

Appendix 1 - Children's Wellbeing MTFS update report: looked after children

As part of the Council's MTFS, Children's Services are committed to delivering savings, one of our key savings strands is the plan to reduce our 'looked after' population.

The current number of looked after children is 308 at September 2017. This is significantly higher than might be expected when compared with Herefordshire's statistical neighbours. A figure of 215 might be expected if Herefordshire had the average rate of its statistical neighbours. There has been no evidence gathered to suggest that Herefordshire has a significantly different and more challenging level of need compared to its statistical neighbours.

Throughout 16/17, we have developed a number of work streams to support this reduction, which is significantly more complex than the simultaneous reduction in child protection numbers we and partner agencies achieved last year. Since September 2016 we have:

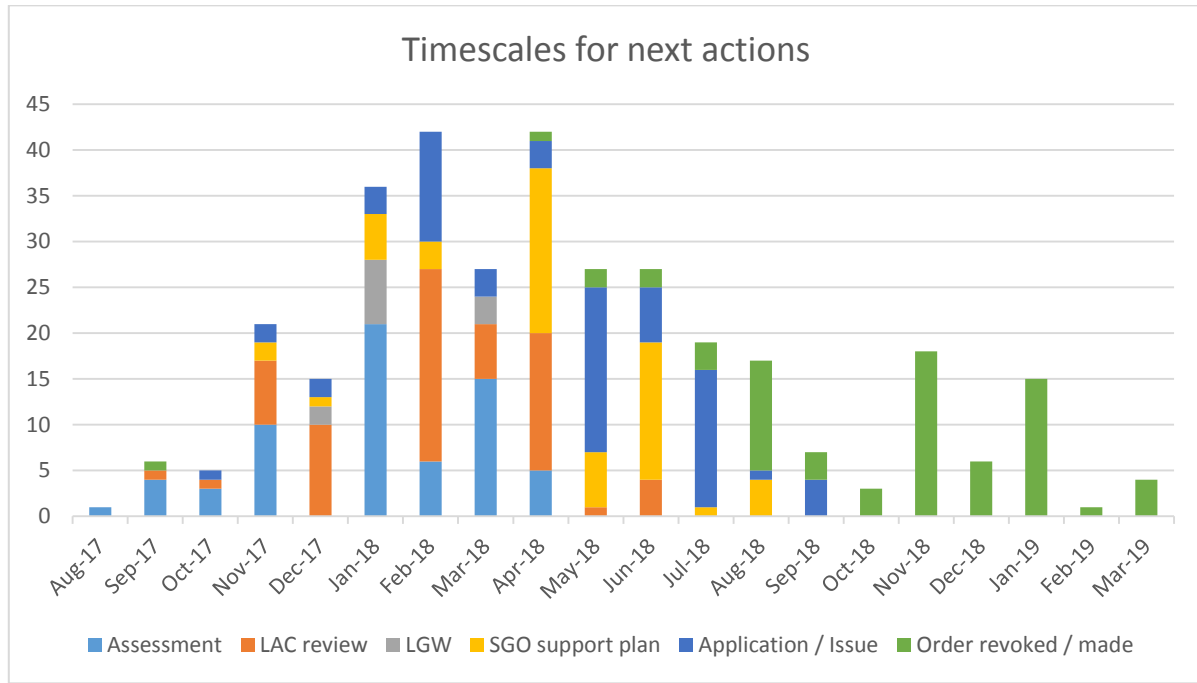
- Established a tracker system for monitoring and forecasting children due to leave care
- Introduced a threshold of care panel which has successfully reduced our admissions to care to below the regional average
- Applied to Court to revoke care orders for children "placed with parents" in appropriate cases. So far 5 care orders have been successfully revoked and a further 11 children have been supported to return home.
- Achieved Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) for 4 children
- Worked across our Service to develop a consistent understanding of the practice expectations, opportunities, barriers and solutions associated with progressing SGO's
- Completed assessments on 5 children that recommend their care plan is changed to an SGO

To support the delivery of MTFS savings social workers and their managers have identified 80 looked after children subject of a care order for whom an alternative permanence option through reunification or Special Guardianship Order (SGO) *may* be the most appropriate outcome. Both options involve completing an updated assessment to recommend the most appropriate care plan for the child, ratifying this decision at a multi-agency LAC review, agreeing the SGO/reunification plan, making an application to Court and proceedings to determine the outcome.

The table below sets out the steps required, the timescales, risks and actions to mitigate the risks involved. It distinguishes between processes and decisions which are within the local authority's remit and those that are not.

Timescales	Work/steps required to achieve	Risks/obstacles	Actions to mitigate risks	
9 weeks	Assessment	Recruitment of 2 Social Workers as agreed in business case	1 Social Worker commenced October '17 Recruitment ongoing for second post	Decision making within our control
		Assessment will recommend SGO/ reunification if this is in child's best interests	Support to Social Workers to apply established thresholds for looked after children	
4 weeks	LAC review	The LAC review is required to endorse a change in care plan and may not agree with proposed plan	Whole system approach to promoting the advantages of permanence through SGO and reunification	
8 weeks	Negotiate support plan for SGO cases	Carers need to consent and many have significant questions regarding the support available in the medium/long term	Leaflet clearly explaining support available and benefits for child and carer SGO finance policy sets out support and means test process Developing confidence and capability of workforce to negotiate support plans that meet need	Decision making not within our control
4 weeks	Application to Court	Requires carers to make application for an SGO	Social workers can assist with completing application LA will fund court fee	
26 weeks	Proceedings	Family court will prioritise cases where there are safeguarding concerns which may delay the first hearing Court directs the timetable for proceedings and any further assessments Court may not agree the application	Discussions in advance with Court, CAFCASS and our legal team to plan and prepare Social workers will be supported to prepare thoroughly and produce good quality evidence to support applications	

A case tracker has been developed to plan and monitor progress of these key tasks and when they will reasonably be achieved. The total time taken from assessment to outcome from Court for an SGO is 12 months and for reunification is 10 months. The graph below sets out the timescales for achieving tasks in each case. Any financial savings will not be realised until the Court order is revoked/made. Operational and strategic groups have been established to meet monthly and review progress on this work – problem solving and addressing obstacles.



Based on the progress against these actions the LAC population could reasonably be expected to reduce as detailed below. In forecasting this trend it has been assumed that our current rates of admission and leaving care through adoption and ageing out will remain constant. The graph shows the population forecast for 25%, 50%, 75% and 100% success rates.

		13-14	14-15	15-16	16-17	17-18*	18-19*
LAC admissions		126	124	121	100	96	96
Ceasing LAC	Current practice	101	95	103	86	84	84
	Focussed reduction					10	70
LAC numbers	No change to current practice	231	256	285	303	315	317
	100% achieved						247
	75% achieved						264
	50% achieved						282
	25% achieved						300

* Indicates forecasted figures