

Corporate Parenting Board

MEETING DATE: November 2014

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 – We have continued to have a high rate of Adoptions, Special Guardianship and Residence Orders. This is very positive for Bury children. The number of children adopted in 2013 -14 was 21 and permanence was secured for 19 children by way of Special Guardianship Orders.
- The duration of Care Proceedings has reduced for the second year. We are continuing to work to reduce our care proceedings timescales to 26 weeks in order to minimise delay and drift for children in care.
- The Independent Reviewing Service achieves a very high proportion of Looked after reviews held within timescale, calculated at 85.8% at 31 March 2014.
- 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 against this measure.
- The 'invest to save' initiative has significantly increased the number of in-house Foster Placements that are available for our Looked after children. We increased our number of in-house foster homes by 13 in 2013 -14. This is a tremendous achievement, and is due to the support of the Corporate Parenting Panel and Councillors.
- The 'invest to save' in the Adoption service as well as the Adoption Reform Grant has allowed us to recruit 27 adopters during 2013 -14 – an increase of 30% over the previous year.

- All children with a plan for adoption are now matched to adoptive carers and this successful activity indicates adoption of up to 30 children during 2014 -15.
- The total number of children and young people in residential care remains low, at 22; this means that the majority of our children (75%) live within either their own extended Family, or a Foster family.
- Educational outcomes are good. We currently have 12 young people at University.
- The health needs of our looked after children 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 our looked after 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 14 young people in continuing care, which means they remain with their Foster Carers post 18
- We work closely with the commissioning team to 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. During 2013 – 14 the overall spend on these placements decreased by comparison with the previous financial year although we remained overspent. Bury was one of only 6 of the 23 NW local authorities that reduced its use of external agency placements in 2013 -14.

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

3.1 Throughout 2013-2014 there was a continuing trend in a reduction in the number of children Looked after at each month end. The high point in the number of Looked after children was August 2012 (350), since when the trend has been steadily downwards. There were 310 children Looked after at 31 March 2014, a rate of 73 per 10,000 0-17 years child population.

By 31 March 2014 our Looked after rate had become much more favourable by comparison with the North West and our statistical neighbour group. Between July 2011 and September 2012 Bury's 'Looked After' rate was above that of all the comparator groups, i.e. the North West, statistical neighbours and England. Throughout 2013-2014 our rate was well beneath that of the North West and was close to, or lower than, the rate for an extended group of statistical neighbours.

In 2013-2014 the number of children who became looked after (116) was the lowest since 2008 -09. The number of children leaving care (128) was the highest since 2008 -09.

Our target remains to reduce the overall number of Looked after children in Bury to below 300 through increasingly timely achievement of permanence.

In order to achieve this target the Placement Strategy identifies the following priorities:

Priority 1

- *To reduce the need for children and young people to enter the care system by supporting families to stay together where it is safe and in the child's best interest to do so*

Priority 2

- *For those children and young people who enter the care system, to provide a choice of placements which meets their assessed needs*

Priority 3

- *To achieve permanent arrangements outside the care system at the earliest opportunity for children and young people for whom this is planned*

Priority 4

- *To ensure that children and young people in long term care are supported, according to their needs to make a successful transition (from the care system) to adulthood*

Each priority is supported by a work plan that is monitored by the CPB Placement sub group.

The number of children placed with Independent Foster Carers is reducing slowly – the use of such placements by Bury is now usually consequent on the need to keep sibling groups together or to place a young teenager who has complex needs.

We are continuing to explore a 'payment for skills' model for Foster Carers in order to attract Carers for more complex children and teenagers and to compete with Independent Agencies and we are engaging with the region to develop an initiative which addresses what appears to be a regional 'crisis in sufficiency' for placements for sibling groups and teenagers.

3.2 During 2013 – 14 placement stability for children who have been in placement care for more than 2.5 years has deteriorated for the second year in a row and is below the national average.

3.3 In order to enhance placement stability and ensure that children are secured in permanent placements as early as possible a review of the work of the Adoption CYPIC and Leaving Care services is underway. A dedicated team from within existing resource is envisaged with a well co-ordinated approach to working with young people in care with complex social and emotional needs.

3.4 Alongside this the Fostering Service is developing a scheme to provide carers for older children who would work closely with the above team to provide task centred care until the young person could move on to less structured care. This would involve enhanced training and support for carers.

3.5 The CYPIC team as it is now configured would focus more on achieving permanence for younger children who are unlikely to be adopted by promoting Special Guardianship Orders, Child Arrangement Orders and where possible reunification with family. They would work closely with Kinship Carers and

through the SGO support worker and make available ongoing support to Special Guardians.

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 event which took place in the Summer holidays and was attended by 13 children this year.
- Bury achieved an exceptionally high rate of participation in reviews. In 2013-2014 98% of all reviews for children aged 4 plus years involved their participation.
- Bury Children’s Rights offers a visit to every child over the age of 8 who becomes newly Looked after. Arranged within four weeks of admission, BCR will explain what they do, what forms of additional support are available and how the child or young person can access advocacy services. Take up of visits and subsequent support and advocacy is high; generally, between two thirds and three quarters of interviewees take up the offer.
- 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 a very vibrant Junior CiCC has been established which is well attended by our younger looked after children. The CiCC requested that the Annual Achievement Awards were reinstated and this event took place in the Spring of 2014. Planning for the next Awards Ceremony is well underway.
- Care Leavers have contributed to a review of their Service.

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