these permanent placements give our looked after children what most children receive this consistently from their birth parents and/or extended family.

3.19 The Council has a clear and sustained positive record in this area including achieving permanency outcomes with older children, where other local authorities may not have pursued this best possible outcome so rigorously. However, it should be acknowledged that these positive outcomes do not come without cost, we are currently supporting 214 children on post order allowances as table 7 below indicates at a total cost per year of £2m.

**Table 5 The percentage of children who ceased to be looked after because of a special guardianship order. National figures.**

<b>RANK</b>	<b>LA Code</b>	<b>LA Name</b>	<b>3 year average 2009, 2010 and 2011 (%)</b>	<b>2011</b>	
		<b>England</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>Hammersmith and Fulham</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>2</b>	342	St. Helens	13	18	*
	351	Bury	13	14	
	868	Windsor and Maidenhead	13	x	
	883	Thurrock	13	11	*
<b>6</b>	359	Wigan	12	13	*
	841	Darlington	12	15	*
	861	Stoke-on-Trent	12	17	*
<b>9</b>	212	Wandsworth	11	10	
<b>10</b>	204	Hackney	10	13	*
	344	Wirral	10	4	
	845	East Sussex	10	16	*
	870	Reading	10	19	*
	921	Isle of Wight	10	13	*
<b>15</b>	208	Lambeth	9	6	
	352	Manchester	9	11	*
	355	Salford	9	9	
	805	Hartlepool	9	8	*
	816	York	9	11	
	909	Cumbria	9	12	*
<b>21</b>	202	Camden	8	4	
	304	Brent	8	9	*
	307	Ealing	8	9	*
	340	Knowsley	8	x	
	353	Oldham	8	11	*
	354	Rochdale	8	9	
	383	Leeds	8	11	*
	384	Wakefield	8	14	*
	813	North Lincolnshire	8	6	
	815	North Yorkshire	8	8	
	851	Portsmouth	8	6	
	856	Leicester	8	12	*
	876	Halton	8	15	*
	881	Essex	8	12	*
	887	Medway	8	9	*
	908	Cornwall	8	10	*
<b>37</b>	210	Southwark	7	6	
	310	Harrow	7	10	*
<b>37</b>	315	Merton	7	x	
	350	Bolton	7	7	*
	370	Barnsley	7	7	*
	392	North Tyneside	7	11	*
	840	Durham	7	10	*
	850	Hampshire	7	8	*
	873	Cambridgeshire	7	8	
	878	Devon	7	4	
	882	Southend-on-Sea	7	x	
	888	Lancashire	7	6	*
	889	Blackburn with Darwen	7	8	*
	929	Northumberland	7	11	*
	931	Oxfordshire	7	8	*
	936	Surrey	7	6	
<b>53</b>	206	Islington	6	0	
	207	Kensington and Chelsea	6	x	
	302	Barnet	6	9	*
	316	Newham	6	8	*



**Table 6 Post Order Allowances.....Placements Numbers and Costs.**

Placement Type	2009/10		2010/11		2011/12		2012/13 Proj	
	Placements	Total Cost	Placements	Total Cost	Placements	Total Cost	Placements	Total Cost
Special Guardianship	69	£632,476	91	£788,876	109	£988,659	115	£1,117,592
Adoption	75	£862,947	75	£849,627	70	£770,171	61	£704,826
Residence Orders	44	£356,495	38	£297,349	35	£310,559	31	£272,374
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>£1,851,918</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>£1,935,852</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>£2,069,389</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>£2,094,792</b>
<b>% Change</b>			<b>9%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>-3%</b>	<b>1%</b>

### **Adoption scorecard**

- 3.20 As a result of concerns about the length of time taken between entry to care and children being adopted (which nationally is 2 years 7 months) in March 2012 the government announced an initiative to hold local authorities to account for the speed of the adoption process by introducing an adoption scorecard. This is a set of measures showing the time taken for overall and individual sections of the adoption process. In May 2012 the government published the first adoption scorecards for each local authority, which initially focuses on the adoption process for children and will be updated annually when new data becomes available. From 2014 the adoption scorecards will be revised to include data on perspective adopters and will be published for all adoption agencies so that performance in relation to timeliness can be compared with each other.
- 3.21 The Hammersmith and Fulham adoption scorecard highlights that 62% of children wait less than 21 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family, this is comparable with the English average.
- 3.22 The scorecard is based on children adopted – so as table 7 shows this is a very small cohort and therefore the final “score” is subject to significant swings from a few children; some Local Authorities have found that hard to place children can lead to a poor scorecard even when they are seen as “successes” - e.g. when they have older more difficult children have been placed for adoption but it has taken longer than it would for a baby. From the placements we have made this year we know we are likely to fall foul of this in next year’s scorecard as we have had children aged 14 and 12 adopted by the foster carers they had been in placement with for many years. An excellent outcome for them and one they had each individually requested in conjunction with their foster carers.

See also table 4 re; age range of our looked after children, younger children being much more readily suitable for adoption.

**Table 7 numbers of orders**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Adoptions</b>	<b>Residence Orders</b>	<b>Special Guardianships</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2004 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2005</b>	19	1	N/A
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006</b>	12	13	N/A
<b>1<sup>st</sup> April 2006 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007</b>	14	7	11
<b>1st April 2007 - 31st March 2008</b>	22	3	24
<b>1st April 2008 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009</b>	10	5	21
<b>1st April 2009 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010</b>	4	5	13
<b>1st April 2010 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2011</b>	10	3	21
<b>1st April 2011 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012</b>	8	11	25
<b>1st April 2012- 31<sup>st</sup> Nov 2012</b>	9	3	11

## **5. CONCLUSION**

- 5.1 The Looked After Children and Care Leavers Service demonstrates a consistently high commitment to the Council's looked after children. As one of the most vulnerable groups within society there still remains much to do in relation to this group of children and young people, this does not stop when young people become 18 as we continue to have commitments to young people under care leaver legislation up to 25 and potentially beyond if still in further or higher education.
- 5.2 While it should also be acknowledged that this group of children and young people are responsible for the expenditure of a high percentage of Children's Services budget, they often have exceptional levels of need. However, we should continue to strive to reduce costs while maintaining service standards. Tri-borough testing of service delivery, better use of family and kinship placements (connected persons) and our own scheme foster placements alongside more timely court and permanency planning processes will all contribute to the targeted reduction in costs and most importantly positive outcomes for children.
- 5.3 The best outcomes for looked after children are achieved when we can secure their placement in a permanent family; sometimes that can be within their birth family, alternatively within a substitute family secured by adoption or special guardianship.

- 5.4 The service over the next year will continue to maximise the permanent placement of looked after children, thereby contributing to a reduction in our looked after children numbers, and to do so in line with government expectations that this is achieved in shorter timescales.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Results from LAC annual questionnaire.

## **7. EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 A Equality Impact Assessment is not applicable for this report.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 When a child is in the care of a Local Authority it is their duty under s22 Children Act 1989 ["CA1989"] to provide the child with accommodation and to maintain the child in other ways apart from the provision of accommodation.
- 8.2 Those sections of the report which discuss the need for supportive residential settings and the introduction of payment cards to facilitate subsistence payments are therefore examples of the Local Authority meeting their statutory duty.
- 8.3 As described within the body of the report statutory duties under s 23A-24D CA1989 to provide support and assistance to care leavers extend beyond childhood into adulthood up to the age of 25.
- 8.4 There are no other direct legal implications of the report.

## **9. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## **10. RISK MANAGEMENT**

- 10.1 No Risk.

## **11. PROCUREMENT AND IT STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 No Procurement or IT Strategy Implications

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000**  
**LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Description of Background Papers</b>	<b>Name/Ext of holder of file/copy</b>	<b>Department/ Location</b>
1.	None		

**LIST OF APPENDICES:**

**Appendix 1**– Current Initiatives Involving Looked After Children

### **CURRENT INITIATIVES INVOLVING LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

There have been a significant number of activities and initiatives involving Looked after children over the past twelve months. The further development of an integrated Looked After Children (children under 18) and Care Leavers Service (permanency over 18) has enabled some improvements to be made to services offered in response to suggestions made by young people. This includes gathering the views of looked after children and care leavers to enable service wide changes to practice if required.

In particular, the integration of the service has made it more straightforward to ensure that children and young people do not automatically experience a change of social worker simply because they have moved from the LAC Service to the Care Leavers Service as happened in the past. This helps to address a longstanding criticism of children regarding frequent changes of allocated social worker.

We are also in the process of introducing payment cards, particularly for young people in receipt of regular subsistence payments be they under 18 or in higher or further education or unable to access public funds [ UASC ].

Again this will assist in addressing issues that arise when the duty system is busy and some delays in response times are encountered when visiting Cobbs Hall. It will also help diffuse the number of incidents at Cobbs Hall involving looked after young people, care leavers and clients of the Youth Offending Service.

The Corporate Parenting arrangements have also been strengthened and a Corporate Parenting Board (chaired by Councillor Helen Binmore) now co-ordinates activity along with the Children in Care Council (facilitated by the Children's Rights Service) having been integrated into these arrangements.

Recent presentations to the Corporate Parenting Board have included "Pathway Plans" (they replace care plans for 16 year olds and over), psychological support services to looked after children including reports from the Psychological Therapies Service (which is integrated into the wider LAC Service/and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service nurses who are also co-located at Cobbs Hall with the wider service.

The "Pledge" to looked after children was formally launched on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2012. This includes our clear commitment to all our looked after children and our aspirations for the service we deliver them.

At the same highly successful event attended by children, young people, members, community representatives and staff saw the launch of "The

Opportunity's Fund" by Councillor Helen Binmore. This is a charity set up to further assist and will be seeking contributions from a wide range of sources.

The service was also subject to two inspections in 2011/2012 by Ofsted. We initially had the borough wide safeguarding inspection in June/July 2011. The overall judgement of the inspectors was highly positive. A good to outstanding grade was the final assessment of the inspection team. Similarly there was a Youth Offending Service/LAC interface thematic inspection in early 2012, again feedback was generally positive; this inspection did not provide a grade as such.

Hammersmith & Fulham Family Services are also currently involved in the Court Proceedings Pilot, an initiative to reduce delay in family proceedings with our tri-borough colleagues in Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster. The LAC Service carries approximately 50% of the Councils cases within the pilot. The LAC Service works with cases where the parents have been or are highly likely to be ruled out of caring for their children permanently.

A particular critical target of the pilot is to reduce care proceedings to twenty six weeks, currently the average duration of proceedings nationally approaches one year.

Six months into the pilot we have been successful in completing a number of proceedings well within the twenty six week target, avoiding previous delays for children and securing permanent care arrangements for them.

While some highly complex cases in proceedings will continue to take a significantly larger time, we anticipate the overall trend will continue downwards, also creating significant financial savings for the Council in both legal costs and the time children remain in Council care.

Hammersmith & Fulham, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster are also currently engaged in a process of exploring whether services for looked after children can be delivered on a Tri-borough basis. Various discreet aspects and levels of integration are being considered. The priority being to improve or maintain current service levels while making efficiency savings.