

**CHILDREN AND LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL: MARCH 25, 2021**

**SERVICE RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (LGSCO) REPORT ON THE EXPERIENCES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

**Appendix 2: Position statement against LGSCO areas of focus**

Area of focus	Position Statement	Reporter	Designation
<b>Accommodation for 16- and 17-year olds</b>			
How many 16 and 17 years old are in bed and breakfast accommodation or in unregulated homes?	<p>There are currently no 16- and 17-year olds in bed and breakfast accommodation and 15 young people in unregulated provision.</p> <p>Regarding unregulated provision, the majority of the provisions used are part of the 16+ South Central Framework, therefore each provider has successfully tendered to be part of the contract. We request to see necessary paperwork, such as Statement of Purpose, Location Risk Assessment and policies. We will also link in with the other Local Authorities on the framework to check if they have used the provider's if SCC is yet to place with them.</p> <p>All LA's on the framework are in regular communication and share info around any ongoing concerns etc.</p> <p>For the placements that are not on the framework (these tend to be out area requests) the team will ensure that they request all necessary paper work, obtain references from at least 2x other Local Authorities and complete a Monitoring Visit to ensure all is okay.</p>	<b>Data team / Brett Purdy</b>	Placement Team Manager

<p>What action is the council taking to ensure their welfare is promoted and safeguarded?</p>	<p>In addition to the commissioning / placement safeguards detailed above, the service has provided the following information: With regards 16/17-year olds in B&amp;B or unregulated provisions, if we were to make such a placement it would only ever be after we'd exhausted all other possible alternatives.</p> <p>The use of B&amp;B would always have to have been agreed at director level if it had to be used and it would always be supported with a robust risk assessment and with preferred accommodation providers, so we'd know in advance if the placement was suitable.</p> <p>We would try always to take the young person to the accommodation ourselves to help them settle in and would always ensure practical things such as toiletries and food or money to buy food were left with the young person. We would have daily contact with the young person and any stay necessary would be as brief as possible with efforts to source alternative accommodation being ongoing until we are able to move the young person on to more suitable accommodation.</p>	<p><b>Julian Watkins</b></p>	<p>Head of Service – Children's Social Care</p>
<p><b>The placing of children in care</b></p>			
<p>How many children in care are placed out of area, or at a distance, and are social workers visiting these children in accordance with statutory requirements?</p>	<p>Regarding children placed outside of Southampton, we measure the percentage of children placed &gt;20 miles from the address from which they entered our care. The most recent corporate parenting data (Q2 2020 / 21) gives a percentage of 21.7%, 4% higher than the national average. Overall, the trend has been decreasing since 2011 / 12 (10%). The accommodation element of the Destination 22 programme (including residential provision) and the refreshed Fostering Strategy are components of the service response.</p>	<p><b>Data Team</b></p>	<p>NA</p>

	<p>CHAT data shows that on 1<sup>st</sup> March 81% of looked after children had been visited within 6 weeks. The percentage for children without Southampton post codes was 74%.</p>		
<p>How many placement moves does a child in care have on average?</p>	<p>Over the last 12 months, 58% of the children we look have had no move, 27% have had one move, 10% have had two moves, 3% have had three moves and 2% have had four or more moves.</p> <p>A move can be a positive experience for a child. It could be part of their plan to transition to a more suitable home. However, for some the move may be unplanned and experienced with a greater degree of disruption. Sadly, for some children we find it difficult to find the right home for them and where there is not a good match sustaining the home long term may not be feasible.</p> <p>National data produced by the Children's Commissioner (The Stability Index 2020) tells us that for those children in care for the duration of 2019/2020, 67% of children had no moves over the 12 months period and 10% had 2 plus moves over the 12-month period. We are in line with this national data, 67% of children had no moves over the 12 months period and 12% had 2 plus moves over the 12-month period.</p>	<p><b>Martin Smith</b></p>	<p>Service Manager Permanence</p>
<p>How many children in care are now in permanent placements?</p>	<p>Children need permanence through securing a home that will last for their majority. There are key milestones along a child's permanence journey that we track upon a child coming into our care. We know that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By three months there is an agreed plan for their long-term care - 97% of children.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Martin Smith</b></p>	<p>Service Manager Permanence</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- By 9 months they are living in their long-term home and this has been agreed as long-term home – 48% of children.</li> <li>- By 24 months 65% of children are living in their long-term home and this has been agreed as long-term home.</li> <li>- 57% of children, whose permanence plan is long term fostering, are matched with their carers. We would expect percentage to be around 70-80%</li> </ul> <p>We know that there is a cohort of children, whose permanence plan is long term fostering and they are living with their long-term foster families, but this has not been ratified by the required procedures. We have worked to ratify these arrangements, seeing an increase from 42 to 57% over the last 6 months.</p>		
<p>Have children in care been placed in a school within 20 days of a placement move if they are unable to attend their previous school?</p>	<p>As below, this data is correct as of 08/03/2021:</p> <p>Between 01/09/20 and 08/03/21 90 pupils required a school move; 66 were in mainstream school (all but two (both with more complex needs were placed) and 22 SEND pupils. No SEND pupils were placed within 20 working days, but all SEND pupils who move placement are offered a remote learning offer by their current school or a tuition provider and we collect attendance.</p>	<p><b>Maria Anderson</b></p>	<p>Head of Virtual School</p>
<p>What action is the council taking to ensure sufficient accommodation is available for children in</p>	<p>Since the implementation of the Children Act 1989 local authorities have been required to take steps that secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children within their local authority area (Section 22G Children Act 1989). This is now referred to as ‘the sufficiency duty’.</p>	<p><b>Martin Smith</b></p>	<p>Service Manager Permanence</p>

<p>their care within their home area?</p>	<p>The actions the council is taking to meet our 'sufficiency duty' is outlined in the "Looked after children and care leavers placement commissioning sufficiency statement and strategy 2020-25". This strategy was approved by cabinet on 17 March 2020. Key actions and progress to date include:</p>		
	<p><b>Theme</b></p>	<p><b>Key Actions</b></p>	<p><b>Examples of progress to date</b></p>
<p>Foster families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance traditional recruitment and marketing activities whilst piloting innovative strategies to attract carers through engagement with local communities, employers and partnerships.</li> <li>• Enhance the support offer to foster carers with a focus on retention and supporting our carers.</li> <li>• Establish a specialist foster care scheme (Tier 4) offering placements to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand refresh; "Fostering Southampton". Marketing materials and publications refreshed eg local bus stop signage.</li> <li>• 10% uplift to allowances paid to foster carer to bring in line with other local providers.</li> <li>• 'Step-across' fostering scheme to start recruiting carers in March 2021.</li> <li>• Recommissioning of external providers underway and to</li> </ul>	

		<p>children with complex needs and behaviours and those children requiring a step down from a residential placements.</p>	<p>be completed by April 2021.</p>		
--	--	---	------------------------------------	--	--

	<p>Children's Homes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore and progress options for securing access to residential provision within the local area, including seeking block contract arrangements with local providers on the Children's Residential Care Framework and seeking to develop local council run residential care provision within the city</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local children's home project scoped and presented to EMB in March 2021.</li> </ul>		
	<p>Supported Accommodation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Undertake a review of the types and range of Post 16 supported accommodation required to inform future decisions regarding contract extension and the commissioning of future service</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recommissioning of external providers completed in 2020 which enhanced the number of local providers on framework.</li> </ul>		

		provision based on identified need and priorities.			
	Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contribute to the implementation of the Regional Adoption Agency, Adopt South.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staffing and financial contribution to deliver of recruitment of and support to local adopters completed.</li> </ul>		
<p>Building of the sufficiency strategy the “Destination 22 Transformation Programme” is reviewing and looking to enhance the local accommodation pathway for the children we look after. The table below outlines the workstreams and timescales around this programme.</p>					
		<b>Workstream</b>	<b>Timescales</b>		
		Workstream 1: Refresh the Housing Pathway and Protocol	March 2021		
		Workstream 2: Review the locality-based assets for children and young people	April 2021		
		Workstream 3: Expand the Local Children’s Home provision	January 2022		



	Workstream 4: Review the In-House Fostering Provision	March 2021		
	Workstream 5: Recommission the IFA Framework / Residential Home Framework / 16+ HRS Support contracts	March 2022/Sept 2024/ March 2023		
Do children in care have up to date personal education plans?	This measure is reported termly, December 2020 - 98.6% PEPs up to date, on which: 86.6% were good/outstanding. This is also reported through the VSHT annual report.		<b>Maria Anderson</b>	Head of Virtual School
How does the virtual school head manage the school age pupil premium?	<p>This is reported through the Virtual School Head Teacher's annual report. Guidance is produced that details the allocations to schools. Each PEP is also signed off by the virtual school and pupil premium spend is audited.</p> <p><i>Leaders of the virtual school understand the importance of their role as advocates for children in care and work efficiently. Funding for these children is used well to improve their education experiences. Leaders provide helpful training that supports designated teachers in schools to have high expectations of children and receive useful help. Schools are effectively held to account for the impact of their work through regular reviews of children's personal education plans. Consequently, children in care in Southampton attain in line with their peers elsewhere in England' (Ofsted, Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, Southampton, November 2019)</i></p>		<b>Maria Anderson</b>	Head of Virtual School

<p>Are there delays in the Education, Health and Care plan process?</p>	<p>There is an increase in requests nationally, some LAs are working within timeframes, some are not, and this will adversely affect our children placed out of area. As vice chair of SE regional virtual school headteachers, we have a meeting booked with DfE to explore this further. However, the current position is that 100% of Southampton Education, Health and Care Plans are being completed on time.</p>	<p><b>Maria Anderson/Tammy Marks</b></p>	<p>Head of Virtual School/Service Manager SEND</p>
<p><b>Learning from complaints</b></p>			
<p>What concerns have independent reviewing officers raised about children in care and are they satisfied that care planning is appropriate and that recommendations, made at their statutory review meetings, are being implemented promptly?</p>	<p><u>Care Planning</u></p> <p>The purpose of the Care Plan Review is to consider the quality of the child's care plan, based on the local authority's assessment of the child's needs. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) must be satisfied that the care plan identifies who is responsible for achieving the plan's objectives and clear timescales set. Additionally, in Southampton, the progress report is embedded in the Care Plan and therefore crucial that this is shared with the IRO. Analysis of the IRO Alerts data tells us that 34% of 97 informal Alerts raised from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 26<sup>th</sup> Feb 2021 were as a result of no recorded/updated Care Plan shared with the IRO and, as a result, the Care Plan Review was adjourned.</p> <p>In 2019/20 this figure was 22.6% (April-March) therefore an increase (to date) in 2020/21. Consequently, the IRO Service has worked with others to develop training that aims to support workers in understanding the importance of high-quality planning and reviews with a key focus on permanence. An e-learning training session will launch in April 2021. This will be accompanied by a suite of resources offering guidance for workers.</p>	<p><b>Elizabeth Robertson</b></p>	<p>IRO Team Manager</p>

	<p>Themes are identified through Care Plan Reviews and Alerts raised such as the need for focused direct work with children to help them understand why he/she is in care. This has influenced practice thus allowing IRO activity to contribute to the authority's understanding of strengths, weaknesses and plans for improvement</p> <p><u>Drift and delay in achieving permanence</u></p> <p>18.8% of IRO Alerts raised between April 20-February 21 were as a result of drift and delay in achieving permanence for the child. In 2019/20, this figure was 12% of IRO Alerts raised. However, the increase is a direct result of a range of activity around permanence such as the formal mid-way review, introduced in June 2019 which allows the IRO to monitor progress of the care plan and ensure that the decisions of the review have been implemented within the agreed timescale. Between April and Dec 2020, 366 mid-way reviews took place where permanence has yet to be achieved for the child/young person.</p> <p>The local authority Permanence Guidance was updated in November 2020 which included clarity around expectations of a plan of permanence to be shared at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Care Plan Review. Since this time, IROs have escalated cases where the Care Plan has not included a range of permanence options being considered for the child or the consideration of these is insufficient. It is hoped that this will prevent any further delay and drift in achieving permanence for the child.</p> <p><u>Audit</u></p>		
--	---	--	--

	<p>A recent IRO audit of ten children new into our care highlighted that inclusive Care Planning meetings are not routinely held and recorded. This would echo a view frequently expressed by the IRO Service. It is clear however from recordings of the PLO process and Legal Gateway meetings that there is a good awareness of cases, concerns and risks. The audit highlighted some good work relating to assessments and planning alongside some deficits. It is clear however that Family Group Conferences have not been a routine part of case work and care planning. The extension of FGC's is a focus for the service as part of its Destination 22 service-redesign programme.</p>		
<p>Is there a robust dispute resolution process to ensure cases are appropriately escalated to senior managers by independent reviewing officers?</p>	<p>The dispute resolution process (IRO Alert) was amended in January 2016 to ensure that a formal management alert system was in place and has since been used effectively to highlight concerns and ensure that improvements take place. In 2018, further amendments were made to ensure that collaboration between Team Managers and IROs was evident.</p> <p>Our data evidences that the majority of issues raised by IROs are resolved at the informal stage of the dispute resolution process. (64.71% of all alerts raised between April 20-Feb 21). If not resolved at the informal stage, the Alert is escalated appropriately to Senior Managers.</p>	<p><b>Elizabeth Robertson</b></p>	<p>IRO Team Manager</p>
<p>Are the council's leaflets or website information about how to make complaints clear to children and young</p>	<p><b>Accessibility of complaints process</b></p> <p>Our complaints form is accessible and easy to find online. Complaints leaflets go out in the introduction packs to children, parents and carers. These have been updated recently. In normal circumstances, posters advising service</p>	<p><b>Elizabeth Robertson/Georgie Batchelor</b></p>	<p>IRO Team Manager</p> <p>Complaints Single Point of Contact Officer</p>

<p>people? Are they easily available?</p>	<p>users how to complain on the walls in Church View and in Sure Start centres.</p> <p>In 2020/21, the IRO Service has produced information factsheets for children and young people. When a child/young person first comes into our care, he/she is sent a letter with an information factsheet from our service about our service, the role of the IRO and Care Plan Reviews. We have also updated our factsheets for parents, foster carers and adopters.</p> <p>Following the initial Care Plan Review a child friendly report and/or a letter is sent to the child/young person. Children and young people are also sent information regarding the Children In Care Council, our advocacy and independent visitor service, Mind Of My Own and the Virtual School.</p>		
<p>Are children and young people told about their entitlement to ask for an advocate?</p>	<p>Children and young people are routinely sent information by the IRO Service regarding the Children In Care Council, our advocacy and independent visitor service, Mind Of My Own and the Virtual School.</p> <p>The Review Arrangements form introduced in July 2020 prompts the social worker to consider if the child/young person requires the support of an advocate to participate in the Care Plan Review.</p> <p>The IRO will discuss advocacy with the child at the Care Plan Review meeting.</p>	<p><b>Elizabeth Robertson</b></p>	<p>IRO Team Manager</p>
<p>How many complaints has a council received from children in care (either from them or on</p>	<p><b>Stage 1</b></p> <p>In the past 12 months three complaints have been made by children themselves and two by parents on behalf of their</p>	<p><b>Georgie Batchelor</b></p>	<p>Single Point of Contact Officer, Legal &amp; Governance</p>

<p>their behalf)? What has been the outcome and the learning from them?</p>	<p>children. The of the complaints are still underway, so learning has not been confirmed.</p> <p>Core themes are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequent changes of social worker.</li> <li>• Lack of contact with social worker (not upheld, evidence provided to complainant).</li> </ul> <p>The stability of staffing within the looked after children team is an area of focus in the service Destination 22 programme.</p> <p>We have had no stage 2 complaints in the past 12 months. We have had investigation conclude from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). This involved the local authority providing support for a young person being released from custody. The outcome is that our YOS safeguarding protocol is being reviewed.</p>		
<p><b>Children in secure accommodation</b></p>			
<p>How many children in care are deprived of their liberty either in youth offending units, secure children's homes or in a child or adolescent psychiatric unit? Are they still receiving services as a child in care?</p>	<p>The number of children in this cohort are usually small. There are currently three children across the placements listed. The service is currently in the process of commissioning Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) training for relevant staff.</p>	<p><b>Data Team</b></p>	<p>NA</p>
<p>Is there sufficient planning and support for these children when</p>	<p>Discharge planning informed by an assessment of need or multi-agency contributions is an area for improvement.</p>	<p><b>Elizabeth Robertson</b></p>	<p>IRO Team Manager</p>

released or discharged from these secure settings?	Discharge plans are not always explicit or embedded within care/pathway planning.		
Has the council agreed with its health partners an aftercare policy for children in care, who have been detained under the Mental Health Act then discharged into the community?	<p>There is not a formal policy in place. Community Adolescent Mental Health Services follow good practice principles and have minimum standards.</p> <p>In relation to more general mental health needs, a recent health audit undertaken for the Corporate Parenting Board identified mental health support as an area for improvement.</p>	<b>Julian Watkins</b>	Head of Service – Children’s Social Care
<b>Children leaving care</b>			
How many care leavers are being provided with services and are the arrangements satisfactory?	165 care leavers up to 19 years and 57 care leavers 21 to 25 years. Pathway planning and levels of contact with care leavers are consistently good; 97% currently have an authorised care plan. The key areas of focus for this cohort are accommodation suitability (84% are in contact and in suitable accommodation; statistical neighbour average is 92%) ensuring a focus on their health needs through health passports and increasing the number in education training and employment (on 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2021, 49% of 1 – 18 year olds and 45% of 19 – 21 year olds were in education, training or employment).	<b>Mary Hardy</b>	Service Manager, Looked after Children and Care Leavers.
Does the council have a Local Offer on its website which explains what care leavers are entitled to?	<b>The local authority is required to</b> Local Offer on its website which explains what care leavers are entitled to. The link to the Southampton local offer is appended <a href="#">here</a> .	<b>Mary Hardy</b>	Service Manager, Looked after Children and Care Leavers.