

Meeting of:	Healthy Living and Social Care Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	Tuesday, 09 November 2021
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Healthy Living and Social Care
Report Title:	Children and Young People Services Annual Placements Review
Purpose of Report:	To outline the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2020/21 with regards to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and the priority actions for 2021/22.
Report Owner:	Director of Social Services
Responsible Officer:	Operational Manager, Children and Young People Services
Elected Member and Officer Consultation:	Head of Children and Young People Services Operational Manager, Accountancy
Policy Framework:	This is a matter of Executive decision

Executive Summary:

- This report outlines the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2020/21 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and the priority actions for 2021/22.
- Where children and young people cannot be supported to remain within their immediate families and need to become looked after the Council seeks to provide a range of suitable placements.
- 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.
- Where a child's needs cannot be adequately met through kinship arrangements, 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.
- 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.

Recommendations

- 1.** That Scrutiny Committee consider the contents of the report (attached as Appendix 1).
- 2.** That Scrutiny Committee receives a further Annual Placement Review report in October 2022.
- 3.** That the report is referred to the Learning and Culture Scrutiny Committee.

Reasons for Recommendations

1-3 To provide Members with an opportunity to exercise oversight of this key statutory function.

1. Background

- 1.1** Resource management in children's social care is inherently problematic. This is particularly the case in the area of children's placements. Local authorities face considerable challenges in managing their overall looked after populations, finding appropriate placements, meeting children's support needs and ensuring the most effective use of placement resources. The number of children with complex needs is increasing and meeting these needs within appropriate placements places pressure on budgets. This cohort of children relates both to those with challenging and complex behaviour and to those with disabilities. Some individual placements are very expensive. The costs of placements for children with complex needs can exceed £390k a year.
- 1.2** In Children and Young People Services, the major issue is the continuing pressure on placements for looked after children. This is the Division's most volatile budget and the one most dependent upon levels of service demand which are not within the Council's direct control. During the COVID-19 pandemic demand across all service areas has increased significantly.
- 1.3** Given this context, it is essential that the Council has in place a coherent strategy for meeting the needs of children within allocated resources. The Corporate Strategy for Children in Need of Care and Support 2019 to 2023 outlines how the Council will meet a number of key objectives, two of which relate directly to looked after children. These are:
 - To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high quality placements that meet the diverse range of children's needs.
 - To develop effective plans in partnership with children and their families which remains focused on achieving care and support plans, prevents drift, enables them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, to have stable placements and to exit the care system positively.

2. Key Issues for Consideration

- 2.1 Officers have analysed the financial position, the demand for placements and spending patterns and their report is attached at Appendix 1. It demonstrates the volatility of the placement budget and the significant impact individual cases can have on overall expenditure. Key influences include: the increasing complexity of children's needs; the Welsh Government "When I am Ready "policy which extends the time children can remain in foster placements beyond the age of 18; the use of remand placements where local authorities have become responsible for the costs of looking after children who are not allowed to live at home while they are the subject of criminal proceedings; and the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2.2 With the exception of the increase in placement commitments, the Children and Young People Services Division has made good progress in delivering the actions in the Corporate Strategy. Appendix 1 highlights the considerable activity undertaken to date in response to the challenges associated with children's placements and the workstreams for the year ahead.

3. How do proposals evidence the Five Ways of Working and contribute to our Well-being Objectives?

- 3.1 It is essential we recognise the importance of balancing short-term needs with the need to safeguard our ability to also meet long-term needs. Children Looked After have their short and long term needs regularly reviewed through looked after children reviews. Permanency plans for children are in place by the second looked after children review.
- 3.2 Children and Young People Services work to the four integrated objectives of the Corporate Strategy for Children who Need Care and Support namely:
- **To support families to stay together** and reduce the need for children to be looked after, by focusing on services which intervene early and prevent greater need arising across all provision.
 - **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 supporting sustainable family arrangements within their wider family networks.
 - **To provide and commission a flexible and affordable mix of high-quality placements** which meet the diverse range of children's needs.
 - **To develop effective plans in partnership with children and their families** which remains focused on achieving care and support plans, prevents drift, enables them to be reunited with family and friends where possible, to have stable placements and to exit the care system positively.
- 3.3 The Council and its partners are committed to involving those in receipt of its services and recognising protected characteristics. In the context of children and

young people, this means involving children, young people, their families, their carers and their support networks in co-producing plans that can effectively meet identified needs. It means taking a strength-based approach that recognises the resources that exist within families themselves and empowering families to support themselves and to achieve change where this is necessary. It also means involving children and families in decision making, including the need to transparently articulate risks that may prevent the achievement of goals that the child or family are hoping for, and where possible managing risks confidently.

- 3.4 Children and Young People Services work collaboratively with a range of services to meet the needs of children looked after. The children's Placement Panel is a multi-agency panel made of members from Social Services, Education and Health.
- 3.5 Acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse is central to the work of Children and Young People Services and is the first of our four objectives within the Corporate Strategy. Recognising the significance of us being able to collectively provide the right services at the right time and prevent escalation of need.

4. Resources and Legal Considerations

Financial

- 4.1 The Social Services Directorate is committed to achieving a balanced budget. For 2020/21, the overall external placement budget for looked after children was underspent by £324,463k. However, this year 2021/22 we are forecasting an overspend of £1,189,246, part of which is being offset by Welsh Government Local Authority Covid Hardship grant income. This reflects the increasing costs of residential placements and the complexity of young people placed in residential placements, alongside an increase in the number of young people placed in IFA placements, both linked to increases in demand.

Employment

- 4.2 There are no employment implications associated with this report.

Legal (Including Equalities)

- 4.3 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report.

5. Background Papers

Reports to Healthy Living & Social Care Scrutiny Committee: 17th March 2020 (6 monthly update due to Covid-19); 17th September 2019; 11th September 2018; 10th July 2017.

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

September 2021

1. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to outline the actions taken within Children and Young People Services during 2020/21 with regard to placement provision for Children Looked After (CLA) and to outline our plans for 2021/2022.

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 harmful 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 £390k 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 £200,000 per year (range from £150,500 – £400,000 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. Since the scheme was implemented in April 2016 we have had 60 young people in 'When I Am Ready' placements. This year we expect a further six to remain in When I Am Ready placements. 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 Children Looked After. 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 £197 per night for a YOI, £592 per night for a SCH and £572 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.

- **COVID-19 Pandemic**

Throughout the period of the COVID-19 pandemic starting in March 2020 and continuing, we have experienced significant increases demand in all areas of our service. Compared to previous years we have seen a 45% increase in referrals/contacts to the service, an 88% increase in child protection registrations, a 50% increase in care proceedings and a 26% increase in children becoming looked after. This is a common picture across Wales and a nationally recognised challenge.

The complexity of issues has also increased, including higher and worsening levels of neglect, family crises, and more issues affecting the emotional wellbeing and mental health of both children and their significant adults. COVID-19 is not the single cause of the issues but we have seen them worsen over this period. The list below is not exhaustive but gives an illustration of the factors affecting both complexity and demand during the period of the pandemic:

- Increased pressure in families due to lockdown.
- Increased financial deprivation.
- Closure of schools contributing to increased stress in families, impact on wellbeing, impact on behaviours and routine, less monitoring and support for vulnerable learners.
- Other professionals not undertaking face to face visits – impact on child protection and children looked after numbers.
- Restrictions on face to face visits impacting on direct work with families.
- Preventative and intensive services restricted, impacting children and families throughout the tiers of our involvement.
- Delay in being able to step down cases as part of care and support plans as a consequence of needing to respond to crises / prioritise our activity during the initial period of the pandemic and at varying points since as demand dictates.
- Deteriorating mental health of some parents and children and young people.
- Significant increase in domestic abuse and the associated impact for children and young people.
- Impact on the stability of placements, high demand for new or alternative placements and significantly less availability across in house and external provision.
- Increased exploitation under the cover of COVID-19, increasing risks to young people.

These demands have consequences for the workforce too and we have seen during the period of the pandemic:

- Increased complexity in caseloads and pressure to act to protect children.
- Court delays creating a back log of cases, increasing caseloads and expectations.
- Long and unsocial hours in an effort to manage the increased demand.
- Impact on staff emotional wellbeing and mental health.
- Impact on having to work remotely and not as part of team requiring greater efforts to maintain connections and a less ready availability of hands on support.

It cannot be assumed that the ending of the pandemic will see these issues improve and we expect the impact to be enduring, including the appearance of delayed trauma for children and families, and potentially also for staff, where not all the impacts of the pandemic are currently visible.

3. Aim and Objectives

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 2019 to 2023.

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 develop effective plans in partnership with children and their families. 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 Child Arrangement 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) 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.

- x) Placements should support a positive transition to independence, adulthood, education, employment, training, and where applicable, resettlement back into the community from custodial settings.

4. Placement Profile

- Activity Update

The following table provides information about the number and nature of placements on a quarterly basis during 2020/21.

Month Starting	Total CLA	Residential Care	Internally Provided Foster Care	Friends and Family Foster Care	Externally Provided Foster Care	Other
Mar -20	259	16	61	129 72 kinship 57 PWP	36	17 13 adoption 4 hostel/independent living 0 secure unit
Jun-20	262	14	66	134 76 kinship 58 pwp	36	12 10 adoption 2 Hostel/independent living secure
Nov-20	281	15	71	134 72 kinship 62 pwp	43	18 12 adoption 6 hostels/ independent living 0 Secure
Mar-21	284	15	75	125 67 kinship 58 pwp	53	16 9 adoption 7 hostels/independent living 0 secure unit
Sept-21	295	16	81	123 69 kinship 54 pwp	63	12 7 adoption 4 hostels/independent living 1 secure unit

- (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 that the number of kinship

fostering has decreased slightly over the past 18 months. However, the figures remain relatively stable in this area.

- (2) Placement with Parents refers to circumstances where a child looked after is 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 a slight decrease in Placement with Parents arrangements over the past 18 months.

The CLA population increased between 2016 and 2019 from 193 to 282, an increase of 89. However, between March 2019 – March 2020 the CLA population decreased by 23 from 282 to 259. During the past 18 months we have seen another significant increase in the CLA population by 36. This increase correlates with the increased demands we have seen within other areas of the Division as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The largest increase is seen in internal and external foster placements. This reflects a national upward trend in demand for foster placements and decreasing capacity.

The table below provides data on the actual numbers of looked after children in neighbouring authorities over the last five years (taken from statwales.gov)

	Cardiff	Merthyr Tydfil	Rhondda Cynon Taff	Vale of Glamorgan
LAC @ 31.3.20	940	205	710	259
LAC @ 31.3.19	870	200	645	282
LAC @ 31.3.18	830	156	676	244
LAC @ 31.3.17	720	145	690	224
LAC @ 31.3.16	645	140	625	193

The figures for 2021 are not published at the time of writing this report.

The majority of Children Looked After in the Vale of Glamorgan are in foster care provided by in-house carers and family and friends (kinship carers). The

breakdown of the CLA 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 home and one is in a secure unit. It is hoped one young person can be returned to the area once appropriate accommodation is identified.

There has been an increase in the number of children placed in externally provided foster care from 36 in March 2020 to 63 in September 2021. This reflects the increasing demand on foster care and continues to be a target for reduction in future years.

The number of children requiring residential care has remained relatively stable with only some variation over the past 18 months. There were on average 15 children whose additional complex needs required this type of provision during the year. We are aware of the increasing complexity of need amongst the children we are currently supporting. In addition to this we have seen costs for residential placements increase. Within the current cohort there is one young person subject to a Secure Order who is placed in a Secure Unit.

- **Placement Budget**

<u>Placement Description</u>	<u>Budget 20/21</u>	<u>Actual Spend 20/21</u>	<u>Variance 20/21</u>	<u>Budget 21/22</u>
Joint Budget - CLA Childrens Residential Placements	3,255,287	3,100,999	154,278	3,255,278
Non CLA Childrens Residential Placements	25,250	3,615	21,634	25,250
LA Joint Agreements - 4C's	19,681	17,314	2,366	19681
Secure / Remand	19,103	0	19,103	19,103
Childrens External Placement - IFA	2,084,747	1,995,846	88,900	2,084,747
YJ Grant	-16,866	0	-16,866	-16,866
WG SWFG 20/21	-500,000	-500,000	0	-500,000
Totals	4,942,239	4,617,775	324,463	4,942,239

The table above relates to the external placement budget and provides information regarding budget and actual spend. For 2020/21, the overall external placement budget for children looked after was underspent by £324,463k. However, it is worth mentioning that the external placements budget has increased from £3,857,239 in 2018/19 to £4,942,239 in 2020/21; an increase of £1,085,000. The current external placements budget is forecasting to overspend this year (2021/22) by £1,189,246.

As of September 2021, we have 16 young people in residential care, 1 young person in a secure unit and 1 child in a parent and child assessment unit, all at a projected cost of £3,999,065 for the year. We have 63 young people in IFA (external fostering) placements at a projected cost of £2,293,378 for the year.

5. 2020/21 Activity Undertaken

During 2020/21, a number of initiatives have been implemented to address the key issues/objectives in this area.

External Placement Audit

Actions undertaken	An audit by the Multi-Agency Placement Panel of all children placed externally in February 2021, 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 being considered for a rehabilitation home plan, one child identified as potential move to supported independent living.
Impact: Financial	Potential savings if two children identified for rehabilitation of £8000 per week. Potential savings for one child to move to supported independent living of £4200 per week
Lessons Learnt	Outcomes from the Audit have been monitored via the Placement Panel. Another external placements audit has been arranged for February 2022. 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.

Internal Foster Carer Recruitment Strategy

Actions undertaken	The National Fostering Framework (NFF) has launched a national brand for Fostering Wales and a long-awaited national recruitment campaign. As a result, the Fostering Service has rebranded all its literature and website to correspond with the launch and new brand. The foster carer agreement has been revised and foster carers payments updated and increased. Local recruitment campaigns have coincided with the National campaigns and have focused on local foster carers. Further recruitment activity is planned for the year ahead and currently there is a media campaign with national TV advertisements.
Impact: Service	From 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021, we have approved eight new mainstream foster carers and 14 kinship foster carers. So far this year up to September 21 we have already approved 8 new mainstream foster carers and are on target to recruit 14 by year end. Therefore we are exceeding our recruitment targets and plan for this trend to continue in the coming years.
Impact: Financial	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. Therefore, a reduction in our use of external placements by increasing our internal provision will provide savings.
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

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 2020/21 was £3.255 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 underspent during 2020/21 by £154,278. The budget set for 2021/22 is set at £3.255 million and is forecast to overspend by £743,787k.
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 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.

CLA Reduction Project Board

<p>Actions undertaken</p>	<p>Since 2019 the Division has set annual reduction intentions which are monitored by WG. The aim is to safely reduce the CLA population by discharging Care Orders, increasing the number of Adoption Orders, increasing the number of non-Care Order outcomes in care proceedings and preventing children from becoming looked after. For the past two years we had achieved our intentions and had safely reduced the number of CLA. However, during 2020/21 the pressures of the COVID-19 has seen increasing demand across all our service areas and our ability to focus on CLA reduction was compromised. Nevertheless, we still achieved 6 discharges of Care Orders, 12 Adoption Orders, 9 non-Care Order outcomes in care proceedings and 9 children stepped down from pre-proceedings.</p>
<p>Impact: Service</p>	<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>
<p>Impact: Financial</p>	<p>Five of the six discharges of Care Orders were as a result of either mainstream or kinship foster carers obtaining SGO's. 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 two children who were previously looked after by a 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>

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. This supports the Division's focus is on discharging Care Orders where it is safe and appropriate.
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The above actions describe how the Division 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 Division's analysis and are important to manage the 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 placements by increasing the availability of in house placements, which includes a target of eight newly recruited foster carers per year.
- To manage the movement into and out of residential care, managing the numbers coming in and the length of stay.
- To utilise local residential provision to return children looked after to local lower cost residential placements where possible and to develop increased local residential provision with our third sector partners.
- To step children down from residential to foster care where appropriate.
- To continue to identify opportunities to discharge Care Orders for children placed with parents and kin.

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.

These activities will continue to be reported to elected members as part of existing reporting arrangements.