

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 1 September 2017
Report for:
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Report Title

Out of Borough Placements for Looked After Children: the costs associated with these and work undertaken to place these children in internal Trafford provision.

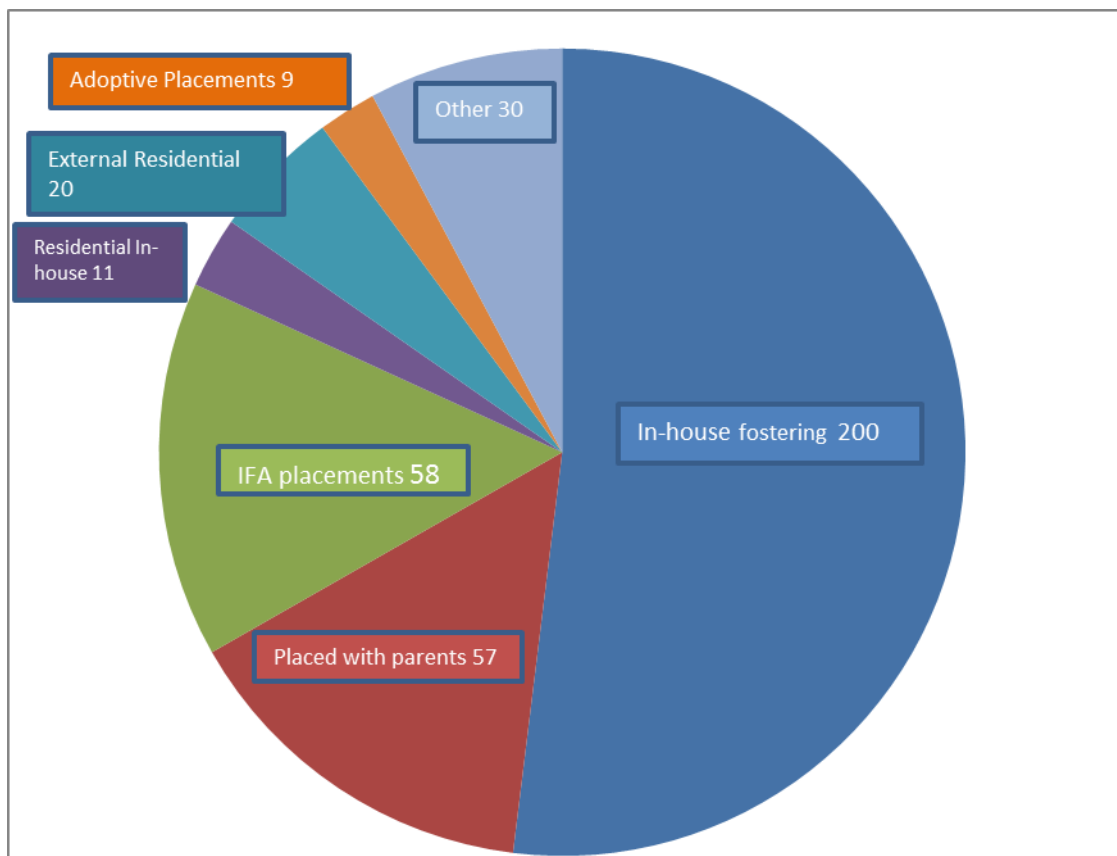
Purpose of Report

To provide information on the current spending on external residential and foster care placements and the work undertaken to track these placements and increase in house capacity to increase placement choice and capacity.

Introduction

At the end of June 2017 there were 385 Looked After Children in the care of Trafford Council. Some of these 385 children were living outside of the Trafford area but with Trafford approved foster carers or with their parents in other geographical areas. This report focuses on those children who are placed in external provision with independent agency foster carers or in external residential provision.

The following graph illustrates the range of placement provision for Looked After Children at the end of June 2017. The children included in adoptive placements are still looked after as the adoption order had not yet been granted.



Our aim is to place children in local, family based care to enable them to maintain links with friends and family and achieve continuity of educational provision, community engagement and a sense of identity. Of the 200 children in Trafford foster care placements, there were 95 children with general foster carers and 105 with Connected Person Foster Carers. Our target is to reduce the number of children with Connected Person Foster Carers to 83 through the increased use of Special Guardianship Orders and to increase the number of children with general foster carers to 112. This is alongside a strategy to achieve a reduction in overall numbers of children in care to 352 by the end of March 2018.

Current costs and Budget

The overall budget placements for looked after children for 2017/18 is £8,934,833.

The range of costs for the different types of placements noted above are given below:

Description

<u>Type of Placement</u>	<u>Unit cost per child per week</u>
	<u>£</u>
<u>Welfare secure</u>	6,179
External Children's Homes	3,342
Independent Foster agency (IFA)	823
In-house foster care	331
Connected Persons foster care	255
CAN (complex and additional needs) Long term care	3,025

The majority of placements are procured through the North West Placements framework which is a procurement mechanism used by all North West authorities to procure residential placements. In 2016 CFW established a children's placement team in commissioning who do the placement search, negotiation around the terms of the placement and so on. They also review the fee structure to ensure that the LA is securing best value as far as possible. There is evidence of savings achieved by the team as a result.

The framework has been in existence for some considerable time and provides a structure to fees, by setting annually the fees across types of provision, and it also determines how those providers are quality monitored as each LA agrees a number of providers to monitor on an annual basis.

At the moment 20 young people are placed in out of borough residential accommodation, and they remain our priority to transition back in borough. There are looked after children and young people placed with Independent Fostering Agencies across Greater Manchester, which technically we class as out of borough, but given the proximity of our borders to Salford and Manchester they may actually be very near geographically. The terminology of 'out of borough' placements is therefore arguably confusing.

Secure placements, are not managed through the placement framework as they are made through a national placement gateway, as directed by the Department for Education, and given that demand outstrips supply and these placements are for the most high risk young people, providers are in a strong position to set fees at their rate. It is worth noting however that those providers in

the main are other LAs and there is therefore no profit element to the fee structure as they may be in private provision.

These placements are very expensive, there was one secure placement made last year by Trafford for example, which had a weekly fee of £10,000.

There is allowance in the budget for secure placements based on demographics but there has been an increase over the last 2 years in these placements which follows the national trend. Trafford currently has 3 young people placed in secure accommodation against an historic norm of 1 at any given time.

Sufficient supply of placement provision

Ensuring Trafford has appropriate accommodation that meets the needs of children in care is vital in delivering improved outcomes (and is a core statutory requirement of the Director of Children's Services) and limiting the number of placement moves a young person experiences. Identifying the right placement in the right place, at the right time, is essential for improving stability and better outcomes. Good matching of children to placements depends on having good placement choice. At present there is some capacity in our cohort of in-house foster carers but this limited due to a number of reasons; a lack of suitable bedroom space, Staying Put placements (explained in more detailed later), training and support needs for our more recently approved foster carers to enable them to build resilience and necessary therapeutic interventions, the complexity of children already placed and the likely impact on their placements of accommodating further children.

The following actions have been taken to address this:

- Since December 2016 we have introduced Placement Panel which now meets weekly to review and track all children who are in external provision. This panel scrutinises the purpose of the external provision through discussion with the social worker for the child and the exit plan where possible to step down to family based care and in house provision where appropriate.
- There are monthly Placement meetings with service managers and the children's finance team to review high cost placements to drive plans to move the children to in house provision.
- We have increased Trafford fostering allowances to enable Trafford to offer an enhanced and competitive package of support to prospective carers which is in line with regional rates. This will enable the service to increase capacity and placement choice with in-house foster carers. This will also enable us to attract foster carers who are currently approved by other agencies. These carers will usually transfer with a higher level of experience, skills and confidence than newly approved foster carers.
- We have reviewed Supported Lodgings provision to enable the service to attract high quality providers to a new role of Key Supported Lodgings Provider. These providers will provide an enhanced level of support to young people age 16/17 and upwards to enable them to move to independence.
- We have a targeted recruitment campaign to attract carers for sibling groups, children with a BME background, children and young people over the age of 11 yrs old and carers with skills and experience to provide therapeutic parenting approaches for young people with complex emotional and mental health needs.
- We are strengthening our interventions using the KEEP and Nurturing Attachments approaches through further training of our social workers and supervising social workers to reinforce learning and implementation during foster carer supervision meetings.
- Embedding the Nurtured Heart Approach in the work of the children in care by providing training for all staff. This approach is currently used by the residential units with clear evidence of success.
- Enhancing the network of support available to carers by facilitating a peer support model with a hub carer who will facilitate networking with a small group of linked carers.
- We are formalising a procedure for providing financial support to experienced foster carers with a proven record of providing excellent care, to extend their accommodation to increase their capacity to provide placements.

Trafford is continuing to develop and implement a recruitment strategy in order to increase the amount of carers we have. The strategy is underpinned by a

- Collaborative approach to recruitment with other local authorities.
- The innovative use of social networking sites to promote fostering.
- A systematic and customer friendly approach to initial enquiries.
- The expedient processing of foster carer applications and assessments.
- Increasing foster care allowances to enable more recruitment.
- Understanding that retention is key as many of our best foster carers are recruited through word of mouth.

Ongoing Challenges

Accommodation

As of May 2014 there is a duty in the Children & Families Act 2014 for local authorities to have Staying Put arrangements (referred to earlier in the report) in place to enable young adults to remain in their foster placements until they are 21 years of age. This duty also means that the Council must support and monitor these placements. Whilst this affords valuable continuity for young people leaving care, this also presents financial challenges to the carers, the local authority and external providers, as well as impacting on foster carer capacity.

In Q1 of 2017/18 there were five large sibling groups (of three or more children) placed with Independent Fostering Agency foster carers. These placements were made with agency carers, to keep the siblings together as we did not have suitable in house placements for large sibling groups when we received their referral. We have undertaken to provide financial support (in the form of capital) to extend carers' properties in order to sustain some placements in the longer term. This approach has resulted in significant savings and has great potential for future use.

Complexity of need

The following information is based on data reported by social workers in January 2017 for the Sufficiency Statement in Trafford relating to 92 children who were in IFA (independent fostering agencies) and residential provision at the time. Overall it shows that the most common mental health issues were trauma, bereavement/loss, anxiety and attachment disorders. As expected, there was a significant difference between the mental health issues of those in an IFA and those in an external residential placement. Compared to those in an IFA, there was an average of a 21 percentage point (pp) increase across all the criteria with those in a residential placement. Over half of young people in a residential placement had either anxiety, bereavement/loss, self-harm, or trauma. 55% of all young people had at least one mental health issue and 42% had more than one.

Children in residential placements also showed a large increase in issues when compared to IFAs in a number of areas: Poor educational attainment (+52%), Missing from Home (+32%), and sexually harmful behaviour (+25%).

Whilst it is imperative that we do not over medicalise the challenges young people present in a way that presents further barriers to achieving good step down placements, it is also essential that we recognise and understand their complex needs and equip carers with suitable skills and expertise to provide a therapeutic parenting approach. Our strategic approach must include appropriate support from Healthy Young Minds and our other partners to ensure our support offer to foster carers is appropriate to ensure stability and sustainability for children.

Further development work

- A separate panel will be reviewing all 16+ provisions to scrutinise the purpose of the provision, adherence to contracts and timely exit plans. Data from this will inform the recruitment and development strategy for in house Supported Lodgings provision going forward to ensure we are able to increase placement choice and capacity in this area.
- Formalise our procedures for increasing our capacity within existing carers' homes by supporting carers to extend their accommodation to offer placements to large sibling groups or to continue to foster alongside Staying Put arrangements.

- Further develop the support and training package available to strengthen placement stability and to increase the resilience and skills of our foster carers.
- Explore interventions available to support children and young people and their carers, particularly for those children who are stepping down to family based care.
- The Reshaping Programme is refocusing services to reduce the number of children admitted to care. There are early indications of effective interventions from the Family Focus Team. This is likely to result in a change in the profile of children who do become Looked After. These are likely to be children with the most complex emotional and mental health needs, who have remained for longer periods with their families.