

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

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| Committee: | Corporate Parenting Board |
| Date: | 15 June 2022 |
| Title: | Children in Care Annual Report |
| Report From: | Director of Children's Services |

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Corporate Parenting Board with an overview of the achievements, progress and challenges of the services provided by Hampshire Children's Services to children in the care of Hampshire County Council. This report will focus on the work of the statutory social work teams.
2. This report will not duplicate information already shared within reports presented to the Corporate Parenting Board this year but will refer to such reports/presentations.

Recommendation(s)

3. The Corporate Parenting Board supports the priority areas for Children's Services, Children in Care Teams as being:
 - Improving the timeliness of all Health Assessments
 - Increasing the number of children who can safely be reunified to the care of family
 - Increasing the number of children who are cared for by family and friends via Special Guardianship Orders
 - Having a greater understanding of the emotional and wellbeing needs of children in care and ensuring timely access to support

Executive Summary

4. Children in the care of the local authority are a key priority group, and in Hampshire we believe that it is everybody's responsibility to ensure that the care and support that they receive is of the highest quality. The Children in Care service holds itself to a high standard and seeks to work with partners to achieve the same.

5. This report provides the Corporate Parenting Board with assurance that the needs of children in our care are known and are being met with the services provided. The report outlines the department's priorities, and the work that is being undertaken to progress these.
6. The report provides an update against key performance measures that are used to ensure that the needs of children in our care are being met, and that services are working effectively. It considers the pressures that are on services, including those caused by national and other factors (such as placement availability and the residual pressures from the pandemic), and how the department is responding to these.
7. The report considers caseloads, and the capacity of frontline services to work effectively with children care and considers the wider strategic framework and objectives of the service.
8. The Board receives updates and reports on services offered by partner agencies, and also separate reports for key issues such as Modernising Placement programme, Virtual School, and the Participation strategy. This report does not seek to incorporate or replicate these updates but refers to them where required.

Who are children in care?

9. Children in the care of the local authority is any child/young person between the age of 0-18 years that have been in the care of the local authority for more than 24 hours. This generally means any child or young person that has been unable to remain living at home and there is a need to be looked after by foster carers, in residential homes or with other relatives
10. Children can become looked after because of a voluntary agreement with their parents, or because of a Care Order made by a Court.
11. Young people between the ages of 16-18 years old can provide their own consent to come into care and do not require the agreement from those with parental responsibility.
12. A significant change in practice has meant that children are in care only for as long as needed, as opposed to previous practice which saw a plan being made for long term care until they reached the age of 18 years. This is reflective of the changing needs of children and their families and in recognition to the importance of family life and living at home being the right place for children and young people, if it is safe and appropriate to do so.
13. As of 17 May 2022, there are 1728 Children in Care. This compares to 1649 on 31st March 2021. Of those children 1013 (59%) are boys, and 706

(41%) are girls, meaning that boys comprise a larger proportion of most children in the care of the authority.

CIC teams

14. Hampshire have 6 children in Care Teams, each having one Team Manager, one Assistant Team Manager and on average 9 social workers (slight variation reflective of case numbers). The average caseload for a CIC social worker is 20 children per full time social worker. The Children in Care team has a stable workforce, those that work in the team are passionate and committed to children in care.
15. 46 children in care are in Disabled Childrens Teams (DCT), and 437 are held within Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Teams. These will be children who are accommodated due to their disabilities, and children who do not have a plan for long term care.

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC)

16. Hampshire currently has 115 UASC in care, 111 male and 4 female. This compares to 56 in 2020-2021 (52 male and 5 female). Hampshire mostly receives UASC children via the national dispersal scheme, with a small number arriving spontaneously into Hampshire. Numbers also increased by 20 in November 2021, when a group of young people were found to have been incorrectly accommodated as adults in a Home Office run hotel in Basingstoke.
17. Asylum seeking young people are supported in semi-independent accommodation or in specialist foster placements.
18. These numbers reflect a significant increase in demand on the Children in Care Service and consideration is being given to establishing a dedicated UASC team. As noted above, the total number of Children in Care is 1728, up by 79 (from 1649) on the previous year. 55 of that 79 are UASCs, and Hampshire has no control over these admissions to care.

Connected Carers and reunification

19. Connected carers and reunification are an area of priority in supporting our approach to ensuring that children do not remain looked after for any longer than required. In the last 12 months, the connected carers service been renamed Family Connections and has moved from the Fostering & Adoption service and is now embedded in the Havant district management structure, bringing it more in line with the Children in Care service. The priority for the service has been to further establish its relationship with CAST (Children's Assessment and Safeguarding Teams) to ensure that options within the family are progressed at the earliest opportunity. The service is now moving to focus on the support offered to Special Guardianship carers. Improving this offer should serve to encourage more

connected carers to consider Special Guardianship Orders and may also encourage existing foster carers to consider applying for a Special Guardianship Order.

20. Reunification has been an area of focus for several years and is now well embedded in practice. Reunification work draws on the strengths-based methods of the Hampshire Approach (our social work practice framework), to reassess children's needs, and to work with birth families to assess the progress that they have made in addressing the reasons why they were previously unable to care for their children. The NSPCC Framework for Reunification is used to provide a robust assessment framework.
21. Hampshire saw 279 children reunified in 2021/2022.
22. During previous discussions about reunification, some foster carers (including connected carers) had identified a lack of guaranteed ongoing financial support as a barrier to applying for a Special Guardianship Order. A scoping activity is currently underway to identify how many carers would wish to progress an application, should financial support be available. Early indications suggest that there could be as many as 70 carers.

Placement stability

23. Hampshire's approach to placement stability has positively evolved along with our approach to long term planning and reunification. Whereas previously, care planning has focussed on securing a long-term arrangement for the child, we now recognise that for many children their experience of being in the care of the local authority may better be described as a journey, with increasing numbers ending this back in the care of their families. That does not mean we do not have an unrelenting focus on permanence, rather the focus is on permanence in all its forms.
24. Children do need stability and moves need to be responsive to their needs, rather than other factors, wherever possible. Placement stability is measured using two indicators – minimising the number of moves in a 12-month period and determining whether these moves are "positive" or "negative". A positive move reflects a change of placement that moves the child towards a longer-term outcome such as independent living, returning to their local area, or moving to a connected carer.
25. For example, a child in care proceedings may move from a foster placement to a relative who has been assessed as a foster carer (and potential Special Guardianship carer) – this would be a positive move. Another child may move from a residential unit to a foster placement or may move to a semi-independent living placement as part of their transition to adulthood. These would also be positive moves.
26. There is some further work required to ensure that the criteria which determines whether a move is positive or negative is applied consistently.

In April 2022, 30.4% of moves were determined to be positive moves. 4.9% were recorded as negative, and the remainder were “indetermined”.

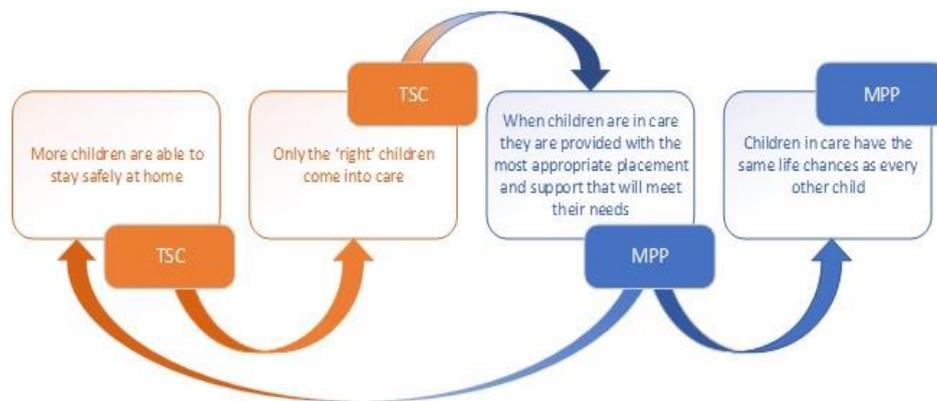
27. In 2021, 13% (222 children) children had had two or more placement moves. This compares with the South East benchmark of 11% however to reiterate, 30% of Hampshire’s moves were positive moves that progressed children’s care plans towards outcomes that meet their needs.

28. Placement availability is a national issue, and it is likely that this number could be reduced if more placement choice was available, hence our modernising placements programme, below. Nonetheless, we continue to work relentlessly to ensure that placement stability is supported and encouraged, using placement stability meetings, placement stability workers, and the other programmes outlined in this report.

Modernising Placements

29. Our Modernising Placements Programme is an ongoing transformation project built on the model below

The transformation journey



30. A programme update was provided to the Board in October 2021, and a further update is scheduled for October 2022.

31. The programme covers a range of transformations designed to strengthen the placements on offer to Children in care. These include

- Hampshire Hives – small groups of foster carers who sport one another, and who can also facilitate support from professionals. The first Hives celebrated their first anniversary in May 2022.
- Improvements to payments processes, designed to reduce problems and delays.
- Improvements to the training offer for foster carers.

- Developing the marketing strategy and growing the fostering recruitment team, to increase the number of in-house foster carers.
- Developing Trauma Informed Services.
- Developing Urgent Care and Extended Care Services.

Participation

32. The department has recently written a new participation strategy, which covers the period 2022-2025. A separate report is being presented to the Board updating on the strategy.
33. Prior to the Covid-19 period, participation activity was mostly facilitated through engagement activities that were held in districts, through the Bright Spots survey and through the Experts by Experience project and the Care Ambassadors group.
34. The Covid-19 pandemic required us to approach participation differently and this was explored in the Children in Care annual report presented in June 2021. During the first lockdown, enthusiasm for virtual engagement was high, however as the pandemic has progressed young people have experienced Zoom fatigue and staff have had to find different, creative ways to run activities. There has been a shift towards collaborative activities that take place over a period of time, and use of platforms other than video conferencing to facilitate more direct engagement. The purpose of engagement activity is to maintain positive relationships with young people, especially when social workers were not able to complete face-to-face visits. This has reassured children and young people that they are still being kept in mind and sought to alleviate any feelings of isolation. These events have intrinsic value of their own, although there may not be measurable outcomes from individual events. Below are some examples –

We've Got Talent

Following the success of 2020s event, We've Got Talent took place again in 2021, concluding with a virtual showcasing and prize-giving in September 2021. A range of entries were received across different categories and age groups, and the quality of these was very high. The number of entries was reduced on the previous year, and, like other online participation events, it is likely that this was something that worked well and provided something to do during lockdown but will not continue in its current form. We continue to consider ways to ensure that there are continued opportunities for the children and young people in our care to showcase their unique and varied talents and interests, and for Hampshire to celebrate these.

Music videos

[Eastleigh CIC choir - This is me!](#) and [NW DCT - You Got a Friend in Me](#) are music videos created by splicing together clips of children and young people singing sections of a song. "This is me!" was created over a period

of 10 sessions, where participants were also asked to give feedback on a range of other topics relevant to them. [Programme outline for This is Me](#)

Local newsletters for children in care

Three teams now produce newsletters for children allocated to their teams – [Eastleigh/Winchester CIC](#), [North East CIC](#), and [Basingstoke CIC](#). The purpose of these newsletters is to keep in touch with young people through sharing information, jokes, get-to-know-the-staff profiles, and asking for feedback.

Minecraft With Ben

During lockdown Ben Donnelly (Personal Advisor in South West Care Leavers' team) ran Minecraft With Ben sessions for young people aged 14+. These sessions were an opportunity for young people to meet in a virtual space and play Minecraft together. [Minecraft with Ben - promo video](#)

Care Experienced young people/housing project

Basingstoke & Deane housing services worked with six Care Leavers to produce a video and "10 top tips" relating to specific areas of housing need

1. How to safely live with a private landlord
2. [Homebid](#)
3. [University](#)
4. What to do if you are homeless

These videos provided relevant, accessible information to care leavers about housing-related matters.

35. The Care Ambassadors group was a group of care experienced young people who represented the views of their peers in different forums. The group had been running for several years but lost momentum somewhat during the pandemic, for several reasons. The formation and purpose of this group has been reviewed as part of the new participation strategy. The local authority is looking to commission a voluntary agency to form and run a Care Ambassadors group for care leavers and a Children in Care Council. The expectation will be that this group is developed to include and represent the voices of a range of care experienced young people, including those who are harder to reach.

Covid 19 – impact and lessons learnt

36. Covid 19 was a significant feature of last year's report, however the last 12 months there has been a gradual reduction of restrictions with no lockdowns.
37. The department has continued to manage the impact of increased staff sickness, especially over the winter months when infection levels peaked. Core services have been maintained and the department has continued to meet statutory requirements however there has been an impact on

consistency for some children, with, for example, visits being rearranged or covered by duty social workers. This has been minimised where possible.

38. Moving forward, the children in care service is considering the lessons learnt from Covid, especially the use of virtual working to enhance the service that is provided. Virtual working has allowed for some efficiencies and some increased frequency of contact with some children, young people and their carers, especially where they may live some distance from Hampshire. Social workers have been able to reduce travel time by attending some meetings virtually and offer more flexible options for communications with children in addition to statutory visits. It is noted that virtual options do not replace our statutory responsibilities, and their use is led by the child's preferences where possible.

Finance

39. No finance issues noted.

Performance

40. No performance issues noted.

Consultation and Equalities

41. No consultation has been undertaken.

Other Key Issues

42. None

Any other headings (if required)

43. None

Conclusions

44. The children in care service continues to work to ensure our children in care have all of their needs met and receive the best start in life, ready for their journey to adulthood. . Although the immediate impact of Covid has been addressed, services across the branch continue to see the impact of the last two years on the mental wellbeing and resilience of children, their families, and wider communities. Staff continue to work hard to support these needs in creative and proactive ways.

45. The service's transformative agenda continues, building on the introduction of the Hampshire Approach in 2018. This has seen a shift in our approach to our children's journey through care and is evidenced in the relentless focus on returning children to their birth families, or identifying connected people who can care for the child on a Special Guardianship Order

wherever possible. Part of this shift has required the department to reconsider the support on offer to Special Guardianship carers, both financial and the wider social work support.

46. Children and young people's views are important, both in terms of their own plans, and also in terms of the shaping and delivery of services. We know that children's views are well reflected in their care plans. The participation strategy and the plans to form a Children in Care council and reform the Care Ambassadors group, will ensure that child's views are better captured and considered at a strategic level.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

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| Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity: | No |
| People in Hampshire live safe, healthy, and independent lives: | Yes |
| People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment: | No |
| People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities: | Yes |

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-Impact-Assessments.aspx?web=1>

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- (a) why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- (b) will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions*