

Question to Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee – 18 October 2021

Following the Member Briefing in response to the Good Law Project challenge,

- what is Surrey County Council doing to reduce the number of looked after children placed outside Surrey?

The briefing cited the statistics as 47.4% outside county, and 35.2% outside county and more than 20 miles from their home location. Surrey County Council performs worse than CIPFA neighbours and worse than national averages.

- What targets and timescales placed out of county have been set for the reduction of looked after children?
- Which senior officers are responsible for reducing the number of looked after children placed outside of the county and how is the Cabinet Member for Children for Families holding them to account for doing so?
- How many children living inside and how many living outside Surrey are in unregulated and unregistered accommodation?

Fiona Davidson

Response

In response to the point regards targets and timescales, Surrey County Council remains committed to improving the sufficiency of provision for looked after children in Surrey, as we think it is an essential part of our job as corporate parents and something that we know will make a real difference to children and young people. The concrete steps we are taking in terms of our practice, processes and provision continue to have an impact on the current position. This can be seen in our current data: as at 1 October 2021, 54.2% of our children are living within Surrey. In real terms, this means 45 more looked after children placed in Surrey when compared to 1 April 2021.

Tina Benjamin, Director of Corporate Parenting and Hayley Connor, Director of Commissioning, are the responsible senior officers for improving this outcome. They are also the senior officers who sponsor a Transformation programme called Placements, Values and Outcomes. This programme is supporting the development of the resources, practice and changes required to deliver the Sufficiency Strategy. This programme reports outcomes to both the Transformation unit and the Children's Leadership team.

Clare Curran, the lead member for children, regularly discusses the performance in this area in addition to other KPIs where targets are not met, in regular performance meetings with the Executive Director.

Additionally, Sufficiency is on the annual plan for the Corporate Parenting Board, this affords all board members to both understand and challenge officers with regard to performance in this area. It is actually the theme of the next meeting which is on 21/10/21.

The current position is that we do not have any children under the age of 16 years who are in unregulated provision. This has consistently been the case since the 9th September when it became unlawful to make use of unregulated provision for children under the age of 16 years.

As at 1 October 2021 there were 86 looked after children over the age of 16 placed within Surrey in unregulated supported accommodation and supported lodgings provision, with a further 54 placed in this provision out of county. Children over sixteen are only moved to such accommodation when it is deemed an appropriate care plan by the Social Worker team. This needs to be agreed by the Independent Reviewing Officer. Many young people request such placements when they reach sixteen. They are not agreed if it is felt it is not within their best interests and they do not have the emotional and independent skills to live in such accommodation. Supported accommodation includes key working hours which for many children are individually commissioned and reduced as they gain skills and confidence. Whilst this provision is sometimes referred to as unregulated, this does not mean it is not quality assured, rather that it is not regulated by Ofsted. Surrey County Council takes a robust approach to ensure the quality of both its in-house supported lodgings service and externally commissioned services from third party providers.

Liz Bowes, Chairman – Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee