

Corporate Parenting Board

MEETING DATE: 28 November 2013

REPORT TITLE: Annual Report to Council

CONTACT OFFICER: Jackie Gower Assistant Director, Social Care & Safeguarding

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.

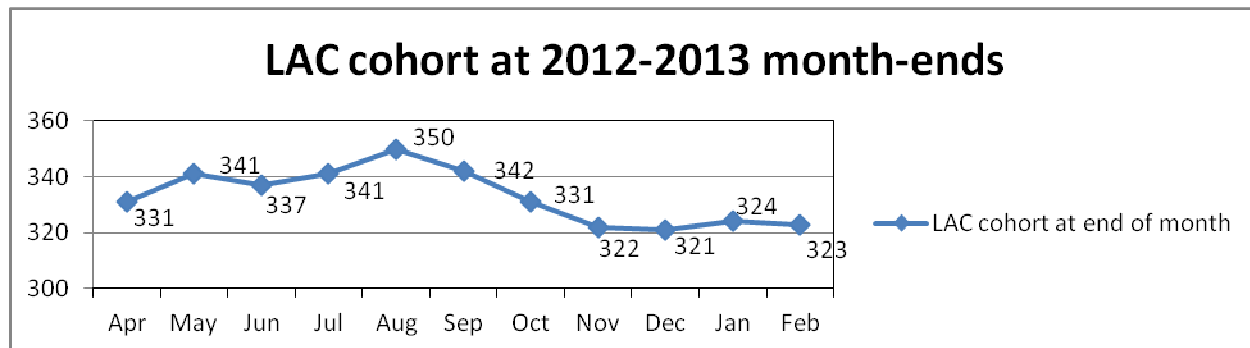
Jackie Gower started as permanent Assistant Director in January 2013, and has focussed on service improvement. A Strategic Lead for Children and Young People in Care and Placement Services Liz Shingler has been appointed. Mandy Williams is acting as Interim in this post until Liz moves into it.

2.0 WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- Achieving legal permanency – We have continued to have a high rate of Adoptions, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders – This is very positive for Bury children. At the end of the year, 18 Bury children were placed with Adopters.
- The duration of Care Proceedings has dropped from 67 weeks to 42, Bury was performing poorly so this improvement is welcome, and we are working under the Family Justice Review new Public Law Outline to reduce this to 26 weeks. This will be better for children as it will reduce drift and delay.
- Placing children near to home is a continued strength and enables children to be better supported and maintain family contact. Bury performs well against our statistical neighbours in this.
- The 'invest to save' has significantly increased the number of in-house Foster Placements that are available for Bury Looked After Children. We have recruited an additional 16 Foster Carers as at 31st October 2013 which means we have 29 new in house Foster Placements. This is a tremendous achievement, and is due to the support of the Corporate Parenting Panel and Councillors.
- The 'invest to save' in Adoption as well as the Adoption Reform Grant has resulted in the approval of 29 Adopters in the last 18 months.

- The total number of children and young people in residential care remains low, at 23; this means that the majority of our children are live within either their own extended Family, or a Foster family.
- Educational outcomes are good. We currently have 10 young people at University.
- Health needs are well met. The CAMHS Outreach team (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) continues to provide expert consultation, advice and training to professionals and carers for children and young people in care. The team works with approximately 25% of the CYPiC population in Bury and is greatly valued by colleagues in social care, education and health.
- 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 currently 22 young people in continuing care, which means they are remaining with their Foster Carers post 18
- We have been working to closely manage and monitor the external placements and Care Leavers Accommodation budgets. The Commissioning Team have ensured that savings are made by being part of regional commissioning for Foster Care and Residential Placements. The overall spend on these placements has decreased due to close management, however we are still over budget.

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



3.1 Although Bury has a relatively stable number of Looked After Children; the number per head of population is high compared to our extended comparator group average. Our target remains to reduce the overall number of Looked After Children, a figure of 290 children would bring Bury in line with the group average and below that for the North West as a whole.

In order to address this we have set up a formal Legal Planning process to monitor and gate keep requests to initiate Care Proceedings.

We have undertaken specific audits to promote discharges of care orders where they are no longer needed, and to promote the use of Special Guardianship and Residence Orders. We have seen a small decrease in the total to 317 in mid November 2013, however it is too early to tell if this reflects a trend.

We are looking to develop a resource that supports families and diverts children on the 'edge of care', and are looking at a 'support care' model.

- 3.2** The number of children placed with Independent Foster Carers is too high and does not always provide local placements. They do not provide the best value for money.

We are not performing well with regard to placement stability; we need to ensure that Looked After children and young people move in to their permanent placement as soon as possible, and are supported to remain there. In order to achieve this we need to ensure that we have sufficient placements available to make the right match for each individual child according to their needs

The 'invest to save' in Fostering and Adoption is for three years and we will continue to recruit and support in -house Foster Carers and Adopters. We will explore 'payment for skills' for Foster Carers in order to attract Carers for more complex children and teenagers and to compete with Independent Agencies.

We are exploring ways of supporting Carers with SGO's and have a pilot project which funds 0.5 worker, and is funded by the Adoption Reform Grant, we are considering ways to develop this work.

The Corporate Parenting Panel Work Area which covers Placements is developing a Placement Strategy for Looked After Children, and this will detail how we will provide sufficient locally based placements for children and young people in our care, and support and divert those young people on the edge of care. It will also address how to make further financial savings. It will be presented to the Panel early next year.

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 in each school holiday - 7 days per year and offer children a collective opportunity to have their voices heard. There is also an annual residential which took place in the Summer holidays and was attended by 13 children this year.
- 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 continues to visit children when they first come into care to ensure that they know who to contact if they need advocacy support.
- The CiCC contributed to the Corporate Parenting Strategy and have set up a Junior CiCC which is attended by 14 children in our Care.
- The CiCC requested that the Annual Awards were reinstated and this took place, planning for the next Awards Ceremony is well underway.
- Care Leavers have contributed to a review of their Service.

5.0 IS ANY ACTION REQUIRED FROM CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

1. Corporate Parenting Board approve the content of the report.
2. To ensure the Annual report is considered at the Full Council meeting held on Wednesday 11th December 2013.

List of/Link to Background Papers : Children's Social Care Performance Information Report 2012/13

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[Report Author]