

Question to Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee – 1 June 2022

1. What is the process for monitoring and assuring the level of care provided by children's homes – those run by Surrey County Council, and the privately run homes both in Surrey and elsewhere in which Surrey children and young people are placed?
2. What is the process for reviewing the monthly Regulation 44 reports? Who in Surrey County Council receives these reports? Are Regulation 44 reports from all children's homes in which Surrey children are placed reviewed each month – both Surrey-run and privately run?
3. How are views and comments of the social workers of Surrey children and young people in children's homes reported in Regulation 44 and other monitoring processes? What weight is given to these comments and views?
4. What is the process for developing, approving and signing off press releases in respect of children's homes? Who is involved in this process and where does accountability lie?
5. What is the process for responding to press queries in relation to children's homes? Who is involved in this process and where does accountability lie?

Fiona Davidson

Response**Question 1 Response:**

Children's homes nationally are regulated and quality assured by Ofsted. SCC has a clear policy that prioritises placements in children's homes that are rated good or outstanding. Data from May 2022 shows that, of the 94 looked after children placed in externally run children's homes, 79.8% were in homes rated "good" or "outstanding". Only 4 children were in homes that were graded "requires improvement". No children were recorded as being placed in inadequate homes at the point the data was taken, but on the occasions where children's homes do become inadequate (usually at short notice) rapid steps are taken to assure ourselves children are safe and placement moves initiated where this is required. For completeness, the other 15 children placed in children's homes are in provision that is newly registered or has not yet been inspected and/or in Wales or Scotland where different regulations apply. The Gateway to Resources Service take all reasonable steps to assure themselves of the quality these provisions, ahead of making placements and keep quality under review.

South Central Framework for Children's Residential Care

Whilst SCC is fortunate to run nine children's homes, most of our children's home placements (around 80%) are made with external providers. When an external placement is required for a child, our preferred route to market is via the South Central Framework for Children's Residential Care. Through this framework, we collaborate with 17 other local authorities to both maximise our collective purchasing power within our region and secure the best value for money (in a challenging market), but also work together to ensure high-quality practice and provision is promoted to the benefit of all member authorities. Firstly, all providers on this framework need to comply with the requirements of a clear and robust service specification, including quality standards, which is assessed at the tender evaluation stage by a cross-LA panel, alongside consideration of their Ofsted rating - with inadequate providers barred from the framework and prioritisation given to those who are graded good or outstanding. Once providers are on the framework, they are monitored through a dedicated, centralised contract management function, which undertakes quarterly monitoring of performance and annual contract monitoring visits with all providers on the South Central Framework. In addition to this formal contract management activity, there is also the added value of the eyes and ears of all member LAs sharing information and monitoring quality in relation to their local provision, and highlighting concerns or issues when these arise. Via the regular framework Board Meetings, which SCC attends, there are a range of options available to LAs, including suspension of providers from the framework, where issues do come to light.

Placements made outside of the South Central Framework

Whilst our first point of call is the South Central Framework, it is the case that the challenging conditions in the market mean that SCC does make a high proportion of off contract placements – in May 2022 this was just above 60%. It is crucial to emphasise that despite these placements being made off contract, this does not mean they are not quality assured, and each young person placed in a children's home will have an Individual Place Agreement (IPA), which connects to clear Surrey County Council terms and conditions. The Gateway to Resources Services plays a vital role in ensuring that all placements made are appropriately quality assured.

Gateway to Resources - Quality Assurance of Children's Homes

In relation to non-framework provision we always ensure due diligence prior to any child moving to a children's home. As a minimum the Statement of Purpose is read along with copies of latest Ofsted reports (full inspection and monitoring visits), the location risk assessment and the safeguarding policy. Where a home has not as yet received their first Ofsted inspection, a copy of their Ofsted registration document is requested. A check of the CCRAAG (Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group) database to see whether a monitoring visit report from another local authority is available also occurs. Any queries arising from the documents are raised with the

providers. Typically, this relates to the experience and qualifications of the staff working in the home. Where time permits, references are requested from local authorities that have children currently or recently placed as well as a reference from the host local authority. Again, where time permits a pre-placement visit is undertaken to the home to assess the standard of care being provided and the quality of the physical environment.

The expectation is that every children's home where a child is living, regardless of whether they are part of the framework or not, is visited on an annual basis. Homes are prioritised where we have not placed a child previously, where there has been a change in Ofsted rating detailing a decline in standards at the home, where social workers have made us aware of concerns or where we are aware of LADO investigation. Within the Gateway to Resources Service, the Resource Review Team are responsible for the quality assurance of external children's homes.

Question 2 Response:

Following the visit, a draft copy of the Reg 44 report is initially sent to the Registered Manager and the Responsible Individual to review for factual accuracy and planned actions to address recommendations. The report is then uploaded by the Independent Visitor onto the Ofsted portal for the consideration of the allocated inspector. Copies of the finalised report are sent to the Registered Manager, Responsible Individual, AD for Children's Resources and Commissioning Service Manager and Contract Monitoring Officer, given that this is a commissioned service. A decision has been made to share the Reg 44 reports with the Independent Reviewing Officer and the Social Worker for the individual child. Common themes are picked up by the service through a centralised tracker and regular quarterly contract monitoring meetings.

Question 3 Response:

As part of the Reg 44 visit an individual child is tracked every month. This means that the Independent Visitor does an in-depth review of the file, provided the young person and the parents have given consent and if appropriate, the Visitor may do direct work with the child. If children are present at the time of reg 44 visit they will speak to them and they try to vary times of visits to meet the children. In this way the views of the children is sought. Formal feedback is sought from the social worker and where appropriate, the parents via feedback forms. These views of the child, social worker and parents are taken into consideration by the Visitor and fed back to the service with recommendations where appropriate.

Question 4 Response:

The children's account manager from C&E works with the AD for Children's Resources and the Director of Corporate Parenting to develop press releases. The Executive Director for CFLL will agree the final draft.

Question 5 Response:

A similar process will take place for press releases and again the Executive Director for CFLL will give final approval.

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