



London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION POLICY AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEE

19 JANUARY 2015

LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS ANNUAL REPORT

Report of the Tri Borough Executive Director of Children's Services

Open Report

Classification - For Review and Comment

Key Decision: No

Wards Affected: (All)

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report highlights the significant responsibilities the local authority has in relation to Looked after Children, and how it discharges these.
- 1.2 Nationally, there were 68,400 and in London 10,110 children and young people in care on 31 March 2014, a slight increase on the previous year. Generally, outcomes for Looked after Children are poorer than those who have not been in the care system, although at least in part this reflects the child's life experience prior to entering care. Part of the job of the care system is to address the additional needs that children in care are likely to have, as a consequence of this earlier life experience. They are amongst the most vulnerable children that the Council has responsibility for. Despite the good work and dedication of professionals and carers, challenges still remain in improving the experiences and outcomes for Looked after Children. We closely monitor the profile and outcomes of our care population in order to effectively plan services. Section 3 outlines the profile of our current care population and the following sections highlight outcomes for Looked after Children and Care Leavers.
- 1.3 Section 5 highlights the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham's (LBHF's) strategic priorities for Looked after Children services and planned future service developments.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In this report, the term Looked after Children refers to those children for whom the LBHF has assumed Parental Responsibility through a care order or by an agreement with their parent(s).
- 2.2 The LBHF also has a duty and responsibility to those young people who leave care after the age of 16 years until they reach the age of 21 years, or 25 if they are in higher education.
- 2.3 The majority of Looked after Children need alternative care and accommodation due to the inability of their primary care giver to offer safe and effective care within the family home. Some Looked after Children are able to return to their parent(s) speedily and do not require long term services or interventions. Many who remain in care are likely to have suffered neglect or abuse, prior to coming into our care, and are likely to require support from a range of services.

3. NUMBERS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 3.1 At the end of March 2014 there were 200 children Looked After by the LBHF. Of those children and young people who were Looked After at the 31 March 2014, 42 percent (84 out of 200) had been Looked After for at least twelve months. During the course of the 2013/14 financial year 134 children and young people started to be looked after, of which 28 percent were aged 16 and above (37 out of 134). This compares to a National figure of 30,430 and a London figure of 5,870 children who entered care. During the 2013/14 financial year there were 160 children and young people in care who ceased to be looked after ; 34 (24 percent) episodes of care ended as a result of the young person turning 18 and 56 (33 percent) ended with the child returning home to their parents.
- 3.2 The number of Looked After Children has gradually declined over the past decade and has more recently stabilised at current levels: from 361 Looked After Children in March 2004 to 200 children in March 2014. The number of Looked After Children as a proportion of the population in Hammersmith and Fulham is 62 Looked After Children per 10,000 population, which is lower than the inner London average which is 64 Looked after Children per 10,000 and slightly higher than the National average of 60 Looked after Children per 10,000. This is much higher than our Tri-borough partners Kensington and Chelsea (37 per 10,000) and Westminster (49 per 10,000).

Year End Looked after Children Population by Borough since 2009-10

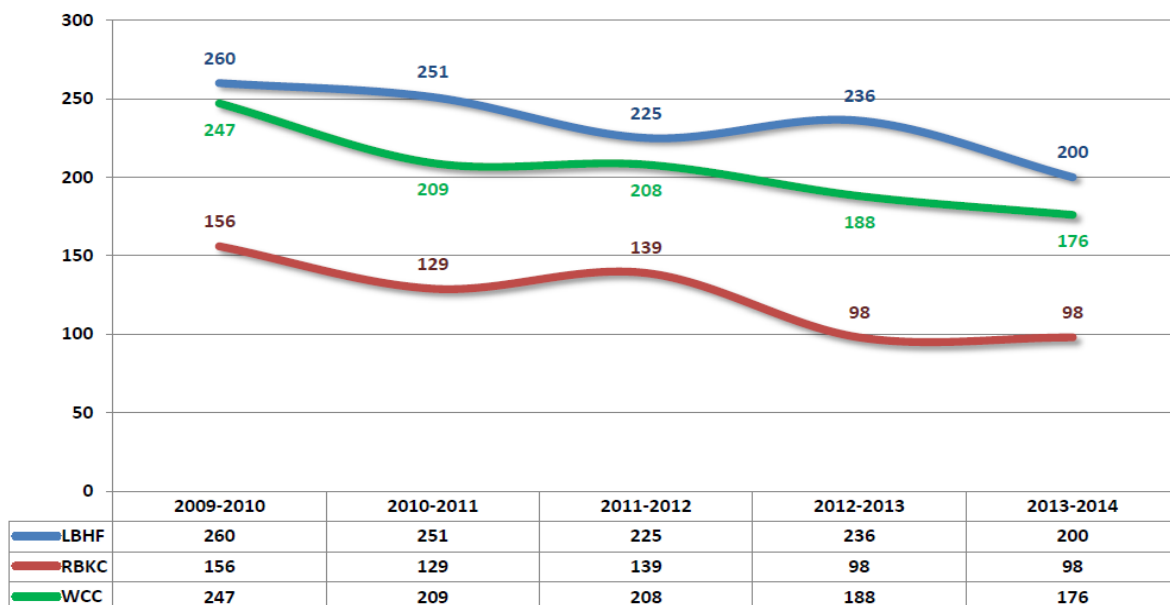


Table 1: Looked After Children population (year end0: 2009/10-2013/14

- 3.3 The majority of children Looked After at the 31 March were aged 10 and over, with 38 children aged 16 and above (29 percent) and 81 aged 10 to 15 (41 percent). Only 32 children were Looked After under the age of five (7 aged under one and 25 aged between one and four). The low number of young children is linked to the Hammersmith and Fulham’s success with finding young children alternative permanent caring arrangements.
- 3.4 Abuse and neglect was the largest category of need, recorded as the main category of need at entry to care for 119 of the 200 (60 percent) Looked After Children at the 31 March 2014. 9 children were Looked After due to absent parenting (the majority of these young people will be unaccompanied asylum seeking young people); 31 due to family dysfunction; 17 due to family in acute stress; 6 due to Disability, 7 due to socially unacceptable behaviour and 11 due to parental illness or disability.
- 3.5 The majority of Looked After Children are in foster care placements: of the 200 Looked After Children at 31 March 2014, 136 (68 percent) were in foster care; 20 were in residential placements (10 percent); and 3 were in residential school placements. Of the Looked After Children in residential placements 12 were in supported accommodation and 8 in children’s homes. Other Looked After Children were placed for adoption, placed with a parent, or were in semi-independent accommodation.
- 3.6 As a geographically small borough, not all Looked After Children are able to live within Hammersmith and Fulham when they are in care. Of the children and young people Looked After at the 31 March 2014, 58 percent were placed in London, including within Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster. Of the Looked After Children placed outside of London 60 percent were in a fostering placement, 11 percent were in adoptive placement, with kinship carers or placed with a parent and 60 percent had been living in their placement for more than two years.

4. CORPORATE PARENTING

- 4.1 Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council to provide the best care and protection for children and young people who are 'looked after', that is, who are in public care. Effective corporate parenting will need the commitment from all Council employees and elected Members and an authority wide approach. These responsibilities for Local Authorities were first laid out in the Children Act 1989, the Children Act 2004 and reinforced in the Children and Young People's Act 2008.
- 4.2 The Corporate Parenting Board has a key role in monitoring how the Council discharges its corporate parenting responsibilities. Over the past year the Board has met with representations from the Children in Care Council who have identified topics and themes for discussion. Topics for this year have included career opportunities and local apprenticeships, access to social housing, education attainment, health and well being and feedback on a recent consultation event highlighting experiences and expectations of local services for children and young people in care. Plans for the forthcoming year include obtaining children and young people's views regarding key priorities and the format and structure of the meetings to enable greater opportunities for participation and service user involvement.

5. STRATEGIC PLANNING

- 5.1 A three year strategy for Looked After Children has recently been developed which sets out the vision and intended outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers in the period 2014 to 2017.
- 5.2 The strategy has six strategic objectives:
1. Children on the edge of care are better supported to remain within their families and community
 2. Looked After Children and Care Leavers are provided with security, stability and are cared for
 3. Looked After Children and Care Leavers are safe from harm and neglect
 4. Looked After Children and Care Leavers are supported in reaching a good standard of education
 5. Looked After Children and Care Leavers health needs are promoted and supported
 6. All Looked After Children and Care Leavers have a voice in decisions which affect their lives.
- 5.3 To support the delivery of the strategic priorities, and progress towards shared outcomes, an annual borough specific Looked after Children and Care Leavers improvement plan has been developed. The plan will be monitored by a multi-agency service improvement group, which will link directly with the Children in Care Council and will be able to respond to the issues that the council rise.
- 5.4 The Tri-borough Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) has a significant role in ensuring effective multi-agency work and safeguarding for Looked After

Children. The LSCB has requested an annual report on progress made with achieving desired outcomes.

- 5.5 This CEPAC Committee is also involved in monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services, via the scrutiny of this annual report on services and outcomes for Looked after Children and Care Leavers.
- 5.6 Other relevant performance indicators are reported quarterly through the Family Services Management Group and routinely by the Director to the Lead Member.

6. SAFEGUARDING OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN AND CARE LEAVERS

- 6.1 Children who are subject to frequent placement moves are less able to form positive attachments with carers which make them more vulnerable to unsafe relationships from other adults or their peer group. The number of placement moves that children have is carefully monitored to ensure plans are adapted to make placements more resilient where required. In 2013/14 19.5 percent of Looked After Children experienced three or more placement moves. To address this area disruption meetings are being held for children who are at risk of having two placement breakdowns in order to strengthen learning and planning for this small cohort.
- 6.2 Teenage Looked after children are more likely to go missing than their peers, and therefore (amongst other things) be more vulnerable to sexual exploitation. There were a total of 56 episodes where Looked After Children went missing involving 23 of the Council's Looked After Children, in 2013/14.
- 6.3 There are significant efforts at both the local and national level to reduce the distance at which looked after children are placed from their borough of origin. While there are a small minority of children who are more effectively safeguarded by being placed at a distance (e.g. those young people identified to be at risk due to gang affiliation), the lack of foster placements in Inner London means that many children need to be placed in other local authority areas who might be better served by a more local placement, although usually these placements are in London. A total of 47 Looked after Children, looked after on 31 March 2014 were in an out of London placements.

7. HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 7.1 Looked after Children and young people share the same health risks and problems as their peers but often to a greater degree. They often enter care with a worse level of health than their peers in part due to the impact of poverty, abuse, neglect and chaotic parenting.
- 7.2 Local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure that health assessments are carried out for every looked after child in their care. Of the 135 Annual Health Assessments (for children who have been in care for a year) 94 percent were carried out on time. This compares to the National average of 88 percent and

London average of 92 percent. This high level of performance is due in part to the implementation of a reminder system for social workers to refer for health assessment, and increased outreach work by the specialist nurses for children and young people placed out of borough.

- 7.3 The Local Authority should act as a 'good parent' in relation to the health of looked after children. Within that role it has the right to approve the immunisation of children within its care against vaccine preventable diseases as per the national immunisation schedule. Framework I, the social services electronic record, shows that 97 percent of children and young people looked after were up to date with immunisations on 31 March 2014, the same level of coverage as was in place on 31 March 2013.
- 7.4 Dental health is an integral part of the Health Assessment. The Local Authority and NHS Trust are required to ensure that children in care receive regular check-ups with a dentist. 81 percent of Looked after children aged 16 and under are up to date with their dental checks; a decline on last year when dental checks for over 16 year olds were slightly higher at approximately 91 percent. Monitoring and targeted approaches to encourage in particular young people to attend dental appointments are now in place.
- 7.5 Due to the nature of their experiences prior to and during being looked after, many will have poor mental health. This may be in the form of significant emotional, psychological or behavioural difficulties.
- 7.6 The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is a self report measure completed by the children's carer and is aimed at assessing a child's behaviour, emotions and relationships. In 2013-2014 the number of SDQs completed for Looked after Children was 47 percent (59/125) a reduction from 2012-13 when 73 percent of Looked after Children had SDQ's completed. A child or young person who reports a high score on their SDQ should be referred for further assessment and, where appropriate, intervention or treatment by the specialist Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Plans to ensure that the SDQ questionnaire is completed as part of the annual health assessment process are being developed to improve performance in this area.
- 7.7 Between April 2013 and March 2014, and based on the SSSA 903 return, 3 percent of Looked after Children were reported to be known to have a substance misuse issue this was comparable to the 3 percent for 2012-2013, three were offered support services; however, none took up the support.

8. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

- 8.1 Education that encourages high aspirations and individual achievement, with minimum disruption, is central to improving immediate and long-term outcomes for Looked after Children and Care Leavers. We know that Looked after Children and Care Leavers face significant barriers to achieving good educational outcomes, therefore closing the attainment and progress gap and creating a culture of high aspirations is a major priority for the Hammersmith and Fulham Borough.

- 8.2 In April 2014 the three Tri-borough Local Authorities appointed a single Tri-borough Virtual School Head. The Virtual School maintains accurate and up to date information about how Looked after Children and Care Leavers are progressing in education and takes urgent and individual action when they are not achieving well.
- 8.3 There were five pupils in the Key Stage 1 cohort, one had a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and one was undergoing a Statutory Assessment. The pupil, who did not achieve Level 2, has speech and language difficulties as well as emotional and behavioural needs. One pupil surpassed her predicted levels although having mild Autism and ADHD. Another pupil achieved Level 3s in Literacy despite experiencing two school and care placement moves in Key Stage 1.
- 8.4 There are six pupils in the Key Stage 2 cohort; three pupils have a statement of SEN. Out of the cohort, 4 achieved Levels 4 and above in Maths and 3 achieved a Level 4 in Literacy. One pupil achieved Level 5 in Reading following targeted tuition. Another pupil achieved beyond his target levels in reading due to daily literacy support.
- 8.5 Out of the 3 pupils who did not achieve a Level 4 in both Reading and Writing, 1 pupil was a newly accommodated looked after pupil placed in residential care with low prior attainment and poor attendance; 1 pupil with a Statement experienced 4 placement moves in KS2 and 2 school placements. The third pupil progressed from P levels at the end of KS1 to Level 2s by the end of KS2 which was good progress for this particular pupil.
- 8.6 There were sixteen looked after children in the Key Stage 3 cohort. Twelve of the cohort was assessed as achieving Level 5 or above in English and ten achieved Level 5 and above in Maths. Four of the cohort have statements of SEN's and two are undergoing statutory assessment for such a statement. Of those four pupils that did not achieve Level 5 in English, all have SEN's. Of those six pupils who did not achieve Level 5 in Maths, five have SEN's and one is accessing additional support to boost her attainment. The Year 9 cohort includes 3 pupils who experience significant difficulties with attendance including those at high risk of offending, episodes of missing from care and mental health needs.
- 8.7 There were nineteen Looked after Children in the Key Stage 4 cohort. In 2014 performance at Key Stage 4 was outstanding and represented the highest overall achievement to date for those who achieved 5+ A*-GCSEs (including Maths and English), 5 x A*-G and 1+ A*-Gs. Within this cohort, 1 pupil achieved the highest A* Maths GCSE (mock) in the United Kingdom and went on to achieve 11 x A*-C GCSEs. In amidst the many successes, it is evident that the work of individual Virtual School Teachers, particularly for pupils looked after beyond 12 months, is having a significant impact on the education of our looked after children. With closer monitoring and targeted interventions, teachers build up a relationship with their pupils and the network ensuring they can tailor support to raise attainment.

- 8.8 Steady progress has been made in addressing the issues and barriers around sustaining education, training and employment for post 16 Looked after Children and Care Leavers. Consideration needs to be taken for the way the Education Employment and Training (EET) performance indicator for care leavers is reported. The performance indicator reflects a snapshot of care leavers at a particular time (19th, 20th and 21st birthday) rather than the overall picture of level of EET throughout the year. Over the last year, there were two major challenges facing the service in reducing Not in Education Employment Training (NEET) figures; the number of care leavers with complex needs and the need for additional workers to support this hard to reach cohort. There has been an increase in late entrants coming into care. There is also the challenge of supporting young people who have become looked after as a result of being placed in custody.
- 8.9 Since the Virtual School began supporting post 16 Looked after Children, numbers of young people in Education, Employment or Training has steadily risen; and effectively planned education pathways through Years 12 and 13 have resulted in greater achievement of qualifications and a year by year increase in the number of care leavers going to university. Ten young people achieved Level 3 qualifications this year and 8 young people have been offered places on university courses.

9. OUTCOMES FOR CARE LEAVERS

- 9.1 The Care Leavers Team assists, befriends and advises young people to make a successful transition from the Council's care to independent living in the community.
- 9.2 Social workers assess and draw up a Pathway Plan for Care leavers aged 16. This plan identifies the support that a young person will require in reaching independence. A Personal Adviser takes full case responsibility when the young person leaves care, usually at age 18. The Pathway Plan sets out the support available for all aspects of their life, with a particular emphasis on securing settled accommodation and appropriate Education, Training and Employment (EET). The Plan is reviewed every six months until the young person is 21, or later if they are completing an agreed course of education, training and employment when support can be extended up until they are 25.
- 9.3 From April 2011 a former care leaver over the age of 21, but under 25, will be able to return to ask for their case to be reopened in order to complete a course of EET up to the level of a first degree.
- 9.4 The team supported up to 163 young people in the current year. Following a national trend there has been a fall in care leavers who came into care as Unaccompanied Minors seeking asylum and a rise in high needs, complex cases where the young person came into care over the age of 14.

9.5 At the end of March 2014, 63 out of 121 care leavers were engaged in Education, Employment or Training (52 percent) which compares to a National average of 45 percent and a London average of 54 percent.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Children and Families Act received Royal Assent on 13 March 2014. It is a wide-ranging piece of legislation, and its various provisions are being implemented in phases between April 2014 and April 2015.

10.2 As part of the phased approach the Children and Families Act has enshrine into law a 26 week maximum period for care proceedings. This will achieve national consistency of the reduced timescales for care proceedings that Hammersmith and Fulham has proven to be possible by its results within the care proceedings pilot.

11. FINANCIAL AND RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Reducing the number of looked after children via a combination of effective preventative approaches and ensuring permanency arrangements continue to be a key area in the departments savings programme both in current and future years. Significant targets are set against these activities. The implementation of the Focus on Practice initiative, which aims to reduce Looked after Children numbers by 20 percent along with the ongoing successful delivery of permanency and connected person's placements, is therefore critical to the achievement of these savings.

11.2 As highlighted within this report a significant number of Looked after Children enter care as young people and therefore there are risks associated with the number of Southwark Judgement, Remand cases and unaccompanied asylum seeking requiring support from Family Services. The costs involved in supporting these young people are significant with the additional costs of leaving care support in future years. In 2013/14 Remand costs exceeded £371k with only £207k of funding forthcoming from the Ministry of Justice. Family Services has incurred in excess of £650k in 2013/14 for Southwark Judgement cases.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2000

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT

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