

High Impact Area – Looked After Children

June 2017

1. Introduction

1.1 This report provides information on the current position in relation to looked after children. It outlines our approach to predicting future numbers of looked after children and the challenges associated with this and defines our current projections.

1.2 The report also provides a summary of the ongoing and planned activity to:

- Reduce the numbers of children entering the care system
- Increasing the numbers of children safely leaving the care system
- Reduce the costs associated with providing care

1.3 A timeline of activity is provided as an attachment to this report.

2. Current Position (31st May)

2.1 The table below provides a summary of the looked after children population and a breakdown of placement types.

Table 1: Breakdown of Looked after children by placement type

Placement Type	Total
Schools: All Residential schools, except where dual-registered as a school	3
Residential Accommodation Not Subject To Children’s Homes Regulation	5
Homes & Hostels subject to Children’s homes regulations	33
Placed With Own Parents Or Person With Parental Responsibility	15
Independent living , e.g. in flat, lodgings, bedsit, B&B or with friends, with	21
Foster placement with relative or friend	80
Placement with other foster carer	291
Residential Care Home	25
Residential Setting:-NHS/health Trust Estab Medical Or Nursing	2
Residential Setting:- Family Centre Or Mother And Baby Unit	1
Total	476
Source: RAISE	

2.2 Of these, 19 were Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers

3. Predicting numbers of Looked after Children

3.1 Predicting trends in the need for children to be looked after, and the associated costs, is not an exact science. Decisions to take a child into care will be based on a wide ranging assessment of individual circumstances and so there are no easy answers to the question about how many children it is appropriate for a local authority to be looking after at any one time or where they are best placed. Additionally the size and characteristics of the looked after population are also likely to change in response to national legislative and policy changes. There is therefore no national model that can be applied to this task.

3.2 A reasonable benchmark could be to compare with similar local authorities. This is the approach that we have previously taken in Dorset, which suggests that if Dorset were comparable to our statistical neighbours we would have in the region of 400 looked after children. This is problematic, however, as there can be similarities and differences in the needs of the population; local policy and practices through different interpretation of legislation and policies relating to resource allocation and service provision.

3.4 We have been developing a predictive model that will help us to understand and project the looked after children population and associated budget implications. This model will be regularly reviewed and updated

monthly. This is the first month that this model has been populated so it is anticipated that utility will improve over time as our monitoring processes develop and we test the assumptions we are using.

3.5 This model seeks to understand 3 things:

- Demand for entry to care
 - Children in need
 - Child Protection
 - Direct entry with no engagement
- Composition of care types
- Exit routes from care
 - Age
 - Reunification
 - Permanency (Special Guardianship, Adoption, Long term foster-care, Other arrangements)

3.6 This model will then be combined with a social care cost calculator populated using the statutory social care return that will be provided to the DfE by the end of June. Reports will be generated that will help us to identify where we can take targeted action to reduce costs. Sample reports using test data are provided in the Appendix.

4. Current Projection

4.1 We set a target to reach a cohort size of 400 looked after children by October 2017. Revised forecasting suggests that there will be some slippage in this and we now anticipate that we will reach the target of 400 between January and March 2018.

4.2 Budget forecasting has been based upon historical mix of placement types. Dorset has traditionally had a higher than average proportion of children placed within in-house provision (69% in 2016) than regionally (60%) and nationally (55%) and a lower than average proportion of children placed in private provision at 23% compared to 29% regionally and 33% nationally.

4.3 There is evidence that there is increased use of Independent Fostering Placements and External Residential Placements. This is due to a number of factors:

- Lack of capacity in in-house fostering
- Lack of capacity in Independent Fostering Agencies
- Increased complexity of needs that can't be met locally

4.4 A rolling review programme of high cost placements is being implemented and at the time of writing 50 placements have been reviewed. Plans have been put in place to implement a series of changes that if completed by the deadline set and monitored by Care and Support Panel have the potential to save up to £1,124,872 in placement costs this financial year. These plans often require intensive work by social worker and placement provider and can take on average 6 months to reach completion. The table below provides further detail:

Table 2: High Cost Placement Review – outline of planned savings

Type of placement change	Number of children	Potential savings if all timescales are met
Children's home to foster care	5	£582,000
Children's home to supported housing	2	£128,800
Children's home to home	2	£227,184
Specialist supported housing to block contract supported housing	4	£186,888
		£1,124,872.00

4.5 Further work will be completed in July to revise the forecasted mix of placement types and associated costs based on the current children in care population, the intended outcomes of the placement reviews and the activity described the following sections of this report.

5. Reducing the numbers of children entering care

5.1 There are a number of ongoing and planned activities that seek to reduce the numbers of children and young people that are entering care. Some will have immediate impact, whereas the others are longer term pieces of work and the benefits will take longer to realise.

5.2 Gatekeeping

- Senior management agreement is required prior to the commencement of a placement searches (short term)
- Value for money is a consideration in all placement decisions along with the assessed needs of the child

5.3 Supporting children and young people on the edge of care

- Family Focus Team undertakes direct work with families to prevent the need for care (medium term)
- Increasing the use of Family Group Conferences will support families to find their own solutions and avoid the need for local authority care (medium term)
- Assess the impact of this work to ensure that it is delivering maximum impact (medium term)

5.4 Improve quality of direct work with children and families known to social care

- Reduce case-loads to increase capacity for direct work (medium term)
- Improve the effectiveness of the Child Protection process (medium term)
- Improve the quality of work with Children in Need (medium term)
- Implement the reinvigorating social work programme (medium to long term)

5.5 Increased early action to reduce the need for statutory intervention

- Increasing capacity for early help through Family Partnership Zones (long term)
- Increasing multi-responsibility for reducing the need for care through the Dorset Safeguarding Children's Board (long term)

6. Increasing the number of children leaving care

6.1 There are a number of ongoing and planned activities underway that seek to increase the numbers of children and young people that leave care. Some will have immediate impact, whereas the others are longer term pieces of work and the benefits will take longer to realise.

6.2 Regular review of placement needs

- Care planning and Looked After Children reviews seek opportunities to consider if child can return to the family home or alternatives to local authority care are available (short term)
- Targeted review and monitoring of placements at:
 - Monthly Care and Support Panels (high cost residential) (short term)
 - Newly created monthly Independent Fostering Agency Panels (high cost IFAs) (short term)

6.3 Long term planning for looked after children

- Monthly Permanence Panel to oversee and track plans (short term)
- Regional Adoption Agency go live (Long term)

- Greater use of Connected Persons to provide care

6.4 Targeted Activity to increase reunification

- Use Business Intelligence derived from the cost calculator tool to identify opportunities for intensive family support to increase reunification
- Target the resources of non-social work qualified support workers to increase the capacity of Family Focus to support families to provide care for their children

7. Activity to reduce the costs associated with providing care

7.1 There are a number of ongoing and planned activities that seek to reduce the numbers of children and young people that are entering care. Some will have immediate impact, whereas the others are longer term pieces of work and the benefits will take longer to realise.

7.2 Getting best value from independent providers

- Cost effective and compliant purchasing arrangements (limit spot purchasing)
 - Use South Central IFA Framework
 - Use South West Region Residential Framework
 - This approach has already delivered cost avoidance of £450,000.
- Effective contract management
 - Apply contract management framework to set monitoring levels
 - Review contract monitoring arrangements
 - Participate in regional agreed contract management arrangements
 - Regular review of invoices and charges by independent providers to ensure accuracy

7.3 Improving the efficiency of court processes

- Specialist assessment are being completed by the Family Assessment Specialist Team (FAST) to reduce the need for independent professional input and increase timeliness of decision making
- A legal tracking process has been implemented to ensure timeliness of reports to reduce drift and delay
- Assess the impact of this work to ensure it is delivering maximum impact

7.4 Modernising Fostering

- A Business Case and implementation plan for modernising fostering to increase in-house capacity is being developed. The table below outlines potential savings that could be delivered through expansion of the in-house service.

Table 3: Outline of potential savings through increased in-house fostering capacity

Care Type	Number Children	Weekly Cost	Minus Average Weekly DCC Cost	Average Weekly Savings	Full Year Costs Avoided
Transfer from IFA to DCC Foster Care*	15	£13,110	£6,930	£6,180	£321,360
Transfer from Independent Children's Homes to DCC Children's Homes (excludes The Cherries and SEN Contributions if applicable)	7	£30,289	£21,000	£9,289	£483,028
Transfer from Independent Children's Homes to DCC Foster Care	7	£30,289	£3,234	£27,055	£1,406,860

7.5 Increasing sufficiency of placements within Dorset

- Implement Sufficiency Plans
 - Options appraisal for Emergency Crash Pad to reduce costs associated with emergencies and provide greater flexibility
 - Supported Housing development – the number of young people in high cost supported housing arrangements is high so we are seeking to increase sufficiency. Current unit cost per week is on average £4,000 per week and we are working with local providers to reduce this by 50%.
 - Market shaping – publication of market position statement and market engagement events

7.6 Review of high cost placements

- A rolling programme of review has been instigated and is overseen and monitored by Care and Support Panel and newly created IFA panel
- Seek further opportunities for joint funding for those with health needs at Joint Commissioning Panel

7.7 Improving the quality of practice

- Outcomes based supervision model to improve timeliness of decision making and focus on value for money
- Appropriate challenge offered by Independent Reviewing Service to improve care planning and timeliness of decision making and focus on value for money
- Improved permanency planning and notification to contracts team as this delivers an average 7% reduction in weekly IFA fees

8. Conclusion

The information contained in this report seeks to provide some information and context of the scale of the current financial challenges that the council is facing in relation to its most vulnerable young people.

It provides details of some of the proactive measures that have been implemented and others that are actively being explored to try to tackle and mitigate the current level of risk.

Hopefully the committee will be reassured that every effort continues to be made to try to balance our statutory responsibilities with the financial constraints faced by the council.

The Audit & Governance Committee are invited to receive regular monitoring reports to maintain oversight of the position and to assess the council's ongoing approach to these issues.

Appendix

Sample Reports that will be available from cost calculator (end of July)

NB: this is not using current Dorset data

Table 4: Analysis of Costs by Placement Type

Description	Type	Provided	Location	Total	Time (Weeks)	Avg Cost/Week
Adoption in LA	Adoption	LA	IN LA	£17,029	20.4	£834
Adoption out LA	Adoption	LA	Out LA			
Agency Foster Care in LA	Foster care	Agency	IN LA	£195,227	138.6	£1,409
Agency Foster Care out LA	Foster care	Agency	Out LA	£229,070	167.9	£1,365
LA Foster Care in LA	Foster care	LA	IN LA	£218,132	465.0	£469
LA Foster Care out LA	Foster care	LA	Out LA	£82,167	193.3	£425
Hospital in LA	Hospital	LA	IN LA			
Hospital out LA	Hospital	LA	Out LA	£11,510	52.1	£221
Agency Independence in LA	Independence	Agency	IN LA			
Agency Independence out LA	Independence	Agency	Out LA	£30,889	38.6	£801
LA Independence in LA	Independence	LA	IN LA			
LA Independence out LA	Independence	LA	Out LA			
Kinship Care in LA	Kinship care	LA	IN LA	£158,547	352.0	£450
Kinship Care out LA	Kinship care	LA	Out LA	£52,359	115.9	£452
Agency Mother & Baby in LA	Mother And Baby	Agency	IN LA	£92,729	87.3	£1,062
Agency Mother & Baby out LA	Mother And Baby	Agency	Out LA	£25,401	20.3	£1,252
LA Mother & Baby in LA	Mother And Baby	LA	IN LA			
LA Mother & Baby out LA	Mother And Baby	LA	Out LA			
Other	Other	N/A	N/A			
Parents in LA	Placed with parents	Parents	IN LA	£8,662	45.4	£191
Parents out LA	Placed with parents	Parents	Out LA	£15,029	104.3	£144
Post-Adoption Support	Post adoption	LA	N/A			
Ag Res + Educ + Health in LA	Res+Education+Health	Agency	IN LA	£142,870	52.1	£2,740
Ag Res + Educ + Health out LA	Res+Education+Health	Agency	Out LA	£189,859	68.0	£2,792
LA Res + Educ + Health in LA	Res+Education+Health	LA	IN LA			
LA Res + Educ + Health out LA	Res+Education+Health	LA	Out LA	£53,630	14.0	£3,831
Agency Residential in LA	Residential	Agency	IN LA	£484,800	184.7	£2,625
Agency Residential out LA	Residential	Agency	Out LA	£207,946	77.1	£2,696
LA Residential in LA	Residential	LA	IN LA	£186,695	52.1	£3,580
LA Residential out LA	Residential	LA	Out LA	£27,454	7.3	£3,768
Ag Res + Education in LA	Residential+Education	Agency	IN LA			
Ag Res + Education out LA	Residential+Education	Agency	Out LA	£156,371	53.6	£2,919
LA Res + Education in LA	Residential+Education	LA	IN LA	£201,312	52.1	£3,861
LA Res + Education out LA	Residential+Education	LA	Out LA			
Ag Res + Health in LA	Residential+Health	Agency	IN LA	£151,257	52.1	£2,901
Ag Res + Health out LA	Residential+Health	Agency	Out LA	£155,897	52.1	£2,990
LA Res + Health in LA	Residential+Health	LA	IN LA	£8,979	2.0	£4,490
LA Res + Health out LA	Residential+Health	LA	Out LA			
Agency Secure in LA	Secure	Agency	IN LA			
Agency Secure out LA	Secure	Agency	Out LA	£36,966	6.1	£6,018
LA Secure in LA	Secure	LA	IN LA	£20,254	3.6	£5,671
LA Secure out LA	Secure	LA	Out LA	£2,353	0.1	£16,470
Agency Semi-Independence in LA	Semi-Independence	Agency	IN LA	£2,898	1.6	£1,844

Description	Type	Provided	Location	Total	Time (Weeks)	Avg Cost/Week
Agency Semi-Independence out LA	Semi-Independence	Agency	Out LA			
LA Semi-Independence in LA	Semi-Independence	LA	IN LA			
LA Semi-Independence out LA	Semi-Independence	LA	Out LA	£113,339	108.3	£1,047
Agency Treatment Foster Care in LA	Treatment Foster Care	Agency	IN LA			
Agency Treatment Foster Care out LA	Treatment Foster Care	Agency	Out LA			
LA Treatment Foster Care in LA	Treatment Foster Care	LA	IN LA			
LA Treatment Foster Care out LA	Treatment Foster Care	LA	Out LA	£28,259	11.6	£2,442
Unknown	Unknown	N/A	N/A			
YOI in LA	Young Offenders Inst	LA	IN LA	£24,495	37.3	£657
YOI out LA	Young Offenders Inst	LA	Out LA			
All Placement Types				£3,332,385	2637.0	£1,264

Analysis of Costs by Age, Needs and Time Looked after

Group	0		2		4		5		9		10		11	
	No	£	No	£	No	£	No	£	No	£	No	£	No	£
00: None	4	£44,784	2	£20,658	1	£2,489	2	£28,962	1	£5,833			1	£4,679
01: Disabilities only	1	£22,076							1	£10,407			1	£13,468
02: EBD only											3	£96,570		
03: UASC only														
04: Offender only														
09: EBD+Offender														
10: UASC+Offender														
Grand Total	5	£66,860	2	£20,658	1	£2,489	2	£28,962	2	£16,239	3	£96,570	2	£18,147

Group	13		14		15		16		17		Total	Total
	No	£	No	£	No	£	No	£	No	£		
00: None	1	£28,259	4	£91,218	4	£102,003	1	£10,172	1	£6,129	22	£345,185
01: Disabilities only			1	£6,784			1	£30,889	1	£34,985	6	£118,609
02: EBD only											3	£96,570
03: UASC only					4	£178,921	2	£73,070			6	£251,991
04: Offender only	2	£116,650	1	£8,979			1	£24,495			4	£150,124
09: EBD+Offender					1	£2,353					1	£2,353
10: UASC+Offender	1	£12,998									1	£12,998
Grand Total	4	£157,907	6	£106,982	9	£283,277	5	£138,625	2	£41,114	43	£977,830

