
Children & Family Services: Community Select Committee - Title - Looked After Children Service

Committee considering report:	Communities Select Committee
Date of Committee:	11 April 2017
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Lynne Doherty
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	03 April 2017
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Forward Plan Ref:	

1. Service Vision

West Berkshire is a great place for children to grow up. Generally West Berkshire's children and young people do well. They are safe and healthy, achieve high educational standards through attending good schools, and move on into higher education or employment and a secure and prosperous future.

We understand children in the context of their families and communities, and we prioritise supporting vulnerable families and working with communities so that their children can do well and be safe within their own family whenever possible.

Where children and young people can't remain with their birth or extended families, and are looked after by the local authority, we want them to know that we are ambitious, driven and committed "Corporate Parents", striving to help them reach their full potential. For these children and young people we prioritise finding the best permanent home for them, so that they can have a stable base from which to build a secure future; and supporting them, while in our care, to be safe, stay healthy and achieve academically and otherwise.

In order to achieve our vision for children and families in West Berkshire, LSCB partners 'ensure the effectiveness' of local provision, to integrate and co-ordinate our efforts, to deliver services that are, at the very least "**good**", if not outstanding. To achieve this we build on the existing strengths we have in West Berkshire and on the principles already established in the Brilliant West Berkshire: Building Community Together programme. We work 'with each other' and 'with our community' (not doing 'to' or 'for'), modelling 'high support and high challenge'.

We do this by providing our looked after children and young people with the right placement, in the right place, at the right time so that they grow into confident, connected and content adults.

We plan to achieve this through:

- Future Scoping – increasing capacity and choice
- Value for Money – Quality Services and providers who deliver what our children need

- Increasing Stability – improving skills and ensuring good outcomes

Future Scoping - Increasing capacity and choice

We will:

- Continue to employ a range of traditional methods – radio, newspaper and events- to recruit the number and variety of carers we need.
- Redesign our Foster Carer website to make it more appealing and a space where carers can also seek support and advice.
- Bring back children and young people placed out of area where it is their interests to do so.
- Work further with potential In-house carers to together devise support packages to ensure permanency.
- Work with a national charity 'Home for Good' to help run a campaign to increase placements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children.
- Explore with BAAFCorum the use of Activity Days for Fostering which is a new concept building on the success of Adoption Activity Days.
- Continue to support 'Staying Put' arrangements where the young person and carer are happy to progress this arrangement.
- Provide a bridge from family life to independence by increasing our capacity through Supported Lodgings placements.
- Provide supported housing with Bramlings for young people who need additional help to prepare for independence and increase stability.
- Use The Restorative Practice project to help young people learn how to resolve differences in a productive and positive way.
- Collaborate with Citizens Advice and the Benefits Agency to make sure young people do not get into debt and are able to manage their finances and receive correct benefits where appropriate.

Key indicators

- Decrease the number of children and young people living out of area
- Decrease the number of moves
- Increase the numbers of foster carers recruited
- Increase the number of Staying Put arrangements
- Decrease the number of young people not in education, employment or training
- Develop with our Housing partners at least one multiple occupancy dwelling with support for our care leavers
- Work with our partners in Benefits to ensure timely processing of care leavers housing benefit to avoid debt

Value for Money- Quality Services and Providers

- Where at all possible that a child will be placed with our own foster carers and where not possible the Placement Officer will seek good quality placements that meet needs and is value for money.
- We will consistently implement Placement Agreements to make sure we are clear what we have agreed and will be provided as part of the core contract to ensure there are no hidden costs.
- The Children & Family Services Accommodation and Resources Panel will continue to ensure proportionate and cost effective solutions.

- We will continue as members of the South East Consortium so that we are able to get the best price possible on a large number of independent foster agencies places and further extend to residential units.

Key Indicators

- Decrease in the spend on the placement budget
- Decrease the number of moves
- Decrease the number of residential placements
- Decrease the number of IFAs
- Decrease the number of out of area placements

Going forward

- Review the support we give to our carers, including in-house carers; connected persons; adopters; special guardians and those with child arrangement orders.
- Aim to make sure that payments are fair and equitable and training, support, respite and expectations are proportionate and clear.

Increasing Stability- skills and Good Outcomes

Key to the success of the strategy this year is to ensure West Berkshire foster carers are resilient, confident and competent and that our children's specific needs are met. The Looked After Children Service strives to ensure that children are not only safe but also that they feel safe.

Our aim is that all those who provide a service to our looked after children have an understanding of the impact of trauma and attachment; how to parent effectively using P.A.C.E. (*Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy*) and commit to Restorative Practice (Doing 'With'; not 'To' or 'For'). To this end a number of the following initiatives are underway:

- Improve communication and consultation by involving foster carers in task and finish groups Review the Carers' handbook, allowances, recruitment, support and training.
- Skill up our carers to cope with increasingly complex children by understanding the impact of trauma and loss on the developing child.
- Pick up children with emotional and behavioural difficulties early by using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) pathway and monthly multi-agency screening meetings.
- Provide training to carers and workers so that they are able to provide support that may include a 5 Ways to Wellbeing Plan forming part of a wider approach to ensuring the child's voice is central in our planning.
- Increase placement stability by working across the service to ensure contact venues are child friendly and risk assessments are reviewed in line with the child's needs.
- Focus on not only on ensuring good matches but also confirming at foster panel so that the child feels fully part of the family, and the carers feel this too.
- Ensure monthly Permanency Tracking Meetings continue to monitor the progress of each child's plan and we continue to focus on Life Journey work which will help children understand their journey in care and settle in their placement.

- Meet the needs of older children with the new Children in Care Team so that all children will have a more settled experience of care before approaching adolescence with consistent social workers.

Key Indicators that will inform the quality and timeliness of our serves to children and carers include:-

- All Looked After children to have Personal Education Plan (PEPs) within 20 working days of their being in care.
- Ensure all SDQs are completed in a timely manner.
- Ensure all health assessments are timely.
- Decrease placement moves.
- Build on our workforce stability and the quality of our workers by providing high quality training and supervision.
- Increase the number of in house placements through focused recruitment activity, an improved website and training that equips carers to care for children with complex needs in the long term.

Going Forward

- All social workers and carers to access training to understand the impact of trauma and brain development.
- Train over 50 foster carers in nurturing attachments so that they will be able to care for traumatised children therapeutically.
- Enable timely and cost effective interventions by training staff in 'Play Therapy' and 'Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy at Level 2'.

2 Current Progress

We consider our progress under the scrutiny of the Corporate Parenting Panel and attach recent data (Appendix 1) and our recent Sufficiency Strategy (Appendix 2) in order to show our progress and focus.

3 Conclusion

Overall the Looked After Children Service is evidencing to show increasingly improved outcomes although it is accepted that this will continue to be a volatile area of work requiring constant oversight.

Appendix 1 – The number of looked after children as at 31 March 2017

Appendix 2 – Out of Authority March 2017

Appendix 3 – Sufficiency Strategy