

# Title of report: Corporate Parenting Service

**Meeting: Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting date: Tuesday 12 March 2024**

**Report by: Rachel Gillott – Service Director, Safeguarding and Family Support**

Classification

Open

## **Decision type**

This is not an executive decision

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose**

For the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider this report which provides an overview and update in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service.

## **Recommendation(s)**

**That:**

- a) **The report in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service is considered; noting the progress made since 2018.**
- b) **The committee determine any recommendations it wishes to make to secure further improvement in respect of the Corporate Parenting Service.**

## **Alternative options**

1. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee could choose not to review information contained in this report; this is not recommended as the Corporate Parenting Service is one of the council's priorities.

## Key considerations

2. The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee requested this report and helpfully provided a briefing note setting out the focus areas and questions to which the Committee seeks answers:
  1. What are the current number and the rate of looked after children in Herefordshire?
    - How have these figures changed since 2018?
    - How does this compare with statistical neighbours and West Midlands?
  2. Does the council understand the causes of the increase in numbers of looked after children?
    - What are the external factors?
    - What are the internal factors? (this is the important one)
  3. What proportion of our looked after children live:
    - With kinship carers?
    - With in-house foster parents?
    - In private fostering?
    - Living in residential care?
  4. What are the costs of placing children in these different types of placements?
  5. What factors are causing the recent increase in numbers of looked after children?
    - Factors out of our control (UASC, court delays)
    - Factors in our control (practice, strategy and funding)
  6. What are our solutions?
    - Longer-term/strategic (more families supported earlier)
    - ECHO
    - Reunification

### 3. Officer's Response:

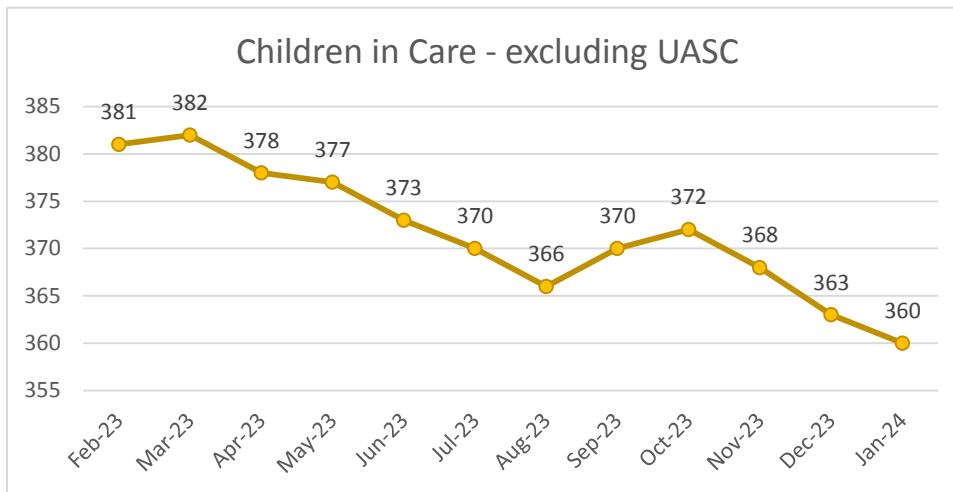
4. The numbers and rate (per 10,000 children) since 2018 are set out in the table below. Rates for England, our statistical neighbours and the West-Midlands are also shown:
- 5.

Year	Herefordshire		England	Statistical Neighbours	West Midlands
	Number	Rate			
2018/19	333	69	66	57	82
2019/20	351	103	68	59	83
2020/21	313	92	69	62	86
2021/22	378	112	70	64	88
2022/23	412	121	71	67	90
Current	396	110			

6. It is difficult to surmise the reasons for the historical fluctuation in the numbers/rate of children in care. Both the senior management team and the operational management team has since changed.

7. In March 2021, a High Court judgement detailed significant and systemic failings in practice within the local authority. The judgement noted that these failings had a significant and adverse impact on some children and families over several years.
8. In May 2021, the Department for Education issued Herefordshire Council children's services a non-statutory notice to improve.
9. The council committed to reviewing all cases open to Children's Services. This noted that there was significant drift.
10. In August 2021, Ofsted carried out a Focussed Visit. One of the findings was that the decision to initiate pre-proceedings was not always considered quickly enough.
11. In a response to these findings drift was addressed and the number of care proceeding and children in care rose during 2021/22 to 378 (up from 313 in 2020/21).
12. Since then we have changed practice and have implemented mechanisms to appropriately escalate children subject to pre-proceedings processes. This was recognised during our second Monitoring Visit by Ofsted (August 2023).
13. In July 2016, the Home Office and Department for Education launched the National Transfer Scheme. This is a voluntary transfer arrangement between Local Authorities to care for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. Herefordshire has been part of the National Transfer Scheme since its inception.
14. Due to world events, the number of individuals claiming asylum in the European Union for the year ending March 2023 increased by 41% compared to the previous year. The UK saw a similar percentage increase in the number of people claiming asylum (44%) over the same period.
15. Of the people claiming asylum in the year ending March 2023, there were 50,843 applications by Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC) of which the United Kingdom received 5,478.
16. This resulted in an increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children supported by Herefordshire under the National Transfer Scheme.
17. To put this in context, in January 2022 there were 6 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. In January 2024 this was 38.
18. As a proportion of all children in our care, in January 2022, 2% of children looked after were Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. In January 2024 this was 9%
19. Whilst the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children has increased, over the last 12 months we taken steps to safely prevent where possible the number of young people entering care as a result of care proceedings.
20. The graph below provides an overview of the number of children in our care excluding Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. It is noted that where this is safe to do so the increased activity in respect of reunification and a reduction in issuing care proceedings has also had a downward impact on the number of children in our care.

21.



22. An average cost for external foster carers and residential placements is provided in the table below but it should be noted that these average costs can vary depending on the cohort of children and their needs in each placement type. Average costs will therefore fluctuate over time.

Placement Type	Number of Children	Average weekly cost
External Foster Carer	111	£988
Residential	44	£6,023

23. Ninety-two (92) children in our care live with in-house foster carers whilst 78 children live with kinship carers (friends and family).
24. The Fostering Care Allowance to in-house and kinship carers is based on the age of the child; additionally a Fostering Fee is paid based on the experience of the in-house or kinship foster carer.
25. There is no difference in fees and allowances between a child living with kinship carers or with in-house foster carers. The most common Foster Care Allowance to our in-house or kinship carers is £219 per week with an addition of a Fostering Fee of £181.
26. Additional allowances such as those for the child's birthday, Christmas and festival, school uniform and holiday allowances might be payable.
27. Placement sufficiency remains a key priority and external placements continue to place cost pressures on the budget.
28. In respect of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children, the Local Authority receives a grant from the Home Office although this does not typically cover the full cost of our placements for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.
29. We have refreshed and relaunched our Reunification Practice Guidance and a ring-fenced and dedicated staff to work on rehabilitation home for young people from care where this is safe to do so.
30. We are expanding our Edge of Care Home team (ECHO); this team consists of skilled workers who provide effective support to prevent family breakdown and provide help for carers. We have seen an increase in the use of Family Group Conferences.

31. Supported by our Leeds partners, we have introduced a restorative practice approach which aims to work alongside children and families and to provide support and services at the earliest point.
32. By continuing the approaches and preventative work as set out above, we should continue to see a decrease in number of children in our care.

### **Community impact**

33. The activity in respect of preventative work and bringing children into care has a direct impact on the lives of both current and future children and families in Herefordshire.
34. As Corporate Parents there is a 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.
35. 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**

36. There is no direct environmental impact arising out of this report.

### **Equality duty**

37. For children in our care and care leavers assessments are completed which allow for equality considerations to ensure these needs are met for through for instance the provision of a specialist placements to meet complex needs; the provision of translators and English language courses or access to places of worship.
38. 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.

## Resource implications

39. The number of children looked and placement type have an impact on the resources of the council. Associated costs are set out the Children and Young People budget. The Committee is sighted on a regular basis in respect of the budgetary position of the Children and Young People directorate.

## Legal implications

40. It is the function of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee to consider the Corporate Parenting Service and its role in the required improvement journey.

## Risk management

41. 41. Risks in respect of budgetary pressures are covered within the overarching risk register of the council and actions are taken as required to mitigate any identified risk.

## Consultees

42. There has been no public consultation on this report.

## Appendices

None

## Background papers

None identified

## Report Reviewers Used for appraising this report:

**Please note this section must be completed before the report can be published**

Governance	Simon Cann	Date 04/03/2024
Communications	Luenne Featherstone	Date 02/03/2024
Equality Duty	Harriet Yellin	Date 04/03/2024
Procurement	Lee Robertson	Date 04/03/2024
Risk	Chris Tindell-Jones	Date 04/03/2024

Approved by Rachel Gillott Date 04/03/2024