

Title of report: Looked after children performance report

Meeting: Children and young people scrutiny committee

Meeting date: Tuesday 1 June 2021

Report by: Cabinet member children and families;

Classification

Open

Decision type

This is not an executive decision

Wards affected

(All Wards);

Purpose

To update the Scrutiny Committee about progress in relation to the Local Authority's Corporate Parenting Duties and to answer key questions of the Committee.

Recommendation(s)

That:

- a) **The committee reviews the information provided and determines any recommendations it wishes to make to the executive to secure further improvement and;**
- b) **The committee notes in its work programme that a further update will be provided in respect of Children in Care at a later meeting in September 2021.**

Alternative options

1. There are no alternative options to the above recommendations; it is a function of the committee to review actions taken in connection with the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the executive and make reports or recommendations to the executive.

Key considerations

2. This report briefly outlines the local authority's duty towards children in care as outlined in the Care Planning and Placement Review Regulations (2010 & 2015).
3. Furthermore, the report provides an infographic snapshot of the children in care.
4. **The Corporate Parenting Principles:**
 - The government, in 2018, set out guidance on what good standards of care is: This is guidance is called: ***“corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers”*** This is statutory and every local authority is required to apply these benchmarks in delivering services to Children in Care and Care Leavers. There are seven key principles and these are:
 - to act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people
 - to encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings
 - to take into account the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people
 - to help those children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners
 - to promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people
 - for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education or work; and
 - to prepare those children and young people for adulthood and independent living.
5. A qualitative analysis of how Herefordshire Council is adhering to as well as promoting these principles shall be reviewed and this will inform our Corporate Parenting Strategy by September 2021.

Snap Shot of Children in Care:

6. Appendix A of this report provides an infographic analysis of statistical performance of Children in Care.
7. The snapshot shows that, on average, 320 children are cared for by Herefordshire Council. This has been consistent within the last 18 months. It is, however, worth noting that the number of Children in Care peaked at 355 in February 2020 but came down sharply within 10 months. The factor(s) contributing to the sharp rise and the sharp fall is under review.

8. Herefordshire Council is measured with other Local Authorities that have similar to or same demographic characteristics. They are called statistical neighbours. Furthermore, it is compared with West Midlands 'regional' neighbours.
9. In relation to Children in Care, Herefordshire Council has 88 children from every cluster of 10,000 children aged 0 to 18 in care. The average for West Midlands region is 95 from every cluster of 10,000 children. The England average is 67:10000
10. In terms of the local authority's statistical neighbours, of the three most closest are; namely: Shropshire 66:10000; Devon 51:10000 and Cornwall 44:10000.
11. It imperative to emphasise that many factors influences these statistics and, although a lower rate is generally better, it is important to take a holistic view of the statutory and non-statutory services available to children and young people in Herefordshire.
12. The number of children entering care on a monthly basis has increased marginally. However, this increase is relatively proportional to the overall increases across England due to the coronavirus pandemic.
13. It is important to highlight the five key wards where children are likely to come into care. South West Herefordshire has the highest number of children entering care.

Home Postcode	Number Of Children from that Postcode
HR2 7	66
HR6 8	29
HR2 6	23
HR7 4	22
HR1 1	19

14. As a service, we aim to review the challenges and factors contributing to these high numbers. A detailed analysis was done and incorporated in our Corporate Parenting and Placement Sufficiency Strategies.
15. When children come into care, and their plan is for them to remain in care long term, every effort is made to match them with appropriate placement option. As a result, significant numbers of children are in a stable placement. However, in Herefordshire, this is slightly below England average but, overall, comparable with the national trend. Every effort shall be made to sustain and improve this positive outlook.
16. It is imperative to mention that some children have high needs and, as result, moved placements more than three occasions within a year. The cohort of these children is 2% higher than England average. In response, an immediate priority is to review children and young people's placement sufficiency with the view of expanding placement options and also strengthening the resilience and capacity of our existing resources.
17. It is noteworthy to report that 55% of the children are cared for by our local foster carers. Our local foster carers are grouped into two categories; namely: those with relationship and ties with children either through blood or friendship (connected carers) and those who have no connection with the children (mainstream foster carers).

18. It is imperative to emphasise that both connected and mainstream foster carers are assessed approved, supported and supervised in accordance with the Fostering Services regulation 2011.
19. A significant number of children are cared for by foster carers with the independent sector. We are currently reviewing our internal fostering recruitment strategy to ensure that the existing pool of foster carers are retained while efforts are made to bring in more carers. Further details about a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy and implementation plan would be available by September 2021.
20. It is also our aim to review the number of children in residential care setting with the view of ensuring that their placement options remains appropriate and that their care plans for the medium to long term are clear and purposeful.

Community impact

21. Children in Care and Foster Carers are mostly residents of Herefordshire. They contribute to the local economy and therefore must be factored in and prioritised in the council's corporate plan.
22. Children in Care and Care Leavers must be prioritised in decision making strategic plans in relation to all key local services.
23. The term 'corporate parent' means the collective responsibility of the council, elected members, employees, and partner agencies, for providing the best possible care and safeguarding for children who are looked after by the council. Being a good corporate parent means we should; accept responsibility for children in the council's care; make their needs a priority; and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.
24. Corporate parenting responsibilities are not confined to elected members. All officers share the responsibility to promote the needs of looked after children. Key responsibilities of all officers are: to promote the life chances of looked after children and care leavers in their area of responsibility; and to consider the impact of decision making on looked after children and care leavers.

Environmental Impact

25. The key decisions and strategic plans relating to Children in Care indirectly contribute to delivering the council's [environmental policy commitments](#) and aligns to the following success measures in the County Plan.
 - Increase flood resilience and reduce levels of phosphate pollution in the county's river
 - Reduce the council's carbon emissions
 - Work in partnership with others to reduce county carbon emissions
 - Improve the air quality within Herefordshire
 - Improve residents' access to green space in Herefordshire

- Improve energy efficiency of homes and build standards for new housing

Increase the number of short distance trips being done by sustainable modes of travel – walking, cycling, and public transport

26. Herefordshire Council provides and purchases a wide range of services for the Children in Care of Herefordshire. Together with partner organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors we share a strong commitment to improving our environmental sustainability, achieving carbon neutrality and to protect and enhance Herefordshire's outstanding natural environment.

Equality duty

27. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows: A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to –
- a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
28. The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation.
29. The Equality Act 2010 established a positive obligation on local authorities to promote equality and to reduce discrimination in relation to any of the nine 'protected characteristics' (age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). In particular, the council must have 'due regard' to the public sector equality duty when taking any decisions on service changes. This is carefully considered and adhered to in the day to day decision making of all Children in Care.
30. We are proactively looking to recruit a range of foster carers who are able to meet the diverse needs of the children across Herefordshire.

Resource implications

31. There are no resource implications arising from the recommendation. The resource implication of any recommendations made by the committee will inform the executive's response to those recommendations.

Legal implications

32. There are no specific legal implications of the recommendation of this report

Risk management

33. The risks associated with the failure to ensure our children in care are provided with the care and support are:
- a. The council does not deliver sustained improvement. Too many children and young people receive a poor service, there is drift and delay, children, and young people receive high threshold services that are reactive. There is not sufficient capacity for good social work to flourish and there are not a range of effective preventative and edge of care services to support children and young people safely in families. The council then runs the risk of being judged as inadequate by Ofsted under the Inspecting Local Authority Children's services (ILAC's) framework.
 - b. Reputational. The council does not make progress quickly enough and adversely affects the recruitment and retention of social work staff. This can have a knock on effect of increasing caseloads, which in turn has the potential to negatively impact on performance and quality of services for children and families. Consequently, the council would have to invest significant resources to then rectify the situation.

Consultees

34. The safeguarding and family support services regularly engage our children about the performance and delivery of our services to ensure that the voice of the child is heard within the feedback on our children and families within Herefordshire young people have been actively involved in safeguarding briefings to all newly and re-elected councillors.
35. We have completed a survey looking specifically at feedback from children and families looking at the outcomes received as a result of our services. This has provided us with rich qualitative data that will be used to enable us to continue our journey of improvement and influence our plans; and will be repeated at regular intervals

Appendices

Appendix A – Children and young people in care presentation