

Corporate Parenting Panel

MEETING DATE: 26 May 2011

REPORT TITLE: Annual Report to Council

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1.0 BACKGROUND

This highlights key issues from the year end performance information for Looked After Children and the priorities for the Service for Looked After Children.

2.0 WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- Achieving legal permanency - high rate of Adoptions, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders – 32 children in the year. At the end of the year, 20 children placed with Adopters currently. This is the highest level in the last 5 years. There is increasing success in placing slightly older children with more complex needs.
- Placing sibling groups together – creative means being used, e.g. use of other Local Authority's foster carers.
- Placing children near to home is a continued strength and enables children to be better supported and maintain family contact.
- Expansion of foster carers and adopters available for children – approvals have increased this year.
- High proportion of children placed in foster care (226 children) and few in residential (22).
- Bid for Multi-Dimensional treatment Foster Care has been accepted to the next "round" – increasing our ability to stabilise children with a lot of difficulties.
- Educational outcomes are good. We have 5 young people going to university this year (which is over 20% of the cohort)
- Health needs are well met.
- Improving the oversight of Care Plans by Reviewing Officers and ensuring that children's views are better taken into account.

- We are successful in preventing the majority of young people from being discharged from care too early and in supporting them to acquire independence skills. Those who leave care at 16 and 17 are very few and mainly do so at their own behest. There are continued positive levels of engagement in Education, Training and Employment.

3.0 WHAT NEEDS TO WORK BETTER AND WHAT ACTION IS IN PLACE TO ADDRESS THIS

3.1 There is a high number of Looked After Children – 324 at end of March. This is due to the increased rate of admissions. Consequently, there has been an increased number of Care proceedings (115 children in proceedings at the end of March) and resources have had to be diverted from family support/prevention to protecting the most vulnerable children from abuse. Our target remains to reduce the overall number of Looked After Children.

3.2 The increase in the number of Looked After Children has also limited our ability to provide placement choice and increased the pressure on placements and carers. Despite this, short-term stability remains in the “very good” banding (although it has dipped slightly), our medium term stability is improving. However, we want to improve this further and placement stability remains a priority area for action.

Key to placement stability is being able to divert children from care effectively, support successful discharge, improve placement choice and support permanent placements, particularly Adoption and Special Guardianship arrangements.

Actions to address 3.1 and 3.2 the above include:

- Continued expansion of foster care resource and focus on maximising the support available to them.
- Continued focus on increasing Adopter recruitment and ensuring that children are adequately prepared for permanent placement.
- Pursuing the bid for government grant monies for Multi-Dimensional Treatment foster care (specialist foster care provision).
- Early Intervention Strategy – greater targeting of the most vulnerable to ensure prevention work is focused on the children who are likely to come into care, and evidence-based, timely interventions with those who are identified.

Whilst we are not in a position to divert resources to improve support of Adoptions and SGOs further, the level of needs and impact will continue to be monitored.

3.3 An emerging issue creating difficulties is the reduction of post 16 supported accommodation. Reduction in Supporting People funding has impacted upon the availability of Supported Lodgings placements. This fiscal expediency is having a detrimental impact upon Social care budgets, as it has required us to use private providers in some cases. Local authorities across the NW are working to address the shortfall in supported accommodation for care leavers.

4.0 HOW HAVE YOU INCLUDED THE VOICE OF THE CHILD/YOUNG PERSON?

- Key priorities reflect the issues that young people confirm are important to them, especially in relation to stability, keeping siblings together and contact with family.
- “Madhouse” participation days continue to be provided 7 days per year and offer children a collective opportunity to have their voices heard.
- A high participation rate in reviews of the Care plan is maintained this year and Reviewing Officers are keeping in direct contact with children and young people between their review meetings to ensure that their views remain central.
- Children’s Rights Service continue to visit children when they first come into care to ensure that they know who to contact if they need advocacy support.

List of/Link to Background Papers : Children’s Social Care Performance Information Report 2010/11
<http://intranet.bury.gov.uk/ChildrensServices/PerformanceInformation/default.asp>

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