

Corporate Parenting Board

MEETING DATE: December 2015

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.

2.0 WHAT IS WORKING WELL

- Achieving legal permanency – We have continued to have a high rate of adoptions, Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) and Residence Orders. This is very positive for Bury children. The number of children adopted in 2014-2015 was the highest ever achieved in one year – 29 - and permanence was secured for 7 children through SGOs and for one other through a Residence Order.
- The duration of Care Proceedings continued to improve throughout the year, with the majority of proceedings being completed within or near the 26 weeks timescale. In order to minimise delay and drift for children in care the work to improve the preparation of cases prior to proceedings and to ensure the timeliness of care planning continues.
- The Independent Reviewing Service achieves a very high proportion of Looked after reviews held within timescale, calculated at 95.9% in the year to 31 March 2015
- Placing children near to home is a continued strength and enables children to be better supported and maintain family contact. The overwhelming majority of children Looked after by Bury are placed within twenty miles of home; Bury performs well against our statistical neighbours against this measure and the indicator 'Placements 3' in the *Children in Care and Adoption Performance Scorecard* ranks Bury equal sixth nationally for the three-year period of 2011-2014.
- The Fostering Service 'Invest to Save' initiative continued throughout the year with an overall increase of 13 fostering households. The increase has improved placement choice for younger children and highlighted the areas for development in 2015/16 – placements for older children, sibling groups and permanent placements will be the focus of the services marketing and recruitment activity during this year

- The service has developed 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.
- The 'invest to save' in the Adoption service allowed us to continue to recruit at the same rate as the previous year resulting at year end with a group of prospective adopters available to take children from Bury or from other local authorities. The Service specifically targeted its recruitment outside the Borough so as to facilitate the placement of our children with Bury adopters
- All children with a plan for adoption in the year were matched to and placed with adoptive carers.
- Whilst recruitment of adopters was highly successful in 2014/15 the year saw a significant change in the judiciary's attitude to Adoption and the making of Placement Orders, resulting in a significant down turn in the number of children to be put forward for adoption. The emphasis has been on maintaining children within their families with sometimes significant support resulting in more children placed with family and friends.
- The new Payment For Skills framework recognises the valuable work of family and friends carers and they are now offered the same financial incentives linked to training and development opportunities as mainstream carers.
- The total number of children and young people in residential care remains relatively low, 39 or 15.4%. The great majority of our Looked after children live within either their own extended family or with a foster family.
- Educational outcomes are good. Progress measures were positive across all key stages in 2015, Personal Education Plans (PEPs) are improving in their quality (approximately 85% are Good or Outstanding) and that we have launched post-16 PEPs and Early Years PEPs. We currently have 17 young people attending university (six of whom went up in autumn 2015).
- 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 were 6 discharges for 16-year-olds, 8 discharges for 17-year-olds and 46 discharges of people on their 18th birthday. There are currently 12 young people in continuing care, which means they remain with their foster carers post-18 years of age.
- 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

2014-2015 Bury has made a number of significant improvements to the overall placement process, with the introduction of weekly multi-agency working partnership meetings. These cover residential, fostering and leaving care placements. The partnership meeting also underpins our Early Help programme for placements and enables the team to direct early intervention towards vulnerable placements before breakdown. Bury is also participating in the new leaving care contract for 2015/17 and has been an active partner in the tendering process, from service design to provider analysis.

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

3.1 Throughout 2014-2015 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 293 children Looked after at 31 March 2015, a rate of 69 per 10,000 0-17 years child population.

By 31 March 2015 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 2014-2015 our rate was well beneath that of the North West and was close to, or lower than, the average rate for our group of statistical neighbours.

In 2014-2015 the number of children who became looked after increased by 21 over the previous year (137), but the number of children leaving care (155) was the highest since 2008-2009.

Our target to reduce the overall number of Looked after children in Bury to below 300 was achieved. The average duration from admission into care to placement, for children adopted in 2014-2015, was 464 days – considerably less than the 606-day average for 2013-2014, despite more children being adopted in 2014-2015 (29 against 21 in 2013-2014). The average duration from the granting of a placement order (where applicable) to the child being matched with prospective parents was less higher than in the previous two years.

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; this was updated at year end to add new targets for 2015/16

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.

3.2 Long-term stability (in placement for two years where looked after for two and a half years and aged under 16) is 67.5% (81 out of 120). For each of the last few years, the England figure has been either 67% or 68%. Statistical neighbour performance was similar but it is hoped this can be improved with better planning and placement support.

3.3 In order to enhance placement stability and ensure that children are secured in permanent placements as early as possible a plan for a dedicated team from within existing resource has been drawn up that will provide a well co-ordinated approach to working with young people in care with complex social and emotional needs will be operational by April 2016.

3.4 The Fostering Service has developed and is now recruiting to 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 have confirmed are important to them in a number of consultation events, 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 11 children this year.
- Bury achieved an exceptionally high rate of participation in reviews. For 2014-2015, of the 756 reviews recorded in our statutory return for children that were aged 4+ at the time of their review, 723 (95.6%) indicated participation from the child.
- 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. Plans for the 2015 celebration event had to be abandoned following the accident at Alton Towers, the awards will however be made at the Children and Young People's Christmas parties. An event will be planned with the Young People for 2016.
- Care Leavers have contributed to a review of their Service and a Care Leavers Forum has been established.
- The Local Authority put itself forward in 2015 for a LILAC assessment and a group of people worked throughout the year to embed the participation of young people across the service – an early success was the involvement of young people in the recruitment and training of foster carers

5.0 IS ANY ACTION REQUIRED FROM CORPORATE PARENTING PANEL

Note the report.

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

Contact Details: Jackie Gower J.Gower@bury.gov.uk

[Report Author]