

Report to:

**RESILIENT COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN'S
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Relevant Officer:

Mrs Diane Booth, Director of Children's Services

Date of Meeting

13 September 2018

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW REPORT

1.1 To inform Scrutiny Committee of the work undertaken by Children's Services on a day to day basis and to update on the progress and implementation of developments within the areas.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To consider the contents of the report, provide challenge and identify any issues for further scrutiny.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 For Members of the Scrutiny Committee to be fully informed as to the day to day work of the Children's Services Directorate and have assurance that Blackpool is continuing to meet its statutory obligations for future inspection requirements.

3.2a Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.2b Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

3.3 Other alternative options considered:

None.

4.0 Council Priority:

4.1 The relevant Council Priority is:

- Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience.

5.0 Background Information

5.1 As per previous reports the Council continues to address the high demand for services, which are amongst the highest in the country. Despite reductions, Blackpool still has a high rate of referrals, assessments, Section 47 Enquiries, Child Protection (CP) Plans and children looked after per 10,000 population. The Council is seeing more effective management of risk following the introduction of the risk sensible operating model and in addition the care planning process continues to be more robust in respect to management and decision making. Work is continuing with partners via the Improvement Board to monitor the effectiveness of plans to manage demand and through the Board challenging targets remain in place to bring Blackpool more in line with the national, regional and statistical neighbour picture.

The journey of the child work is now complete and plans are in place to realign services to ensure services are in place at the right time which will work with keeping children within their families where it is safe to do so. Where it is not safe to do so services will be looking to secure permanence at the earliest opportunity.

The following outlines performance against key indicators in respect to demand, child protection and looked after children. This gives an indication of progress against targets and this in conjunction with audit findings gives a holistic picture of quantitative and qualitative outcomes.

As requested there is also a more detailed picture in respect to children looked after, sufficiency plans and plans to address these needs in the future.

5.2 Front Door Demand

There continues to be a decrease in the number of referrals being made to Children's Social Care (CSC) in comparison to the same quarter last year. The first quarter in 2018/2019 saw a total of 694 referrals compared to 717 in 2017/2018. However, this is higher than the last quarter. The percentage of the referrals that are repeat referrals was also lower at 18% compared to 24% in 2017/2018.

Positively one can see the conversion of referrals to assessment increase with this quarter seeing 83% of referrals progressing to a Children's Social Care assessment. This indicates increasing evidence of the right work being referred for a statutory assessment.

5.3 Child Protection

Children become subject to CP Plans following a Section 47 enquiry having

established a child(ren) is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm and is in need of protection via a CP Plan. Not all Section 47 enquiries result in the need for a child(ren) to become subject to CP Plans.

- The number of Section 47s remains high and there was an increase this quarter on the last quarter (74), but this is an improvement on last year.
- The number of children and young people subject to a CP Plan has reduced to 267 in June 2018. This is 118 children less subject to a CP Plan from the highest number in August 2017.

5.4 **CP Statutory Visits**

All children subject to a CP Plan should receive a visit every four weeks. The average per month visited for the first quarter was 86.5%. This is a reduction on previous performance. Work has been undertaken to understand this and where visits have not taken place within the timescale these are followed up by Team Managers and explanations provided to the monthly performance improvement meetings. A majority of visits out of timescale are due to no access visits, but further visits are undertaken and the child(ren) seen within a short timeframe.

5.5 **Open Cases**

- The number of cases open (including CP and LAC) has decreased to 1,663 in June from 1,872 in March. There were fluctuations in the first quarter months, with June being the highest.
- As expected in line with the above a similar pattern emerged for open cases (excluding CP and LAC) with the number in June being 960, lower than the March figure of 1,076, but the highest in the first quarter months. As outlined in previous reports some of these cases are cases stepping down from a child protection plan to a child in need plan and also includes open statutory assessments.

5.6 **Looked After Children (LAC)**

The total number of children looked after has continued to increase with 559 children being looked after in Blackpool at the end of June 2018. This is 26 more children than at the end of the year in March 2018.

The number of children and young people entering care had remained stable, but there was a slight increase in the number in April 2018 (19) and May 2018 (18), but a significant increase of 25 in June 2018.

The number exiting care has slowed again in recent months with only 36 children ceasing to be looked after in the first quarter.

5.7 **Stability for our children looked after**

The Children's Commissioner has recently published data on stability across a number of areas including:

- Placement Stability
- Social Worker changes

The summary headlines relate to 2016/2017 and are:

- **Placement instability**

Blackpool had levels of single year placement instability 3% higher than the national average and 4% higher than its regional average. It is 5% higher than its Stability Index neighbours.

- **Social worker instability**

Blackpool had levels of single year social worker instability 13% higher than the national average and 13% higher than its regional average. The robust recruitment and retention strategy aims to reduce instability.

5.8 **LAC Statutory Visits**

All looked after children should receive a statutory visit. These visits vary in frequency depending upon their length of time in care and stability of placement. These visits are completed by all teams with the Permanence Team having the majority of cases. The performance at the end of the first quarter was that 92% of visits were completed within the timescale. The Permanence Team has increased their performance and it was the Safeguarding teams who had been unable to complete the visits within the timescale. All cases that did not meet the timescale are discussed at the monthly performance improvement meetings and Team Managers are able to explain the reason for any outside of the statutory timescale.

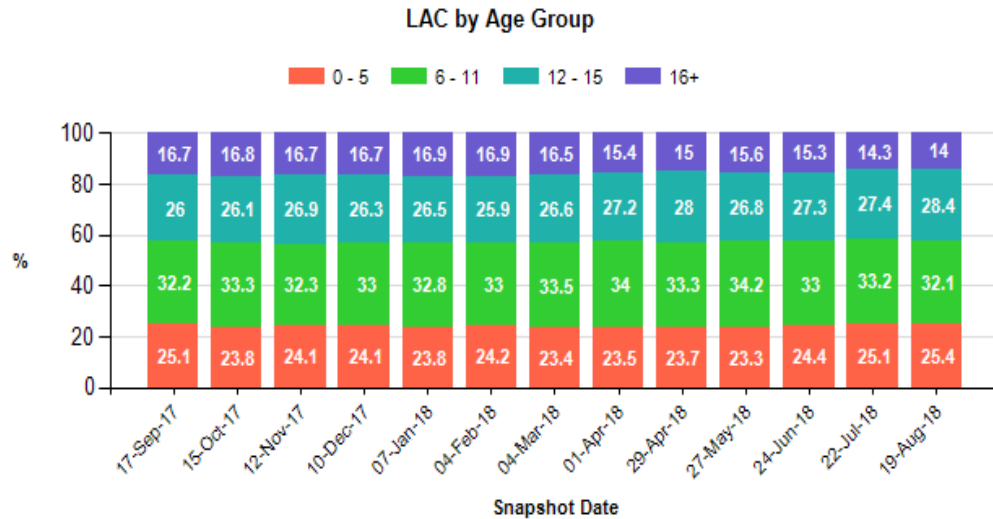
5.9 **Looked After Children Summary**

As requested please find below a breakdown of our children looked after, including the following:

- Age profile
- Placement type/sufficiency strategy
- Out of area placements
- Discharge/Exit Plans

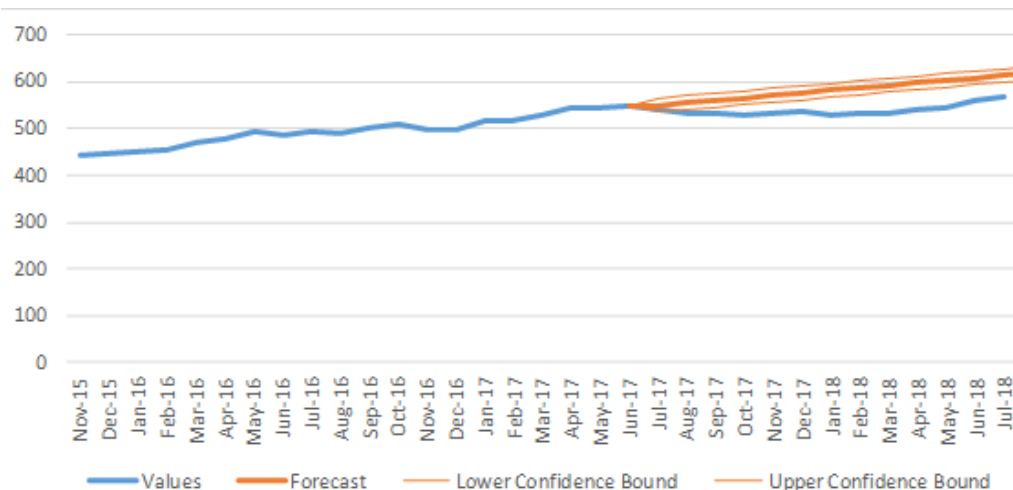
Age Profile

The following gives a breakdown of the age profile of our children looked after:



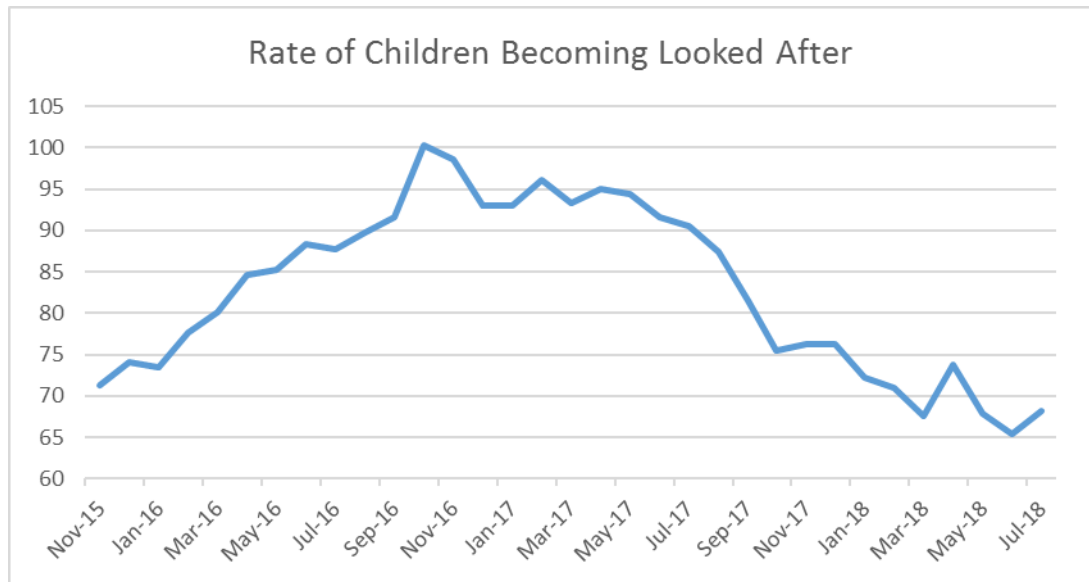
The breakdown of looked after children by age shows that 46% of looked after children are aged 10 and under. The age profile of children looked after in Blackpool is broadly in line with the national profile. The variation lies in a greater proportion of children under one year and a smaller proportion of over 16 (although this is increasing in line with the positive pathways work).

In respect of those starting to be looked after; It is the case that the numbers of looked after children continue to be high in Blackpool. However, they are significantly lower than the numbers that were forecast when the journey of change which is currently in process began. (Demonstrated in the chart below). Based on the data from November 2015 to June 2017 the expected forecast number for August 2018 is 620. August actual children looked after numbers are 560. This is a 10% reduction on forecast figures.



If the work undertaken across the service was not having an impact, one would expect the actual number of looked after children to be within the Lower and Upper confidence bound above (603 to 637) which would account for “normal variation”. The actual track is much lower, demonstrating a link to the targeted activity which is underway, particularly with the work being done at the front door.

The most significant change can be seen in the rate of children becoming looked after in a rolling 12 month period. The rate has reduced from a peak of 100.3 in November 2016 (per 10k population) to the level previously achieved in 2015 and is now 68.5.



A longer term ambition is to increase the rate at which children are supported out of the care system, through a robust care leaver offer for those reaching independence or, for younger children either returning home or settling in to a new family support network. Further work is underway with Dartington to implement the “Going Home” tool in partnership with the Service Lead in Permanence to ensure that every child who is supported by the team who may to safely leave care has a robust plan in place to facilitate this. The partnership is designed to enhance the transparency and oversight of how the tool is being applied. This work is being monitored through the sufficiency group and Childrens Services Management Team. As this work takes shape and care orders are discharged at court, one might expect to start to see not just an arrest in the rate that looked after children numbers rise, but a slow and steady reduction in the cohort overall.

There is a more robust emphasis on care planning and management of risk ensuring that this is identified as early as possible to ensure these children have every opportunity to return safely to their family.

If a return home is not possible then reducing drift and delay facilitates timely

alternative permanent options.

5.10 **Placement Type/Sufficiency**

A sufficiency statement has been developed which outlines the current position and projection of need going forward based on a number of plans and importantly on what children looked after have told us. Over half of children looked after in Blackpool are supported by foster carers in a home environment. Whilst only a small proportion of the looked after population as a whole, too many children are supported in residential homes out of area, not because the placement is the right one to meet their needs, but because of the limited availability of placements closer to home.

By March 2019, based on current and planned activity and demand, it is anticipated that the overall numbers of children looked after will drop, and a higher proportion of children looked after will be supported by foster carers

It is hoped that the Council would see a reduction in placements in external residential providers, with an increased proportion of children supported in internal provision.

This activity will be monitored through the sufficiency group which meets monthly, and variations from planned activity and demand addressed through rapid intervention planning where required.

There are numerous risks to any sufficiency planning to include, changes in government guidance, research evidence, instability in workforce and transience making predictions difficult.

5.11 **As at 21/08/18 the breakdown of placements is as follows**

- 22 Placement Order granted for adoption
- 55 placed at home
- 301 living in in-house fostering placements (66 are with Connected Carers)
- 101 living in agency fostering placements
- 2 living in in-house residential placements
- 48 living in agency residential placements
- 5 living with an Emergency friend or relative
- 5 living in a Mother and Baby Unit
- 2 in a Youth Offender Institute
- 18 in Supported Accommodation/Tenancy Support

Placement stability of children and young people experiencing three or more placements remains a challenge. This is mainly due to the availability of placements

for adolescents exhibiting challenging behaviour and their placements breaking down. This is to be addressed via work on the sufficiency statement with local providers. There will always be a need to look at specialist provision for some children and young people and this will be done in line with meeting their needs.

5.12 **Out of Area Placements**

There are 41 (7.3%) children placed more than 20 miles out of Blackpool. The breakdown is as follows:

- 27 young people are living in agency residential units more than 20 miles from Blackpool, with the furthest living 102 miles away in Wigton, Cumbria.
- 14 children and young people are living in agency foster placements with the furthest living 53 miles away in Sale, Greater Manchester.

As outlined above as part of the sufficiency statement is looking at provision closer and within Blackpool to return children/young people nearer to their family and friends, although this will not be appropriate for all.

5.13 **Care Leavers**

All care leavers should be kept in touch with at least every three months. In order to ensure the quality of these keep in touch meetings it has been insisted that these should be face to face meetings unless there is good reason for this not to take place. This has impacted on previous performance data in which any form of contact e.g. telephone, text was being counted. More recent performance shows 92% of care leavers received face to face contact in June 2018. Reasons for those not in contact with are explained, including young people having moved and not passed on details and young people expressing a wish not to be contacted.

Work continues to provide care leavers with opportunities for Education, Training or Employment. The Council is presently supporting 19 care leavers through university which is excellent performance and a number achieved their degrees this summer which are excellent outcomes. As outlined in previous reports there are four care leavers in apprenticeship/positions within the Council, one within the Chief Executive Office, one as a Children's Participation Officer, one in Children's Commissioning and one in Adults' Commissioning. Work is ongoing to look at increasing these opportunities and systems have been put in place to alert care leavers to vacancies within the Council through the Greater Jobs website. At the end of June 2018 there were 49.7% of care leavers in employment, education or training.

Work to look to secure suitable accommodation for care leavers with Blackpool Coastal Housing, Blackpool Housing Company and others continues. The Blackpool Young People's Service (BYPS) is a member of the Positive Transitions Group which

leads on this work. A review of the plan is taking place to look at how a range of accommodation options can be ensured. In addition a further meeting has taken place with Blackpool Coastal Housing and Blackpool Housing Company to look at future projections to ensure suitable accommodation is made available. A recent Corporate Parenting Panel was taken over by young people with housing being the theme for discussion which proved positive in outlining care leavers' experiences. Unfortunately some care leavers are presently in custody which impacts on the overall percentage in suitable accommodation. In June 2018, 92% were in suitable accommodation, 13 care leavers were deemed to be in unsuitable accommodation, 10 of which was due to them being in custody.

5.14 Work going forward

As outlined in the sufficiency statement the Council is looking to change the composition of the care population going forward to ensure that decision making is framed within a risk and resilience model in order to maximise outcomes for children. This means that there is an increased focus on pre-birth and younger children through to adoption, SGO and long term fostering, where appropriate. The Council is working towards an increased understanding and emphasis on permanence planning both for this cohort and any older children and young people moving forward. Care orders will be tracked to ensure these orders are still the most appropriate plan and acting quickly if they are not. In addition, work is ongoing to explore a way of working with ingrained neglect that focuses on intensive support and not removal for a number of families and ensuring that outcomes for children and young people are considered at every decision making stage which links with prevention and early help strategies.

Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

6.0 List of Appendices:

None

7.0 Legal considerations:

7.1 There are no legal issues to consider

8.0 Human Resources considerations:

8.1 There are no human resource issues to consider

9.0 Equalities considerations:

9.1 Planning for every child is at an individual level and based on analysis of risk and need.

10.0 Financial considerations:

10.1 There is a financial pressure on childrens services budget which is predominantly linked to external care placements.

11.0 Risk management considerations:

11.1 Planning around demand management brings with it a level of risk relating to predictions. It is not possible to take into consideration every eventuality.

12.0 Ethical considerations:

12.1 This update does not contravene any of the council's values, morals or beliefs.

13.0 Internal/ External Consultation undertaken:

13.1 Partner consultation has taken place as part of the journey of the child work.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.