

Overview & Scrutiny Report



REPORT TO : **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: 12th September 2019

SUBJECT: Early Help & Looked After Children

REPORT FROM: Tony Decrop Assistant Director Social Care and Safeguarding

CONTACT OFFICER: Bart Popelier, Kirsty Walton & Susan Harris

TYPE OF DECISION: For information only

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION/STATUS: Not classified

SUMMARY: Overview of Early help and Looked After Children

OPTIONS & RECOMMENDED OPTION N/A information only

IMPLICATIONS: N/A

Corporate Aims/Policy Framework:	Do the proposals accord with the Policy Framework?
	N/A

Statement by the S151 Officer:

Financial Implications and Risk Considerations: N/A

Statement by Executive Director of Resources & Regulation: N/A

Equality/Diversity implications: N/A

Considered by
Monitoring Officer: N/A

Wards Affected: All

Scrutiny Interest:

For information only

1.0 SUMMARY

The report provides an overview of Bury's Looked After Children and Early Help provision and service developments/transformation linked to these work streams. This report also provides an overview of the data relating to Looked After Children and Early Help.

2.0 MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION/DECISION

None for information only

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 This report was requested by the Overview and Scrutiny panel

4.0 Body Of The Report

Looked After Children

The children and young people who are 'Looked After' by Bury Council will be referred to as Children in Care in line with their wishes and views represented by the Children in Care Council.

Introduction

Principles and Values

The underpinning principles and values of Bury councils commitment to children in care and drive the Children In Care Strategy is that

- The family is usually the best place to bring up Children and Young people
- The role of the corporate parent is to act as the best possible parent for each child and young person in care and to champion and advocate for them to achieve the best possible outcomes.
- Early help is better for families, children and young people
- We want to ensure that children and young people in our care achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity
- Interventions with families, children and young people should effect positive change

- Underpinning the work we undertake is a commitment to ensuring people are treated with respect, dignity, promoting equality of opportunities and tackling inequalities.
- Children in care are entitled to a good standard of support, stability health and education.
- Children in care are encouraged to participate in decisions made about their lives.
- Children in care should be supported to develop a sense of belonging and identity to their community.

Who are Our Children in Care?

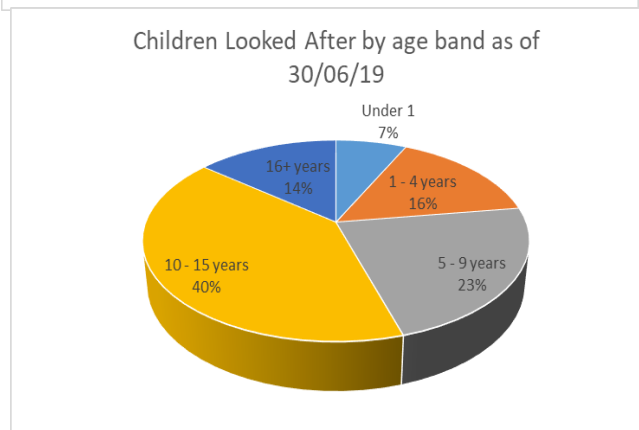
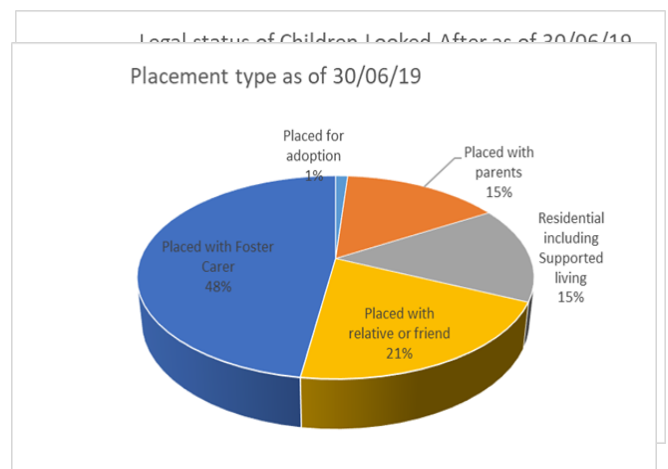
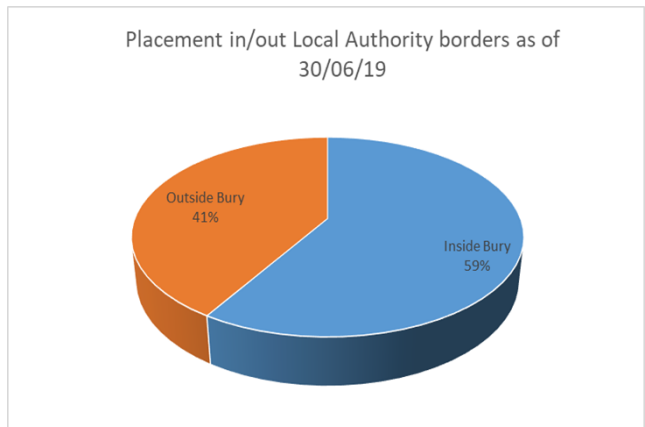
As of 30 June 2019 there were a total of 340 children in care to Bury Council from age 0 – 18 years.

This is made up of 175 male and 165 female.

Bury Children in Care are predominately White British with 69.4% of the cohort.

Bury's children in care are predominately placed within the borough and/or within a distance of 20 miles.

The 10 – 15 year old age group is the largest age group entering care in 2018/2019, this is important to consider when planning for placement sufficiency and targeting resources.



The largest resource providing care/placements to our Children in Care is Foster care at 69%. This consists of 48% placed with general foster carers and 21% placed with Family and Friend foster carers.

The Role of Corporate Parents including Elected Members, Officers and Partner Agencies

Corporate parenting is a whole-council endeavour and not the sole responsibility of Childrens Services. It requires services across the whole council to work together with partner agencies to achieve the best outcomes for our children in care and care leavers. The role of the Corporate Parent is now a statutory function and set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017

Corporate Parenting is defined as:

"The responsibility of local authorities to improve outcomes and actively promote the life chances of children they look after is referred to as 'corporate parenting' in recognition that the task must be shared by the whole authority in partnership with partner agencies along with parents".

The role of corporate parent is to act as the best parents for each child they look after and to take action to speaking out on their behalf, arranging for appropriate services to meet their needs, standing up for them and representing them as needed, to ensure they grow up in the best possible way".

Bury's corporate parents need to work closely with partners to ensure that the needs of children in care are clearly identified and met at every level. This should encompass the strategic planning, commissioning and integrated delivery of services.

Children in Care Council

In Bury the Children In Care Council are a group of children and young people in care and care leavers who work to ensure that 'our children' have their voices heard and promoted and to ensure that they have a right to be part of the decision making process that affect all aspects of their lives. The Children in Care Council work collaboratively with the corporate parents to share our Childrens experiences, ideas and suggestions on how to improve local practice.

Bury Childrens Rights

Bury Childrens rights service undertakes a role of promoting Childrens right to be part of the decision making processes that affect their lives. They also undertake visits to children and young people age 8 plus in the period after they first come into care. The visit is to inform young people about how Childrens rights can support them in terms of advocacy, independent visiting service and other services available to them as children in care.

Bury Childrens Rights also provide a confidential and independent Advocacy service for our children who may not feel heard or who wish to make a complaint about the service they have received.

Role of the IRO

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to review and monitor the arrangements for Children in care. These activities are undertaken by Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs). The majority of reviews are held within timescale (90.5%). Following feedback from young people and their families, IROs are now organising reviews which are very different from the usual format. Several have held reviews around a baking theme, some have taken the young person out for the day and others have held the meeting around a topic. The young person is given the opportunity to choose who attends their review and the minutes following the meeting are written up akin to a letter to the young person. The feedback of the new child focussed review format has been very positive.

Monitoring and Governance – Meeting Our Responsibilities

Performance management and quality assurance is routinely undertaken and reported at monthly performance management meetings which is chaired by the Assistant Director of Childrens Services. Performance indicators and data is routinely scrutinised. In addition an auditing framework undertakes thematic audits in regards to compliance and qualitative information.

The Corporate parenting board also provides challenge and scrutiny regarding the outcomes for children in care and care leavers using performance indicators and quality assurance data. Both qualitative and quantitative data is analysed in order to ensure that strategic objectives are met.

Virtual School

Children and young people in care have access to appropriate education and additional support to assist them to achieve their potential. Good education is essential for success, supporting aspirations and widening opportunities. We want all our children in care and care leavers to do well and reach their potential in school, in further education, training or employment.

Bury's Virtual School oversees Bury children in care. The Virtual School Headteacher supports a small team of teachers and learning mentors who outreach to school to provide support for children in care.

Some children in care do very well at school but we also recognise some face additional barriers or challenges to success in their education and attainment.

Health

Good physical, emotional and mental health is essential to successful learning happiness and resilience for life events. Children in care and care leavers are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health. Many children in care have poor physical and mental health as a result of early experiences of neglect and abuse.

For children in care at 31.03.19, 100% had up to date immunisations and health development checks, 94.9% had had a dental check in the previous 12 months and 96.2% had completed health assessment completed. Also 92.6% had a Strength and Difficulty Questionnaire (age 5 – 16 years), this provides information on mental health and emotional wellbeing.

A health of LAC steering group continues to drive up standards in terms of immunisations, dental checks and the timeliness of initial and review health assessments. Both health assessments and SDQ compliance has seen an increase in performance from the 2017/18 data.

Permanence

Permanence is based on the principle that every child has the inherent right to a secure stable home with loving family/carers to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. Older children and young people in care also need to achieve permanence in their lives they can also achieve a sense of security and belonging in foster care or residential placements.

The primary focus of permanency planning for children and young people in care is to prevent children 'drifting' in care and to ensure that permanent plans are achieved in a timely way. We aim to ensure a framework of emotional, physical and legal arrangements are in place in a timely manner that will give a child in care a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging. Tracking has been put in place to ensure that children with a care plan for long term foster care are matched as a long term arrangement.

Early permanence planning is essential to ensure that children achieve permanence in a timely manner to assist them to build lasting relationships and attachments. Consideration should be given to permanence planning at the outset of a referral being received by Childrens services. We have developed a Permanence forum meeting and have staff who are permanence champions across the services to ensure that permanence planning is a priority.

Regional Adoption Agency

Achieving adoption for children in care contributes to improving outcomes for the most vulnerable children and young people in line with priorities for achieving permanence.

Since November 2017 there has been a significant change in the way that adoption services are delivered are delivered, Bury's adoption services are now incorporated into a Regional Adoption Agency called 'Adoption Now'. Adoption

Now is a Regional Adoption Agency providing adoption services on behalf of six Local Authorities – Bury, Bolton, Blackburn with Darwen, Rochdale, Oldham and Tameside. Adoption Now is also linked to two Voluntary Adoption Agencies, Adoption Now and Caritas.

The development of Adoption Now means that adoptive families that would have been approved separately by the six local authorities are now all part of the same organisation and are immediately available to Bury's children. There were 11 children adopted in 2018/19.

Special Guardianship Orders

As part of the drive to improve permanency and to ensure that children and young people can exit the care system if deemed appropriate to do so we have been supporting both general and family and friend carers to seek special guardianship orders. This order provided the carer 'parental responsibility', the child would no longer be in care/looked after and therefore would not require the ongoing intervention from Children's services. In 2018/19 there were 18 children who were made the subject of a Special Guardianship Order. We have increased capacity in the Fostering Service using GM transformation funding to increase the assessment and support to SGO carers, this in turn will increase the numbers of children exiting care under this arrangement.

Future Actions

Foster Care

To improve foster care recruitment the fostering service have trained and recruited foster carers to be Ambassadors to increase marketing, recruitment and assessment of Bury foster carers and supported lodging carers. The scheme was formally launched in February 2019.

Ambassador Helen says: "We are proud to foster because we are given opportunities to share ourselves, our home, our family, with young people who are in need, through no fault of their own, and to provide a safe, caring, non-judgemental environment for them to achieve and thrive. Joining the ambassador scheme gives us the opportunity to share our experience and encourage other families in Bury to come forward and help keep the children and young people local in Bury."

Increasing Bury foster carers means that there will be a reduction of placements made outside of the Bury area with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) but more importantly will enable children in care to be placed within their local community ensuring they are able to maintain local links with family, friends and school. We have seen an increase in foster Care enquires from an average of 16 per month to 45 per month since implementing the Ambassador scheme.

The Fostering Service assess and oversee Supported Lodging hosts who provide homes for older Children in Care and Care Leavers who have an appropriate level of semi-independent skills. We are working to increase the number of

Supported Lodging providers to create increased placement capacity and improve placement choice.

Foster Friendly Employers

The Council have submitted a proposal to Corporate HR to become a Foster Friendly employer, this will allow an employee with the Council or CCG with 12 months continued service to have increased benefits and entitlements. This demonstrates a commitment to increase the number of foster carers and also strongly reinforces the commitment to the Corporate Parenting role. Foster Friendly policies and procedures will allow Bury employees who are Bury foster carers additional leave time and flexibility to attend training and appointments to ensure they are supported to meet the needs of children in care. It is envisaged that this policy will support the overall development and recruitment of foster carers.

Corporate Parenting Champions

We are developing the role of corporate parenting champions across the council and the CCG. We are seeking to recruit Champions across all services to help ensure that the aspirations and experiences of the children and young people in care and care leavers are improved and enhanced.

We are seeking officers in all departments and teams across in Council and CCG to raise awareness of corporate parenting, to be a voice for children and young people in care and care leavers within various work streams, look to identify opportunities and experiences that could be offered, promote services to colleagues and spread the word to other corporate parents.

An e-learning package has been devised to provide information to assist with the understanding of the specific needs of children in care and to enhance the role of the Corporate Parent.

Early Help and School Readiness

Bury want to ensure that we have a robust Early Help offer that delivers appropriate intervention to ensure that only the right children come into our care at the right time. Children in the main are more likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own family.

It is important that early identification, prevention and interventions are key factors in supporting families to stay together and to address areas of difficulties. However, services offering early help are not just aimed at preventing abuse or neglect but at improving the life chances of children and young people as a whole; this support can be around a wide range of issues, social and emotional skills, communication, the ability to manage own behaviour and mental health. This in turn will result in a stronger foundation for learning at school, an easier transition into adulthood, better job prospects, healthier relationships and improved mental and physical health.

Early Help in Bury is currently provided through a series of different teams and services rather than a coordinated coherent delivery model and services and teams have different operating objectives, access and referral requirements. For those in need of help, access to support is confusing, services are not joined up and children, young people and families often feel like they are shunted round the system and don't get the help that they need when they need it. Therefore, by not intervening early to tackle emerging problems, we risk long term damaging impact on children, young people and families, unmanageable pressure on services and a huge financial and social cost.

Consultation/Structure

In February 2019, a three-month staff consultation commenced, which outlined a new proposed Early Help division, this ended on 27th May 2019. In re-designing a new model, radical transformation of the current early help workforce was required and proposed bringing together staff from Team Oasis, Children's Centre's, including outreach services, Reaching Children, Families & Parenting Workers and the Reach Out Project into a unified early help management structure. Within the consultation existing teams/roles moved to the Early Help and School Readiness division; Integrated Youth Support Services, Connexions, School Attendance Service, Emotional Wellbeing practitioner, Early Years Advisors, Portage, Early Help Youth Offending Practitioners and Domestic Abuse Project. A new role has been developed for School Readiness Lead Officer and Service Manager. In order to strengthen and provide accountability and focus for Early Help and School Readiness, a role of Assistant Director Early Help and School Readiness has been developed; this will help to drive forward changes at pace to have the impact needed to reduce demand on our system.

SCIL (Troubled Families)

On the 1st July 19, the line management of the SCIL Team transferred from Communities and Wellbeing is now positioned within our Early Help and School Readiness Division.

During the consultation, there was significant feedback from staff who were fully consulted during the process. All of the feedback was considered and responded to and the final structure was shaped following consultation in line with feedback.

Please see attached structure for Early Help and School Readiness.

Localities

The new Early Help delivery model will be locality based and support communities across the five neighbourhoods; this will be delivered from locality teams that will be located in Whitefield, Radcliffe and Bury. These teams will deliver coordinated, family focused and evidence-based interventions, using a

single early help assessment process and a key worker system; working with children from pre-birth to 19 years old.

The locality teams will provide the right support at the right time for children, young people and their families, to ensure that they are able to make a positive contribution to community and do not require long-term statutory intervention by seeking to understand and address core issues rather than dealing with individual problems in isolation.

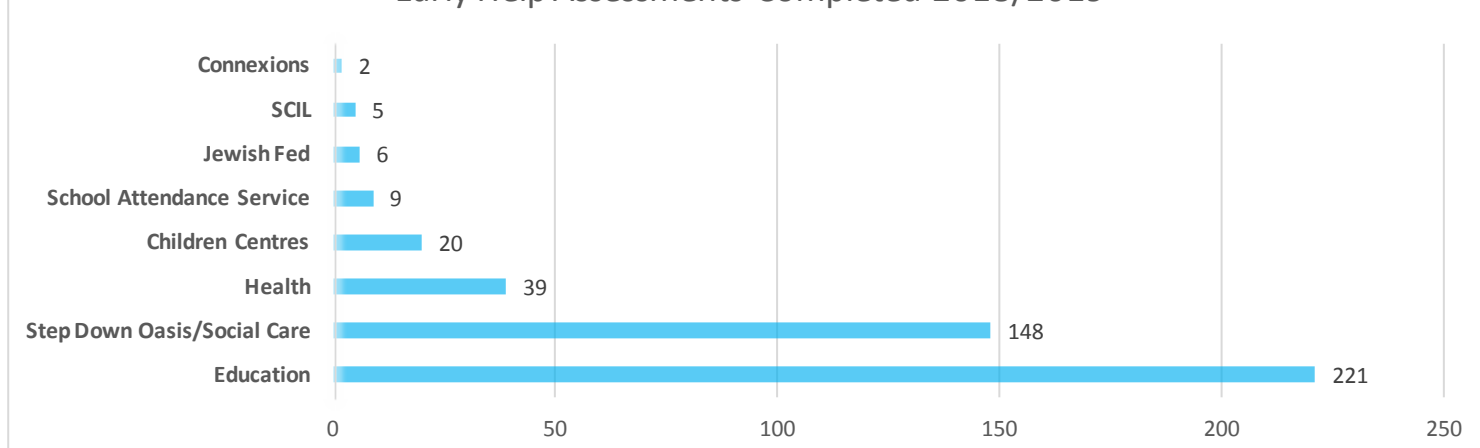
In developing this model there will be a consistent early help approach across the Authority, which will end silo working, duplication of services and casework being undertaken with families. This in turn will lead to a more positive experience for service users and partner agencies who will know where to access support and guidance and be able to respond as need arises.

Teams will be integrated and aligned with wider services who provide early help such as community health/GP's/healthy young minds/housing/police/voluntary partners and education.

Single Assessment

A new early help assessment has been developed through multi-agency consultation. The assessment is called the "Story So Far" and developed with the intention for it to be a live document where a family's story can be captured and added to as their circumstances change stopping them having to re-tell it to different agencies. The early help assessment was initially known as the CAF (Common Assessment Framework), this was changed in format and name in April 16 to the Family Support plan neither of these documents have been championed by partners in Bury and our data around completion of early help assessments is low. The Story So Far is a strength-based assessment that can be used to build on the families' assets to achieve positive outcomes.

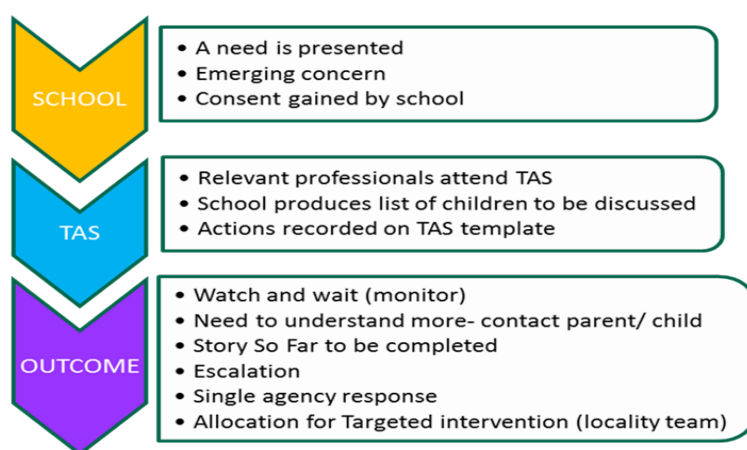
Early Help Assessments Completed 2018/2019



Pathways to Early Help

TAS (Team around the School)

In early 2019, we were successful in a bid to adopt and adapt a DfE Social Care Innovation; Stockport Family Team around the School. A key element of the transformed early help model is the development of the TAS approach; this will mean that every school will have a named Early Help Social Worker and Early Help worker from the locality team. Schools, depending on need will convene regular TAS meetings where EH Social Worker, EH Worker, School Nurse and other relevant partners along with school staff will meet to discuss young people with emerging need within their provision. Information will be shared and advice and guidance given and decisions made as to the best way of supporting the child and family.

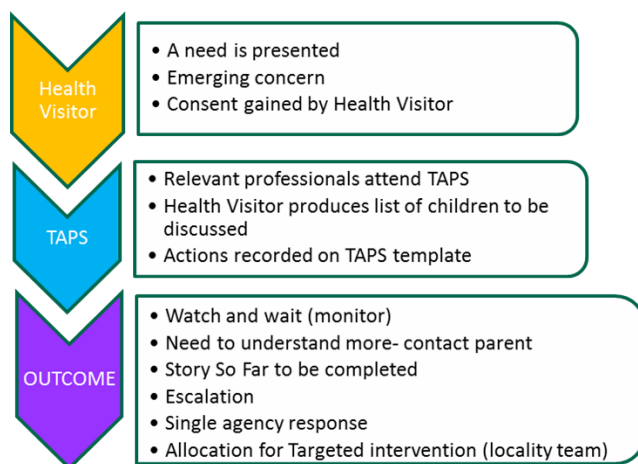


There will be wrap around support available through the named workers outside of these meetings should needs arise within settings. The TAS approach aims to co-ordinate health and social care services, working together with schools, to offer support to children and their families providing earlier intervention and targeted short-term pieces of work. This approach will support effective early intervention to prevent needs and challenging behaviours escalating to levels that compromise outcomes not for only these children but which disrupt the learning pathway for many other children within the educational setting.

TAPS (Team around Pre School)

In order to ensure that children have the best start in life and have a broad range of knowledge and skills that provide the right foundation for good future progress through school and life, the new early help model will provide a focused approach to school readiness within early years. School readiness is essential for development and determines a child's future outcomes so promoting these skills as early as possible is the best way to ensure every child gets the support they need to succeed. In order to make pathways clear and accessible for children pre-school we will adopt the same multi-agency principles as seen in the Team around the School approach. Health Visitors integrated to locality teams

will bring cases of emerging early help concerns to a locality meeting where relevant partners will share information and discuss cases offering advice, guidance or allocation for targeted intervention to meet needs of pre-school children.



TAS+

Future development is a Team around the School + approach for young people post school who are in either college, education or training. It is envisaged that it will follow the same principles as TAS and work will commence in September 19 to develop this pathway.

Timetable

It is envisaged that the new locality teams will be defined and become operational from 1st October 2019.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This report has provided an overview of Bury's Looked After Children and Early Help provision and service developments/transformation linked to these work streams. The future servicer development aims to ensure that the right children are in the right part of the service at the right time and that they receive timely and proportionate interventions.

TRACKING/PROCESS

DIRECTOR:

Chief Executive/ Strategic Leadership Team	Executive Member/Chair	Ward Members	Partners
Scrutiny Committee	Committee	Council	
