

**Vale of Glamorgan Council
Children and Young People Services
Annual Placement Review**

June 2017

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2016/17 with regard to placement provision for Looked After Children (LAC) and to outline our plans for 2017/18.

This report relates also to one of the key savings that was being managed as part of the Social Services Budget Programme (C5: LAC Residential Placements), with a target of £150,000 in cashable savings each year between 2015/16 and 2016/17.

2. Context

This area of activity and expenditure is a very challenging and often volatile one in all local authorities. It is difficult to anticipate a number of key factors including:

- how many and which children will enter the looked after system each year;
- what type of placements they will need; and
- how many children will cease to be looked after;
- the impact of case law and changes in government regulations.

To plan as effectively as possible, the Management Team in Children and Young People Services continuously analyse external and internal influences to anticipate the likely impact in the Vale of Glamorgan.

Some of the high profile external influences pertinent to this area are as follows:

- **Children with Complex Needs**

In common with other local authorities, the Vale of Glamorgan has experienced an increase in the number of children with especially complex needs and the rising costs associated with meeting these needs within appropriate placements continues to place pressure on budgets. This cohort of children relates both to those with challenging and complex behaviour and to those with disabilities.

Children and young people with challenging and complex behaviours often cannot be maintained within foster placements and require admission to residential care. In certain circumstances these placements will be specialist (for example, where a child is displaying sexually abusive behaviour) and/or require the provision of additional staffing to manage risks associated with the child's behaviour. Placements of this type can cost over £200k a year.

There is evidence of increasing demand for support for older disabled children and young people. Families often manage to cope when children are younger but some of them find it increasingly difficult to do so as the children grow and may become more challenging or aggressive. Some disabled young people require 24 hour care and support which can be met only in a residential school setting, usually until they reach the age of 19. This represents a significant long-term pressure on resources in coming years as the average annual cost of such provision is on average £113,000 per year (range from £18,500 – £250,000 per year).

- **The Welsh Government's 'When I Am Ready' scheme**

The 'When I Am Ready – Planning Transition to Adulthood for Care Leavers' scheme aims to promote better support by extending a young person's transition to adulthood within a supportive family and household environment. Young people are now able to remain with their foster carer beyond the age of 18 until their 21st birthday, or until they feel able to leave for independent living before that age. The scheme was implemented in April 2016 and as of the 31st March 2017 we have 14 young people in 'When I Am Ready' placements with a potential further five identified for this financial year. This scheme will continue to have an impact upon the Fostering Service as children remain in placements for longer. This will increase the overall demand for foster care placements, to provide for the same number of Looked After Children. The Council will also have to address the need to recruit and retain foster carers who are capable and authorised to foster children from birth to the age of 21.

- **Remand Placements**

Following the Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, local authorities became responsible for the costs of young people under the age of 18 who are remanded into Young Offenders Institutions (YOI), Secure Children's Homes (SCH) and Secure Training Centres (STC). Before April 2013, the Ministry of Justice paid for all YOI remands and two thirds of SCH and STC remands. The costs of a remand placement are £158 per night for a YOI, £561 per night for a SCH and £533 per night for a STC. If a young person is considered vulnerable, it is most likely they will be remanded to a SCH or STC. It is difficult for us to predict how many young people may be remanded into custody or for how long.

3. Aim and Objectives

Approved by Cabinet on the 5th September 2016, the Corporate Strategy for Children in Need of Care and Support identifies how the social care needs of children, young people and their families will be met within the resources available to the Council during the period 2016 to 2019.

The scope of this strategy covers four key objectives. These are:

- a. To support families to stay together and reduce the need for children to be looked after, by ensuring a focus on early intervention and preventative action across all service provision for children.
- b. To manage risk confidently and provide support at the 'edge of care' by making sure that need is accurately assessed, resulting in the right children being accommodated at the right time. This includes supporting families to avoid children becoming accommodated unnecessarily and by making private arrangements within their wider family networks.
- c. To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
- d. To give children clearly planned journeys through care which remain focused on achieving care plans, prevent drift, enable them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, have stable placements and exit the care system positively.

These objectives are underpinned by the following key principles:

- i) The responsibility for meeting the needs of children and young people looked after or at risk of becoming looked after rests across all services for children, including statutory and independent providers.
- ii) The majority of children are most likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own families.
- iii) Preventative services and early intervention to support children in need and their families should be provided to give them every chance to stay together.
- iv) Where children cannot be supported within their immediate family, families will be supported to make private arrangements within their wider family and friendship networks and, where necessary, to make these arrangements permanent through the use of Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders

- v) Formal kinship fostering arrangements will be explored as the preferred alternative arrangement where it is necessary for the local authority to share parental responsibility or intervene in managing risk and protecting children
- vi) Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through the arrangements described in principles iv and v, the majority will have their needs met best in a substitute family, preferably with in-house foster carers and, if not, with Independent Fostering Agency carers wherever possible living within the Vale of Glamorgan.
- vii) Residential care placements will be made only where the complexity and challenge of a child or young person's needs mean they are unable to live within a family setting or where a young person is subject to a Court Ordered Secure Remand.
- viii) Placements should be local to enable children and young people to remain in their communities, maintain their networks and minimise disruption in their lives.
- ix) Placement requests should be defined in terms of the child/young person's needs. It is the role of the Placement Panel to agree that a child should become looked after and consider the most appropriate type of placement to meet these needs, with due consideration given to the available resources.
- x) All Looked After Children of statutory school age should receive appropriate education provision regardless of their placement and ability to access school. Providing appropriate support to enable engagement in education is just as important as finding suitable care placements for Looked After Children.
- xi) Placements should support a positive transition to independence, adulthood, education, employment, training, and where applicable, resettlement back into the community from custodial settings.

The overall objectives for residential care are:

- To reduce the looked after children population where it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- To make residential care placements only where it is necessary to do so, by making use of other forms of accommodation wherever possible.
- To ensure that all residential placements are time limited.
- To maximise the use of locally provided residential care where this type of accommodation is necessary.

The aim of the associated work stream within the Budget Programme is to source alternative suppliers/provision for those looked after children requiring residential care.

4. Placement Profile

- Activity Update

The following table provides information about the number and nature of placements on a quarterly basis during 2016/17:

| Quarter Starting | Total LAC | Residential Care | Internally Provided Foster Care | Friends and Family Foster Care | Externally Provided Foster Care | Other |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Mar -16 | 193 | 13 | 65 | 68 44 kinship 24 PWP | 30 | 17 10 adoption 3 supported lodgings 1 independent living 1 mother and baby 1 NHS establishment 1 other |
| Jun-16 | 197 | 10 | 72 | 69 45 kinship 24 pwp | 34 | 12 8 adoption 1 Hostels 1 NHS establishment 1 independent living 1 other |
| Sept-16 | 209 | 13 | 71 | 75 47 kinship 28 pwp | 37 | 13 7 adoption 4 hostels 1 independent living 1 NHS establishment |
| Dec-16 | 216 | 11 | 76 | 83 50 kinship 33 pwp | 35 | 11 5 adoption 2 hostels 1 NHS establishment 1 independent living 2 other |
| Mar-17 | 224 | 13 | 67 | 93 57 kinship 36 pwp | 39 | 12 6 adoption 4 hostels 1 secure 1 NHS establishment |

- (1). Friends and Family Foster Care (also known as Kinship Care) refers to circumstances where a family friend or relative has come forward and offered to care for a looked after child, and they have undergone rigorous checks and an assessment of their suitability to do so. The friends or relatives are approved as foster carers via the Local Authority Fostering Panel. We can see from the table above and previous figures that there has been a significant increase in kinship care from 29 in March 2015, to 44 in March 2016, to 57 in March 2017.
- (2) Placement with Parents refers to circumstances where a looked after child subject of a Care Order is placed with one or both parents with a degree of delegation of parental responsibility for decisions about the day to day care of the child, whilst parental responsibility is shared with

the Local Authority to ensure the child's welfare and safety. These arrangements are subject to checks and formal placement agreements, and are sanctioned by the Court and the Local Authority. There has been an increase in Placement with Parents from 13 in March 2015, to 24 in March 2016, to 36 in March 2017.

The LAC population reduced significantly between April 2011 and April 2013 with a 12% drop. Between April 2013 and March 2016 the population remained relatively stable at between 180 - 200 children/young people with some variation throughout the years. The LAC population over the past year has increased by 31 with the largest increase seen in family and friends placements. This reflects a national upward trend in kinship placements where children placed with family and friends and subject to an Order of the Court require the approval of family and friends as foster carers. Although the Order defines the child as looked after by the Local Authority, and overall the rise in kinship placements has contributed significantly to the overall increase in the number of looked after children, it is important to acknowledge that these arrangements enable a child to remain within their wider family. The table below provides data on the actual numbers of looked after children in neighbouring authorities over the last five years. Figures for 2016/17 are not yet published.

| | Cardiff | Merthyr Tydfil | Rhondda Cynon Taff | Vale of Glamorgan |
|----------------------|----------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| LAC @ 31.3.16 | 645 | 140 | 625 | 193 |
| LAC @ 31.3.15 | 650 | 165 | 620 | 190 |
| LAC @ 31.3.14 | 610 | 175 | 650 | 185 |
| LAC @ 31.3.13 | 557 | 181 | 621 | 184 |
| LAC @ 31.3.12 | 568 | 192 | 594 | 219 |
| LAC @ 31.3.11 | 521 | 167 | 553 | 198 |
| Rate /10,000 | 84 | 140 | 130 | 68 |

The All Wales average rate of children looked after per 10,000 population was 89 at March 31st 2015 (range 46-155). The Vale of Glamorgan figure was 70, the 9th lowest of the 22 authorities.

The majority of looked after children in the Vale of Glamorgan are in foster care provided by in-house carers and family and friends (kinship carers). Breakdown of the LAC population confirms the Council's strategy to return children to placements within Wales and, where possible, within the boundary of the Vale of Glamorgan. Of the three children who currently remain out of Wales, one is placed with relatives, one is in a specialist residential school

and one is in a residential care home, but is due to return to the area following her exams. These planned changes can have an impact on the percentage of children who have three or more placements in a year, but this figure has remained at 9%; the same as last year.

There has been an increase in the number of children placed in externally provided foster care from 30 in 2015/16 to 39 in 2016/17. This is due to a small number of large sibling groups whose assessed needs required them to be placed together. Reduction in the use of externally provided foster care continues to be a target in future years.

The number of children requiring residential care remained stable during 2016/17. There were on average 12 children whose additional complex needs required this type of provision during the year. This level of usage in respect of residential care reflects the success within the Division in reducing the numbers in residential care from 23 in March 2014 to 13 in March 2017. We are however aware of the increasing complexity of need amongst the children and young people we are currently supporting which coupled with the associated challenges in identifying placements both internally and externally, linked an emerging national shortage, has seen a rise in the numbers in residential care to 15 in the first quarter of 2017/18. Within the current cohort there are also three children within this who have significant disabilities and their care packages will be funded by Children and Young People Services until the age of eighteen. During the last quarter of 2016/17 there was one child in secure accommodation for a short period.

The following case studies illustrate the type and level of need with which the Service is working.

Case study 1, 10 year old male

This young person became looked after in May 2016 due to his complex and challenging behaviour. His behaviour quickly became too challenging to be managed within foster care and he was excluded from mainstream school. He was placed in a local residential provision but his behaviour continued to deteriorate. His offending behaviour escalated and he was further excluded from the pupil referral unit. This young person is now placed in a specialist residential school out of area at a cost of £213,200 per year.

Case Study 2, 14 year old male

This young person has learning disabilities, autism and associated behaviour difficulties. His parents felt they could no longer cope with his needs and behaviour at home. His needs have become too complex to be managed within a fostering placement and he moved to a residential placement in March 2016 at a cost of £127,920 per year.

Case Study 3, 17 year old male

This young person has been looked after by the Local Authority for a number of years. He was placed in a residential children's home following a number of criminal convictions. He has previously spent time in secure accommodation and specialist residential settings. Two years ago he moved to a residential setting within the Vale of Glamorgan enabling the Authority to work closely with him and his family. Following a plan of increased contact and a rigorous assessment, he has returned to live with his grandmother with a package of support. This has saved the authority approximately £118,440 per year.

- **Placement Budget**

| <u>Placement Description</u> | <u>Budget 16/17</u> | <u>Actual Spend 16/17</u> | <u>Variance 16/17</u> | <u>Budget 17/18</u> |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Joint Budget - LAC Childrens Residential Placements | 1,933 | 1,671 | 262 | 1,955 |
| Non LAC Childrens Residential Placements | 25 | 15 | 10 | 25 |
| LA Joint Agreements - 4C's | 19 | 16 | 3 | 19 |
| Secure / Remand | 73 | 0 | 73 | 74 |
| Childrens External Placement - IFA | 1,485 | 1,524 | -39 | 1,499 |
| | 3,535 | 3,226 | 309 | 3,572 |

The table above relates to the external placement budget and provides information regarding budget and actual spend. For 2016/17, the overall external placement budget for looked after children was underspent by £309,000. This is a significant improvement on previous years where in 2013/14 the budget was overspent by £496,000, in 2014/15 overspent by £20,000 and in 2015/16 was underspent by £183k. For 2016/17 the joint budget residential was underspent by £262k, the secure/remand was underspent by £73k and the external placement IFA was overspent by £39k.

As previously stated, remand placements remain an unpredictable area. However, during the last year, we have only had one child on remand in a secure unit for a short period of time. The average costs of such placements can be in excess of £4,300 per week.

During 2016/17, five young people left residential care and five young people entered residential care. Of the five new young people requiring residential care, four had experienced a series of foster placements breakdowns and one came straight into specialist residential school following an adoption breakdown.

As of June 2017, we have 15 young people in residential care at a projected cost of £2,129,464 for the year.

5. 2015/16 Activity Undertaken

During 2016/17, a number of initiatives have been implemented to address the key issues/objectives in this area.

External Placement Audit

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| Actions undertaken | An audit by the Multi-Agency Placement Panel of all children (47) placed externally in February 2017, either in residential care or with independent fostering agencies, with a remit to confirm suitability of placement and where alternative provisions may be appropriate. |
| Impact: Service | Three children identified as having already moved to lower cost placements in Wales, one child being considered for a move within Wales, two children identified as potential moves to supported independent living. |
| Impact: Financial | <p>Potential savings if one child identified for consideration is suitable for a move within Wales to local residential provision of £900 per week.</p> <p>Potential savings for two children to move to supported independent living of £5600 per week</p> |
| Lessons Learnt | <p>Outcomes from the Audit have been monitored via the Permanency Panel. The first progress report is due to be reported to Placement Panel in June 2017 and there will be an update every other month. The Multi-Agency Placement Panel has made a commitment to complete an external placement audit in February each year prior to commitment setting for the following financial year.</p> <p>Increasing the availability of lower cost placements within Wales and the Vale of Glamorgan, and matching children to these placements, where this is appropriate to meet their needs, have the potential to significantly reduce costs. These reductions, however, will only have an impact on the overall budget if we can successfully manage the number of new placements coming in, use alternatives to care where this is appropriate and maximise our use of internal resources where accommodation is required.</p> |

Internal Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

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| <p>Actions undertaken</p> | <p>The Fostering Service has been implementing the Recruitment Strategy since 2013.</p> <p>Beginning with Foster Carer Fortnight in May 2016, we have worked closely during 2016/17 with Corporate Communications to increase advertising activity, including radio interviews, newspaper features and distribution of new leaflets and posters. We have implemented the Fostering Recruitment Best Practice Guide produced by the South East Wales Improvement Collaborative (SEWIC) and we are closely monitoring our performance against these standards. We are engaged in the National Fostering Framework which is one of the four major key workstreams within the programme which has been established by the strategic steering group set up by Welsh Government with the task of improving outcomes for children. The aims of the National Fostering Framework (NFF) is to improve permanency planning for children and quality of placement provision, consistent use of best practice models for recruitment and supporting carers and an increase in collaboration and cooperation by all key stakeholders.</p> |
| <p>Impact: Service</p> | <p>From 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017, we have received 66 registrations of interest and completed 37 initial visits to prospective applicants. We have provided regular pre-approval training for prospective applicants, with 20 people attending since April 2015, and we have received six applications for assessment.</p> <p>We have assessed and approved four new mainstream foster carers and are currently assessing a further five. We have approved twenty new kinship carers. Therefore, whilst we did not meet our target of eight new mainstream carers, we significantly increased the numbers of kinship carers, supporting children to remain within their wider families.</p> |
| <p>Impact: Financial</p> | <p>The costs associated with internal and external foster care placements vary according to the needs of the individual looked after child. In addition, the skills of the foster carer and the number of children placed with them will cause the payment to internal foster carers to vary. However the cost differential between external and internal provision equates to £391.60 per week/£20,363 per annum per placement on average.</p> |

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| | Therefore, a reduction in our use of external placements by increasing our internal provision will provide savings. We plan to reduce external placements by two during 2017/18 resulting in a saving of £72k. |
| Lessons Learnt | Growth within the Fostering Service will support us to meet the demands of the looked after population in future years. Alongside our own foster carer recruitment project, we continue to work with the NFF looking at possible collaboration for regional marketing and recruitment. |

Joint Budget

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| Actions undertaken | Establishment of a joint budget between Children and Young People Services and Learning and Skills to meet the education and social care costs of residential placements for children with highly complex needs who are looked after by the Council. It was endorsed by Cabinet as a pilot scheme for one year from 1 st July 2013 and a report recommending continuation was presented to Cabinet on 30 th June 2014 and approved. |
| Impact: Service | Prior to the joint budget, the process for determining the allocation of costs to each funder could be difficult and time consuming. These arrangements for agreeing contributions to the overall cost of specific placements did not assist effective planning for the children concerned. Under the new arrangements, where a child has been identified as being eligible for funding from the joint budget, all the costs of caring for the child and meeting their needs are charged to that budget. |
| Impact: Financial | The joint budget for 2016/17 was £1.9 million. The budget holder is the Head of Children and Young People Services, who takes responsibility for monitoring and reporting the position of the budget. The budget overspent during 2013/14 by £496,000. During 2014/15 the budget was underspend by £4,000. The budget for 2015/16 was underspent by £183,000 and the budget for 2016/17 was underspent by £262,000. The budget set for 2017/18 is set at £1.9 million. |
| Lessons Learnt | Establishment of the joint budget has been successful in removing the need to determine funding arrangements on an ad hoc basis. There is a need for |

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| | rigorous management of the budget, to ensure there are no overspends. The relevant Directors and the Head of Finance will monitor the budget on a quarterly basis. |
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Revocation of Care Orders

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| Actions undertaken | <p>In line with the looked after children recovery plan; a plan aimed at reducing the overall number of looked after children the Permanency Panel takes responsibility for reviewing all cases prior to their second LAC review (i.e. within four months). The specific focus of the revocation work stream is to examine the potential for the discharge of Care Orders for LAC to more appropriate /less intrusive Orders which still protect and safeguard the child's welfare.</p> <p>Three successful applications were made to Court to revoke Care Orders and institute Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) during 2016/17 in respect of four children.</p> |
| Impact: Service | <p>These children are no longer looked after and they are able to lead more normal lives, without high levels of state intervention. Monthly statutory social work visits are no longer required, nor the statutory review of their cases by an Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO), freeing staff capacity for other essential work.</p> |
| Impact: Financial | <p>Two were approved as kinship carers prior to the granting of the SGO. For those in receipt of fostering allowance before the looked after status of the children ended, they are now in receipt of SGO allowances at the same rate, less child benefit payments which they are now entitled to claim directly. (Rates vary from £136-£170 per week according to the age of the child.)</p> <p>For the children who were previously looked after by an in-house foster carer this will equate to a saving of approximately £3500 -£4000 per annum.</p> <p>The most significant 'saving' is in qualified staff time, which is easily absorbed by existing and new demands for Social Services intervention with children and families assessed as in need of support.</p> |

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| Lessons Learnt | SGO applications are now given much more consideration as a means of achieving permanence for children unable to live with their birth families. This policy position will continue to be applied where it appropriately meets the needs of the child. |
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The above actions describe how the Service is seeking to deliver overall objectives within this area of work. The result is more robust processes to manage a volatile area of demand and associated expenditure.

In the coming years, the Division will build on these actions (whilst maintaining and enhancing them) in order to continue to manage service demands.

6. Opportunities

The following opportunities have been identified based on the environmental analysis and in order to manage associated risks and issues:

In line with the overall objectives for this workstream, the following activities are underway:

- To reduce the use of independent fostering agencies for placements through the foster carer recruitment project which includes a target of eight newly recruited foster carers and a reduction of two independent foster placements during 2017/18.
- Minimise movement into residential care – limit the numbers coming in and the length of stay.
- Utilise local residential provision to return looked after to local lower cost residential placements where possible and appropriate.
- Continue to address the overall looked after children population with a particular focus on the increase in kinship placements, through the use of revocation of Care Orders and preventative services.
- Work in partnership with Health to offer increased therapeutic support to looked after children and foster carers to promote placement stability and prevent placements breaking down and leading to more costly placements.

These actions will continue to involve the use of regional arrangements where appropriate, for example, working with the NFF project and other local authorities to secure affordable placement opportunities. The Service is also working within the Reshaping Services agenda and looking at ways of responding to challenges and opportunities presented by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act. This work is underway and will continue to consider new and innovative ways of working that align with the aims and objectives of the Reshaping Services agenda.

These activities will continue to be reported to elected members as part of existing reporting arrangements, including the monthly budget programme report and update reports regarding the Corporate Strategy for Children who need Care and Support, and the Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy.