



Young Peoples Scrutiny
Committee

23 March 2016

Item

Public

Management and cost of placements for Children in Local Authority Care

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1. Summary

1.1 This report sets out how Children's Social work services manage placements for Looked After children.

1.2 It aims to explain:

- How the range of placements are identified, including internal assessment and approval and processes for commissioning of external placements.
- How costs are determined for foster care and residential care.
- The use of residential care for our LAC

1.3 The report should be read in conjunction with the Sufficiency Duties annual report 2015 which can be found as appendix 1.

2. Decision

2.1 Scrutiny is invited to note the contents of the report and to seek further information as required to be confident that the management of placements for Looked After Children in Shropshire is effective in meeting the needs of children, is meeting the legal sufficiency duties of the LA and are managed at best value to the public purse.

REPORT

3. Accommodating children and sufficiency duties of the local authority

- 3.1 The Children Act 1989 section 22G sets out the 'Sufficiency' - Statutory Guidance on securing sufficient accommodation for looked after children. The guidance seeks to ensure accommodation improves outcomes for looked after children and young people and requires Local Authorities to take steps to secure, so far as reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation within the authority's area which meets the needs of children that the Local Authority are looking after.
- 3.2 It is well understood that the quality of placements strongly relates to children and young people 'doing well' in care – the higher the quality, the better children and young people do' (Sinclair et al, 2007). In Shropshire we work to ensure we have the full range of accommodation available, locally where possible, to meet the needs of any child who needs to be received into LA care to protect them from harm or promote their welfare where birth parents are unable to provide this.
- 3.3 All placements have cost inclusive of staffing, day time and night staff teams, accommodation/buildings, domestic, insurances etc. In addition placement will have additional provision such as additional 2-1 staffing, night waking staff, therapeutic service and on site education. Each individual placement set out in their Statement of Purpose and provision statement what they offer and what is included in the cost of the placement. Placement are split into tiers to reflect the level of services and size of the occupancy. Examples across the range of these are attached for information as appendices. In line with the LA duties and responsibilities the placement of each child must be matched to needs identified in the social work assessment.
- 3.4 In April 14 we introduced a Process for Accommodating Children into Local authority Care (PALAC) the PALAC reports enables us to evidence in a single place the assessment of need for LA accommodation, the decision for accommodation and the process by which the placement is identified to meet the needs of the child. This process has been successful in ensuring our practice is consistent, scrutinised and transparent. The PLALAC form can be found as an appendix to this report.

4. Foster Care Placement Provision

- 4.1 The Care Planning Placement and Case Review Regulations 2010 confirm that where a decision has been made to receive a child into Local Authority care the LA have a duty to try and identify a family member, friend or connected person (FFC) to the child to act as carer on behalf of the LA in order to keep the child connected to its family community and to cause minimal disruption to the child's life.
- 4.2 Where no FFC carer can be identified a decision needs to be made as to which is the most appropriate placement able to meet the needs of the child identified through the Social Work Assessment. Where ever possible the first option would be to identify a family based foster carer though an internal in house provision or an

externally commissioned carer if we have no in house provision able to meet the needs of the child.

- 4.3 Payment for foster carer payment structure is set out in our Payment Arrangement for Foster Carers as an Appendix to this report.
- 4.4 At the time of writing FFC carers are paid the “Child Care” allowance of the foster care payment. However the policy is under review to ensure we are compliant with legislation and that appropriate payments to FFC carer’s are based on the needs of the child and to ensure there is no discrimination between foster carers and friends and family, connected person foster carers, as is required by legislation.
- 4.5 Internal foster care provision is the responsibility of the LA fostering team. This staff team are responsible for the recruitment, assessment, supervision and annual review of our foster carer and FFC carers. The average internal FC care weekly cost for a child aged 11yrs – 15 yrs. is £320 a week. Our current lowest cost placement for a child of the same age in an external foster care placement is £795 a week and our most expensive being £1,352 per week.
- 4.6 As at 31.12.15 we have 84 children in internal foster care placements and 73 placed in FFC carers. We have 38 children placed in externally commissioned foster care placements.
- 4.7 In 15/16 Shropshire joined the Worcester Framework for externally commissioned foster care placements. The Framework gives us competitive rates and best value where we have to spot purchase individual placements for children. The existing framework expires in March 16 and we are currently working to join a new Birmingham led framework. See finance section for finical impact.

5. Fostering Placements Performance

5.1 Our strategy through 2014 - 16 has been to increase the use of FFC and internal carers and in line with our sufficiency duty place children where possible in local and family care provision. The table below shows the positive trends in our performance against these key activities.

	2013/14	2014/15	As at End Feb 2016
Foster Caring Households	118	133	141
Foster Caring Households (Exc. Family & Friends/Short Breaks)	72	78	82
Foster Caring Households - Family and Friends/Connected persons	40	50	54

Foster Caring Households - Exclusively Approved for Short Breaks	6	5	5
Approved Foster Carers (all)	216	242	252

% LAC Placed:	YE 2013	YE 2014	YE 2015
In Shropshire	70%	65%	74%
Outside Shropshire	30%	35%	26%

5.2 Focused recruitment of foster carer during 15/16 has looked to target carers for teenager and siblings groups as an identified gap in our internal provision. This has been a successful targeted campaign and we currently have nine foster care households in the assessment process who have been recruited specially to provide care for sibling groups and teenagers.

6. Residential Care Placement Provision

6.1 We currently have one in house residential provision, Chelmaren that accommodates 5 children in placements. This is an increase from 4 made in 2015 following a redesign of our in house residential care. Chelmaren have achieved “outstanding” rating in their recent Ofsted inspection for the quality of care and outcomes achieved by their children in placement.

6.2 In addition we continue to run Havenbrook as an in house children home offering short break to prevent children needing to be received into LA where with support and short breaks it is safe for the child to remain in family care. Havenbrook offers short breaks to children aged 8-16yrs and we know that of this age group if the need for LA care did arise the placement option can often be residential care or specialist foster care which we usually need to commission.

7. Residential Care Placement Performance

7.1 Our strategy through 2014 - 16 has been to reduce the number of children accommodated by providing a range of good quality edge of care support. The table below shows a significant reduction in year of newly accommodated children but a higher number requiring residential care to meet their needs.

Start date	End date	New LAC	New LAC (Unique)	First Placement Residential (of the unique)
01/04/2015		79	79	17
01/04/2014	31/03/2015	138	131	14
01/04/2013	31/03/2014	128	118	24

7.3 Using Havenbrook as a short breaks alternative to care, where it is was safe and in the children interests to keep them at home has impacted on the needs of our LAC cohort. In short children who are coming in have greater needs that can often only be met through residential care and specialist residential care placements. This includes siblings groups and Teenagers.

8. Financial Implications

8.1 Joining the Worcester framework has saved us approximately £26,000 in year from existing placements transferring into the framework. We estimate a saving of approximately £65,000 per year from 16/17 in existing placements transferring into the new Birmingham framework.

8.2 The cost of our two in house children's homes is £1'255'300 per annum.

8.3 The redesign of our in house residential services reduced our weekly cost of placement from £2,989 to £2,300. As a comparison our lowest cost spot purchased residential provision is £2'650 and our highest cost is £5,733 with the average being between £3,000 and £4,000 a week. (Excluding specialist placements for children with disabilities)

8.4 Since its start date June 14 there have been 111 children and young people who have accessed short break at Havenbrook. 75 children have received a planned short break and 36 have been provided with a crisis short breaks to prevent family breakdown in an emergency situation.

8.5 LAC analysis in 2014 estimated the average stay of a child in care to be four months. Using this figure if we had not have the HB as a facility to prevent family breakdown and as such 50% (55 children) required LAC then the estimated cost to the LA would have been £279'470.000 if the children have been found placement in our internal foster care provision and £2'099'680 if they had been placed in a basic residential care placement.

8.6 During 2015/16 we have undertaken a procurement process to review our block contract provision for residential care. We sought increase our options for both more specialist services and local placements. Although we had 2 potential providers we were unable to secure a block contract with one of these that was at bets value to the LA and as such as a result of the process we have secured on provider and have agreed a block contract for 13 beds at a cost of £2,386 per week.

9. National Finance comparators

National data released (section 251 return) identifies Shropshire's cost per head of child placed in residential care. This figure is calculated using our total cost of residential care budget divided by the number of children who have been in a residential care placements in year

	2011-12 (OT)	2012-13 (OT)	2013-14 (OT)	2014-15 (OT)	2015-16(S251)	Change from previous year
Shropshire	£2,855	£2,620	£2,365	£3,350	£2,555	-£795
West Midlands	£2,965	£2,985	£3,000	£3,075	£2,835	-£240
Statistical Neighbours	£3,199	£2,722	£3,172	£2,985	£2,647	-£338
England	£3,015	£2,840	£2,910	£2,915	£2,595	-£320

10. Conclusions

In line with our duties and responsibilities under the Children Act 1898; to Promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm and our duties to Looked after children as corporate parents our LAC strategy has been to ensure we take appropriate and timely action to accommodate children where it is necessary to protection them from harm and to have a mix of placements available so we can match children needs to placement in order to promote their outcomes as Looked After Children.

We have reduced the number of LAC from 310 in April 15 to 300 in Dec 15 and significantly reduced the number of newly accommodated children in year from 131 in 14/15 to 79 year to date.

Our work in managing placements for children looked after should be seen in the context of our focused work to achieve permanency for children outside of LA care. Permanency options include Adoption, Special Guardianship Order, Residence Orders and Care Arrangement Orders. In 14/15; 5 children left care achieving permanency through a Special Guardianship order. In 15/16 year to date we have increased this to 16. During 14/15 there were 15 children who achieved permanency through Adoption, for 15/16 year to date this number has increased to 19.

We continue to ensure we are achieving good quality and best value in our placement provision through:

- Targeted recruitment of local foster carers
- Review and evaluation of commissioning opportunities for fostering and residential provision
- Review and evaluation of internal provision

- Analysis of our LAC cohort informing our placements needs and outcomes for children

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

David Minnery

Local Member

Conflicts of interest declared by members

Appendices

1. Sufficiency Duty report 2015
2. Payment Arrangements for Foster Carers April 15
3. PALAC