

Division(s):

CABINET – 15 NOVEMBER 2011

Progress Report On Children In And Leaving Care: To Note Progress And Issues In Relation To The Children And Young People In Council's Care.

Report by Director for Children, Education & Families

Introduction

1. This report reviews the performance and outcomes of Looked After Children and Care Leavers (LAC) over the last six months, and of the revised Corporate Parenting Strategy which was last updated in May 2011 in partnership with its Children in Care Council (CICC).
2. Since the last Cabinet report, the OFSTED findings on their inspection of Looked After Children services has been published with an overall rating of "Good". Specifically, all our services received a rating of "Good" except for Children and Young People's involvement, including our Children In Care Council (CICC), which received an "Outstanding", and our intensive support services, including those to "Children on the edge of Care" which were judged as "Excellent". "Enjoy and Achieve" received a rating of "Satisfactory". The reports and action plans have been presented to cabinet separately but this report will include updates on these
3. In addition, members will be aware that OFSTED have also inspected both of our Children's Homes, which both received overall ratings of "Good" with "Outstanding" features, as did our Adoption services, although the final report for this has been seriously delayed because of the illness of the inspector.

The Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy

4. Although considerable progress has been made since the last report to cabinet, the priorities remain the same: the need for stable and consistent care; the support necessary to minimise time spent in care; access to the best possible appropriate education and healthcare, and ensuring all children and young people (CYP) feel valued and listened to.
5. Our Corporate Parenting role currently (end of August, 2011) extends to 439 CYP who are looked after, 23% of whom are from BaME. Of these, 249 are males and 190 females, 161 are aged 0 – 9, 150 aged 10 – 15 and 128 are aged 16+. These numbers are very volatile and show a rise of 5% since April with a further slight growth in the number of 16-18s. It should be noted that the figures released for 10-11 again highlight the fact that Oxfordshire have low rates of LAC compared to our Statistical Neighbours (SNs) 31/10,000 against 37. There are also 315 care leavers, including 150 Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASCs). The strategy also includes children on the edge of care and those who have left care for permanent placements, e.g. adoption.

6. Staff across the Council and Children's Trust, including Health and Police, continue to be made aware of LAC's needs and of their Corporate Parenting responsibility, and regularly provide updates to Corporate Parenting Panel. A specific focus on the safeguarding of LAC is to be reported to the Safeguarding Board and a new policy on Friends and Family care is being presented to the Children's Trust.
7. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel have now established a regular visiting pattern to both children's homes (Regulation 33 visits) and continue to provide constructive challenge to the care provided. They have contributed to a programme of continuous improvement in the quality of the environment and care and the outcomes being achieved by children and young people. Their findings continue to be discussed at Corporate Parenting Panel along with all other inspection and monitoring reports.
8. Councillors and officers recently hosted a visit of the Children's Minister, Tim Loughton, who launched Extended Projects using evidence-based programmes to improve outcomes for LAC. Oxfordshire has been awarded £140,000 and £175,000 for its first two years as part of a four year programme to develop Multi-treatment Foster Care, an intensive foster care programme for adolescents and those at risk of custody, and KEEP, a behaviour management programme for carers including adopters. Oxfordshire has also been selected to help other Local Authorities develop their own programmes. Finally, we are one of two authorities selected by DFE to develop a research informed training programme for residential staff.

Review (Grouped Under Strategy Objectives)

The remainder of this report will reflect the key elements of our Corporate Parenting strategy.

All professionals, statutory services and the voluntary and private sectors to work in effective partnership.

9. 219 days of B&B were used in the first four months of this year, illustrating that the significant reductions shown last year have been maintained, although it is clear that there is an increasingly troubled, albeit small, group of CYP with complex needs who need enhanced provision to help them. A review of their needs is underway.
10. The Cross Regional Commissioning projects to provide additional residential placements for children with complex needs has now opened three homes with three more in the advanced planning stages designed to complete the project. Oxfordshire has currently used two of its 7 eventual placements and whilst the project suffered some significant teething problems, due in part to establishing sufficiently experienced staff groups and part due to the difficulty of establishing the right mix of children whilst we have so few beds to choose from. However, it is providing savings of around £2,000/ week on two beds we are using although it is difficult to predict the annual savings at this time since we may well have to pay for some voids. The same model is being extended to commission Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements to complement our own growing fostering service and is now at the tendering stage. We are confident that this is the right approach if the Local Authority is to meet our responsibilities to develop a "sufficiency" of local provision.

11. It is recognised that changes in partnership working with adult services have improved transitions for those with learning difficulties. The setting up of the vulnerable adults' panel, along with the mental health review and new mental health housing strategy, is designed to improve service delivery for those vulnerable adults, including care leavers, who formerly have not met the criteria for adult services and/or are too chaotic to engage. This has been going less well, due in part to the relative lack of provision for this age group, who have a growing number of complex needs. The chairing of the panel will be taken over by John Dixon with a meeting due to take place in November to finalise the work programme needed to address the issues. Those identified include;
 - training between children and adult services to address the gaps in knowledge and expertise about each other's procedures and legislative requirements, for both SCS and CSC staff;
 - Agreement needed to minimise late "Fair Access to Community Service Assessments" (FACs) and thus late decision making about eligibility for services;
 - The level of personal budget available, which of course makes planning very difficult, especially where CSC has been funding costly residential provision, and even more so when this has been out of county and it is necessary to plan for a return at 18 with adequate services in place, and
 - FACS assessments which are focussed on current rather than likely future needs as adults.
12. The timeliness of initial health assessments has improved to 85% being completed within a month of admission with significant positive feedback being received from CYP and their carers on the thoroughness of the assessment and the positive respectful experience providing a faster and more satisfactory basis on which to access specialist services.
13. The inter-agency missing person's strategy led by the police continues to meet monthly and has established a robust system for ensuring all CYP concerned are interviewed and issues arising from their missing episode acted upon, with systemic issues and action plans developed and monitored by members of the group. There has been some disruption to the processes following the recent re-organisation of services. Between January and August, there were 795 missing episodes reported to the police concerning 398 children but the impact of this work has been the reduction of missing episodes in our children's homes, an achievement positively noted by OFSTED.
14. Close partnerships with local colleges and work providers are assisting CYP into preparation to work schemes and various pilots are underway to work out the most effective way to ensure the most complex CYP are helped into work. The RAISE , our Care Leaving Education team have created a Virtual team to ensure that support for our CYP is well co-ordinated

Challenges

15. A review of supported housing is being undertaken to identify the best way of housing and meeting the needs of a small cohort of young people with chaotic behaviour and prevent the use of B&B or nightly charge accommodation. This was an action identified by OFSTED.

16. Delivering the work programme to improve the transition to adult services for those with the most complex needs.
17. Re-establishing the strategic management group to oversee the missing persons work and ensure all agencies understand and fulfil their contribution to this work.
18. Developing effective provision for engaging those with complex needs in work.

Attaining best possible outcomes for LAC

19. **Key Stage 2** outcomes for a cohort of 6 students show significant improvement, with 50% gaining level 4+ in both English and Maths, an improvement of 19.2% on the previous year. This is above the national and statistical neighbours' average for the last three years and shows four consecutive years of improvement. All but one student were on the SEN register and 5/6 pupils made the expected 2+ levels of progress in English and 4/6 in Maths.
20. **Key Stage 4** results are measured for two cohorts of CYP, those who have been in care for a year (50 students) and those who have spent any time in care during year 11 (73 students). 64% of students who had been in care for a year were on the SEN register.

Overall there was a pattern of improvement on the previous year. The comparative figure is given in brackets:

8% (+1.6) gained 5+ A*-C including English and Maths.

50%(+9.6) gained 5+ A*-G including English and Maths.

76% (+10) gained 1+ A*-G.

However, the figures for 5+ A*-C including English and Maths remain below the national average for 2010 of 11.6%.

In relation to the second cohort results showed an improvement on 2010 outcomes, apart from those achieving 5+ A*-C which deteriorated by 5.59%.

21. The number of CYP with a Personal Education Plan (PEP) completed on time improved from 73% in September 2009 to 94% in March 2011. All PEPs are quality assured and show steady signs of improvement.
22. There were no LAC permanently excluded last year. Attendance continues to remain an area of significant concern since it is fundamental to improving attainment. For the second year running levels of school attendance deteriorated. In Oxfordshire in 2009/10 the levels of absence were higher than statistical neighbours and the England average. Overall absence in 2009/10 was 6.6% and in 2010/11 was 7.8%. Persistent absence (less than 80% attendance) in 2009/10 was at a level of 4.8% and in 2010/11 this deteriorated to 9.5%.
23. EET performance of our CYP is measured at 19 and fell for the first time this year. The performance was 68% compared with last year's 78%. However, this includes a number of YP who have lost their right to work or been removed from the country because of their Asylum status and, although this is not allowed for in the returns, when these YP are removed from the cohort,

the out turn is 88% which exceeds last year. Numbers going to university have shown a further rise this year from 12 to 14% proceeding.

Challenges

24. Key Stage 4, results at 5+A*- C including English and maths remain below national averages and thus a priority, in order to address the disadvantages between LAC and their peers.
25. The recent restructure has put in place seven early intervention hubs and established a countywide Behaviour, Inclusion and Attendance Team. Members of these teams will have direct responsibility to support improved outcomes for LAC, including attendance and engagement in learning. A termly list of LAC will be made available to these teams who will prioritise and target LAC. This will inevitably bring about a higher profile for this vulnerable group with an opportunity for earlier intervention and a broader offer of support. The Virtual School governors are also closely monitoring this and all Councillors will be given a termly list of LAC so they can support and promote a whole Council approach to improve this situation
26. There is a growing concern about the impact of the current economic climate, with a deterioration in the numbers of care leavers in EET. A number of intensive programmes have been established to identify the most effective way of addressing these issues and the next cabinet report will report on their effectiveness.

Ensuring stable relationships

27. The improvements in reviewing CYP on time have been maintained. 94% have had their reviews on time (SNs = 87.7% for 09/10).
28. Long term actions are improving short term stability (the number of children who have three placements or more in a year) and outcomes. Current performance extrapolated to the end of the year has reduced to 5.5% against year end performance in 2010-11 of 12.6%. Key actions which have contributed to this improvement include: the new care and placement plans; targeting intensive support packages to reduce the numbers of emergency admissions; improvements in the recruitment of carers continuing to provide more placement choice, and additional training and therapeutic support programmes to improve the skill base of carers,
29. The rise in long term stability has been maintained at 77 % (SE average for 09/10 = 70%).
30. Numbers placed for adoption within a year of the decision to adopt is projected to rise slightly to 90% at year end (SNs = 73.3%) Comparatively high levels of LAC continue to leave the system to permanent placements so, whilst the authority only had 9% leaving care to go to adoption (cf 11% nationally and 9% SNs) another 9.5% left as a result of Special Guardianship Orders (National figures = 6%). Oxfordshire is extending its partnerships with voluntary agencies and piloting more intensive ways to find adoptive families for its older children who require permanency, although ensuring our specialist support services continue to develop will be imperative to ensure robust and successful placements. The new commissioning arrangements with IFA also put this as an essential part of the required service

31. 99% of care leavers are in contact with the service with the numbers in suitable housing rising from 92% to 94%.

Challenges

32. Oxfordshire's decision to run an increased number of Multi Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) placements, which is designed to improve long term placement, can have an adverse effect on this indicator.
33. Delays in agreeing the sustainability in running the MTFC programmes means that there has been a loss of momentum since potential carers have been reluctant to commit to giving up their jobs, due to lack of certainty.
34. Increasing the number of LAC exiting to permanent placements. whether or not these placements are in the care system, needs robust support systems including, in most cases, regular financial support.

Listening to LAC

35. CICC has continued in active engagement in local, regional and national events, including regular meetings with the Children's Minister, Tim Laughton. Their intention is to develop reviews of key areas of policy and entitlement. To address the new structures and a reduction in the service time available to run the CICC, is moving to the Play and Involvement team.
36. 97% of LAC participated in their reviews.
37. Current plans include combining a Celebration event (now a national expectation) and a Christmas party to attract more members.

Challenges

38. Ensuring the CICC remains a vibrant Council and extends its reach to those who do not attend its meetings.
39. We also need to find other ways to ensure the small minority of CYP who do not participate in reviews are engaged.

Valuing and celebrating the uniqueness of each LAC

40. The Directorate has a contract through care planning that all children should have the right to participate in at least one activity of their choice per week.
41. CYP and their carers continue to participate in a variety of activities to raise self esteem and prevent offending. Activities have included foster and adoption picnics, arts weekends, holidays and a conference. Although the service has not been able to provide residential events at Hillend this year, other popular activities have been and will be maintained through fundraising by the Oxfordshire Foster Care Association, the CYP themselves and a donation from the Schools Forum.

Obtaining best value

42. Using the full range of Family Placement Support Services to ensure stability is considerably less expensive than having to respond when placements disrupt, a prime factor in CYP escalating along the care trajectory to the most expensive options. Targeted family support delivered in a range of multi-agency activities has ensured that Oxfordshire continues to have a relatively low number of LAC(31/10,000) compared with its SNs (37/10,000), a further confirmation of the worth in our investment in preventative services.

43. No further benchmarking information is available since the last cabinet report which showed us to be cost effective.
44. The successful pilot of MTFC has led to improved outcomes for children with particularly disturbing histories, been recognised nationally for the effectiveness of our implementation, improved outcomes for the children and saved placement costs. The Council has taken the decision to extend the funding for MTFC.
45. Our recruitment strategy for new carers continues to be successful although the new Care Planning regulations mean that we have had less flexibility to make placements. Attracting carers for disabled CYP and BaME remain a challenge.
46. The Community Parenting Programme in partnership with the Elmore Team, which uses Parents Under Pressure, a research informed programme, has attracted National interest and it is hoped this will develop into a project capable of addressing most of our needs in this area and is designed to increase support to families at risk of care and speed up decision making for their children. Future success is currently dependent on the Elmore securing further grant funding.

Challenges

47. The financial climate makes further streamlining of support services crucial. Oxfordshire is well-placed to address this because it has already adopted a strategy on commissioning to achieve better value for money, has relatively low numbers in agency placements and a relatively high proportion of LAC in in-house foster care. At this time of the financial year, it is difficult to give accurate estimates about potential in-year savings. However, whilst it is clear that the additional in-house bed at the "The Moors" (formerly Thornbury) has made a difference as has the new Cross Regional project and placing CYP in enhanced foster placements, there has been a rise in the number of expensive placements and uncertainty about the start date for MTFC (i.e. when sufficient carers will be recruited) and the costs associated with removing CYP from B&B and other unsuitable housing. Equally, the realignment of the placement budget has meant that the exponential increase rise in placement costs in one area, e.g. Special Guardianship Orders has been met by moving money from reducing payments in other areas e.g. Residence Orders, adoption allowances etc. However, it is clear that these pressures can be met within the overall cost centre.
48. There is a rapidly decreasing number of UASCs entitled to grant funding due to the rising number of CYP receiving citizenship, and an increasing number who have exhausted all their rights to services have had to be re-established following a recent court ruling.

Conclusions

49. The Corporate Parenting Strategy has proved effective at helping our LAC and in achieving best value, and is endorsed by them through the CICC and other forums, such as the Sounding Boards and the Virtual School Governing Body. Clearly, Education, Stability and support to Children On the Edge of Care, including adopted children, remain our priorities and continue to present

challenges. Failure to grow our specialized support services will undoubtedly lead to increased entrants to the LAC system.

50. Other challenges are coming from or expected to come from capacity issues surrounding the implementation of the new Care Planning regulations, particularly: the new IRO roles; the need to deliver increased services to care leavers; independently chaired reviews of relevant CYP; foster carers' annual reviews; and the Sufficiency Strategy (a legal requirement to provide stable local placements based on timely and effective care plans). In relation to the IRO role, it is hoped a reconfiguration of staff will ease capacity issue, whereas it is not clear at this stage what the take up will be in relation to extended care-leaver rights to help with Further Education.
51. Additionally, pressures continue from: the need for cost savings (particularly regarding Leisure and Cultural Activities for our CYP); the need for CYP to remain in care for longer, i.e their right to remain in foster care post 18; the increase in complex needs of those entering care later as a result of the Southwark Judgement, and the expected increased responsibilities for young people who will get care leaving status as a result of the proposed changes to financial and legal responsibility for remanded CYP.
52. Working in closer partnerships with all agencies, voluntary and statutory, to support our LACs is the best way to ensure that the most effective services are delivered at the earliest point to prevent escalation. To do this, we need to:
 - Build our knowledge of vulnerable individuals and groups within our care population so that we continue to focus performance management and resources at children and young people's identified and assessed need
 - Review and invest in what we have learned really works and brings about significant positive results
 - Respond to the financial constraints on local government by continuing to ensure value for money and obtaining better outcomes are linked with appropriate management of risk.
 - Continue to involve LAC in the review and design of services so that our approaches to the work and the pattern of provision is robust and flexible to meet future challenges
 - Continue to work on achieving placement sufficiency through recruitment and retention of foster carers

Financial and Staff Implications

53. There are no new financial assessments arising from this report. The report contains examples of how we have delivered both cashable savings or avoided costs and achieved better value in our commissioning of placements for CLA, which also ensures they are closer to the communities they come from. It is currently forecast that services for children in and leaving the authority's care will spend in line with the approved budget for 2011-12.

Recommendations

54. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to continue to support the Corporate Parenting Strategy and to work to the current objectives of the strategy;**

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MEERA SPILLETT
Director Children, Education & Families

Background Papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Jim Leivers, Head of Children's Services,

Tel: (01865) 818271

Fran Fonseca, Corporate Parenting Manager Tel: (01865) 323098