



Children and Education Select Committee
27 January 2014

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services

This is an introductory overview report. It is the contextual introduction to be read in conjunction with the Lead Members and Outcomes for Looked after Children reports. Together with other statutory annual reports it reviews the key Corporate Parenting responsibilities and outcome for Surrey's Looked after Children and care leavers.

Introduction:

1. Most children and young people are able to live and be cared for by their families without additional support from the Local Authority. However, for some families, life experiences and circumstances impact upon their resilience and capacity to safely and/or adequately provide good enough parenting for their children. In those circumstances where the wider family network of relatives and friends are unable to provide support to children and young people who are deemed to be at risk of significant harm and therefore may become looked after.

Context:

2. Children and young people may be in the care system through either a "voluntary" or statutory route by virtue of the Children Act 1989.
3. Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 allows for children and young people to become "looked after" by agreement between the Local Authority and the parents (or the young person if aged 16 or above).
4. Every Local Authority shall provide accommodation for any child in need within their area who appears to them to require accommodation as a result of:
 - There being no person who has parental responsibility for him/her;
 - Him/her having been lost or abandoned; or
 - The person who has been caring for him/her being prevented (whether or not permanently, and for what ever reason) from providing him/her with suitable accommodation or care.

5. Where the level of concern is more significant and the Local Authority needs to share parental responsibility in order to safeguard and plan for the child and young person then applications can be made to a Court for a Care or Supervision Order (S31 – Children Act 1989). In such circumstances an Order can only be granted if specific criteria are met.
6. As of November 2013 Surrey had 843 Looked after Children, of whom 517 were subject to some form of Order. 326 were accommodated under S20 Children Act 1989.
7. It is generally accepted that Looked after Children and care leavers are amongst the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the community. They will have experienced traumatic and difficult life events, significant loss and be required to form and make new relationships most often with unknown people in unfamiliar settings. In order to ensure the best possible outcomes for Looked after Children and care leavers it is necessary to be confident that the right services and the right support are provided.
8. This report will be introducing the services provided, the ways in which these services are delivered and monitored and the most recent outcomes as reported through both national and local indicators and measures.

Looked after Children and Care leavers System Overview:

9. As the Corporate Parent of all Surrey children in care the “State” has a special responsibility for their well-being. “Like any good parent, it should put its own children first”. That means being a powerful advocate for them to receive the best of everything and helping children to make a success of their lives! (DfES 2006).
10. This means ensuring that children and young people have:
 - A safe and stable place and people to live with;
 - Receive high quality physical and emotional care;
 - They are able to access high quality education and learning;
 - That they experience good health and well being;
 - That there are good systems and planning to ensure that their changing needs are recognised, identified and addressed;
 - That as Corporate Parents we listen and learn from what our children and young people tell us;
 - Children and young people are able to grow and develop into healthy and productive adulthood.
11. In addition to local scrutiny and audit, services for Looked after Children are inspected every three years by Ofsted. The last overarching inspection for Surrey was in September 2010. At this inspection, our rating for overall effectiveness for services for Looked after Children and capacity for improvement were adequate. Staying safe and making a positive contribution sub-sections were rated as good, being healthy was deemed inadequate and

all other headings were adequate. Separate inspections of Fostering and Adoption services took place in February 2011 (Fostering) and June 2011 (Adoption). Both services were deemed to be good with outstanding elements.

12. In 2013 Ofsted have introduced a new approach to inspections that will mean that all services are inspected collectively under the umbrella of Safeguarding and Looked after Children. There are specific sub-sections now on Adoption and care leavers but there will not be separate inspections of these parts of the service.

13. The accompanying suite of reports provides commentary on this Looked after Children’s system as follows:

- **Overview of Governance** – This is addressed by the Lead Member’s Report. This is a statutory report as required under the Children Act 2004. [Annexe 1].
- **Placement and Care - Fostering** – This is addressed through the Fostering Statement of Purpose. This is a statutory report as required under the Fostering Regulations 2011. The Fostering Service provides a range of placements, both short and long term, for children who are in our care. [Annexe 2].
- **Placement and Care - Adoption** – This is addressed through the Adoption Statement of Purpose [Annexe 3] and Adoption annual report 2012/13 as required under the Adoption Regulations 2011, considering the services we manage to provide permanent placements for children. [Annexe 4].
- **Outcomes for Looked after Children** – This is a report that considers the indicators and measures we use to assess our performance and the impact of our work in looking after children who are in the care of Surrey on their outcomes and achievements. [Annexe 5].

14. Most reports presented cover the periods of April 2012 - March 2013 in line with their statutory requirements. Where possible, we have included more recent information for the Committee’s consideration.

Recommendations:

15. The Committee is asked to receive and scrutinise the suite of reports that provide an overview of the Looked after Children and care leavers system, and consider what recommendations it would wish to make.

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Supporting Documents

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Looked after Children Offending Report Sep 2013 – Final
Annual Report 12-13 Participation – Final
Independent Reviewing Officers Annual Report 2013
Virtual School for Children in Care Annual Report 2012-2013