

# Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Agenda  
Item No.

Report of Corporate Director for People  
to  
Cabinet

on

22nd September 2015

Report prepared by: John O'Loughlin, Head of Children's  
Services  
& Diane Keens, Group Manager, Placements & Resources

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**Annual Report on Corporate Parenting Group**  
**People Scrutiny Committee**  
**Executive Councillor: Councillor Anne Jones**  
*A Part 1 Public Agenda Item*

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## 1. Purpose of Report

To provide an annual report for Cabinet on the work of the Corporate Parenting Group (CPG) in regards to the progress and outcomes of children who are looked after by the Council.

## 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the annual report as at Appendix 1
- 2.2 That Cabinet approve the overarching priorities set for 2015/16 as at Appendix 2
- 2.3 That Cabinet approve the Corporate Parenting Strategy for looked after children 2015/16 as at Appendix 3

## 3. Background

- 3.1 On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 the council looked after 241 children and young people. Of these 63.4% (153) were placed with, in house foster carers including kinship carers. 17.7% (43) were placed with external foster carers and 11.5% (28) were in residential establishments. The remaining 17 were either placed at home; placed for adoption or living independently.
- 3.2 Although the overall number of looked after children remain reasonably static throughout the year, the children change. The Council actually cared for around 310 children last year.
- 3.3 Performance monitoring is a central role of the CPG. This report provides information in relation to the range of indicators considered. The CPG monitors

at every meeting those areas that either performed above or below the corporate targets set.

#### **4. Other Options**

There are no other options to consider in relation to this report.

#### **5. Reasons for Recommendations**

None

#### **6. Corporate Implications**

##### **6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities**

This report contributes to the Council's priority to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and young people and is linked to the Children & Young People's Plan 2014/15.

##### **6.2 Financial Implications**

Services to looked after children are delivered within the allocated resources of children's services and partner agencies.

##### **6.3 Legal Implications**

CPG will continue to monitor any impact of recent changes. This framework includes the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England regulations 2010 (updated 2014), Adoption scorecard, Sufficiency Guidance, Staying Put guidance and Local Authority responsibilities towards young people on remand.

##### **6.4 People Implications**

Delivering high quality outcomes for children in care requires commitment from all partner agencies. They demonstrate this through their contribution to the CPG, which is a sub group of the Success for all Group.

Particular workforce challenges remain in recruiting qualified and experienced social work staff on the front line and continuous attention is paid to implementing the workforce strategy to achieve a fully staffed and suitably trained workforce.

##### **6.5 Property Implications**

None

##### **6.6 Consultation**

The revised CPG Priorities and Corporate Parenting Strategy have been considered and agreed by the CPG. Voice4All, National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) and the Southend Foster Families Council continue to inform the CPG and the Executive Member, of areas they wish to see change or develop.

##### **6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

The needs of children in care are diverse. There is a higher population of significantly disabled children and those with special educational needs (25% of all LAC). White British children (84.7%) are over represented in the care

population compared to other ethnicities in Southend's population. There are more boys than girls in care.

6.8 Risk Assessment  
None

6.9 Value for Money  
Over the past 5 years the numbers of LAC has shown a steady decline. The numbers of children placed in external provision over the same period has shown a proportionately greater decline than the numbers overall. As a result savings have been secured each year in external purchasing. The most recent Audit commission report showed Southend children's services as high performing at low cost.

6.10 Community Safety Implications  
None

6.11 Environmental impact:  
None

## 7. Background Papers

None

## 8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Annual Report 2014/15

Appendix 2 – Overarching priorities 2015/16

Appendix 3 – Corporate Parenting Strategy for looked after children 2015/16





# **Corporate Parenting Annual Report 2014/15**

## Overview and Background

The Corporate Parenting group (CPG) met on a six weekly basis throughout 2014/15, monitoring the overarching priorities set for 2014/15. This is a multi agency group and has been running in its current form since 2006. The Group was established to ensure that outcomes for looked after children are scrutinised and improved using a multi-agency approach. There are a clear terms of reference for the group which were reviewed and updated in 2012 and again in April 2014. These have been further updated in March 2015 along with the completion of a full Corporate Parenting Strategy.

Membership of the group includes the Executive Member for Children's Services and elected members from other political groups, senior officers from children's services, education and health, foster carer representatives and community partners. Our commissioned advocacy service for looked after children, the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS), are invited to attend regularly to ensure that the group can be made aware of issues that young people have raised and take action to address the issues.

The Corporate Parenting Group has also given consideration to themes raised by young people in other Local Authorities and reported by NYAS in order to benchmark against other Local Authorities.

The group has links with the Voice4All (our children in care council) and the Corporate Parenting Group holds meetings so that representatives from Voice4All are formally able to attend the group at least twice a year wherever possible and their views are regularly fed back to the group.

The CPG monitors a range of performance data and activity relating to looked after children. Its focus remains to ensure actions are put in place to improve outcomes for looked after children and to be able to measure the impact by how well children are doing at school; whether they are in good health and their potential life chances once they leave school.

There are links between the CPG and the Southend Foster Families Council ( now named Southend Foster Families Community)(SFFC), with a foster carer regularly attending CPG meetings to represent Southend foster carer's views.

## **Issues considered by the Corporate Parenting Group over the past year**

### **Statistics**

Performance monitoring is a central role of the Corporate Parenting Group. There are a range of indicators considered including:

- Numbers of Looked after Children( LAC)
- Number of LAC placed for adoption
- Timescales for children moving to adoption
- Stability of placement
- Timeliness of reviews; health assessments and PEP's
- Progress of care leavers at age 19, 20 and 21
- School places and exclusions as well as overall education attainment at all key stages
- Percentages of LAC placed locally with in- house foster carers.

Additional reports were presented during 2014/15 directly in relation to these statistics to give a wider explanation of these areas of practice, outcomes and areas of pressure.

### **Additional areas of consideration**

The CPG considered the following areas during 2014/15 the following additional reports were presented in relation to:

- The Sufficiency Strategy- ensuring that Southend has sufficient local accommodation to meet the needs of Southend's young people in care.
- Pledge Survey – to ensure that the views of young people are fully taken into consideration and influence changes to policy & practice.
- Missing and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) – to ensure that Southend is fully aware of those young people whose behaviour places them at risk of CSE or who go missing from placement and that strategies are in place to support them and reduce levels of risk.
- Work of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service – ensuring independent oversight for all LAC and presenting a thematic review of issues raised during reviews.
- Work of the Virtual School- looking at the achievement of all LAC and work being undertaken to improve overall academic outcomes for LAC. In addition advising on changes in legislation which impact on LAC.
- Regularity of visits to LAC – ensuring statutory compliance with respect to visits undertaken and appropriate recording of such visits in a timely manner.

## Appendix 1

- Stability of Placements – looking at those young people with three or more moves in any 12 month period with reasons for the moves and strategies put in place to prevent this.
- Recruitment and retention in fostering and adoption – looking at the work undertaken to recruit new carers and retain existing carers and the barriers to this.
- Health Passport for care leavers – ensuring that all young people on leaving care have a full health history to take with them into adulthood.
- Advocacy services – quarterly reports from the National Youth Advisory Service (NYAS) to look at themes of concerns raised by LAC.
- Timeliness of Initial health assessments (IHA)– monitoring of timescales with our health partners in achieving IHA’s within 20 working days of a young person becoming looked after.
- Junior ISA’s – reviewing implementation of new processes for LAC and ensuring clear information provided to relevant parties to enable payment’s into the young person’s ISA.
- Placement Provision and Quality – a report looking at the quality of in particular external (PVI) provision to give assurance to members regarding the safeguarding of young people placed in these external provisions.
- Monitoring offending patterns
- Impact of changes to the looked after status of those young people on remand
- Effectiveness of Family group Conferences
- Effect of looked after children permanency planning
- Care leavers who are parents
- Work of the Special Guardianship Panel
- Placement Trends including the quality of provision both external and in-house
- Health assessments for young people looked after and in prison
- Looked after children involvement in training, recruitment and service delivery
- Placements of looked after children in Southend from other local authorities
- Outcome and timescales of court proceedings
- The adoption scorecard

Towards the end of 2014/15 the Corporate Parenting Group considered the **Terms of Reference** for the group and these were subsequently formally updated at the end of March 2015.

In addition, the **Overarching Strategic Corporate Parenting Priorities for 2015/16** were set by the group and these have been used to create the forward plan for 2015/16. The key priorities for the group in the coming year are recommended as:

- Reduce the need for children to become or remain looked after
- Experience of the child and family



## Appendix 1

- Narrow the achievement gap for looked after children
- Support the emotional and physical wellbeing of looked after children
- Reduce delay in achieving permanence for looked after children
- Ensure sufficiency of high quality placements for looked after children
- Ensure looked after children are safeguarded

From this a Corporate Parenting Strategy for Looked after Children 2015/16 has been developed.

### Training for Elected Members

During 2013/14 a number of training sessions were held for Members in relation to their role as Corporate Parents. Level 1 training was open to all Members with Level 2 training being available for those members with specific responsibilities for Corporate Parenting.

The training was not well attended, so in early 2014 an afternoon drop in event was held, showing “the journey of the child” and run jointly with partner agencies. The feedback from this event was very positive and will be repeated in the autumn 2015. Further Level 1 & 2 training will also be arranged.

Safeguarding induction training took place on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to present information on all aspects of Children’s Services including the CPG and member roles in relation to this. This was attended by 10 members and this will be repeated on an annual basis as required.

### The way forward

The table below identifies the areas of strength and areas for improvement identified by the CPG during 2014/15. Areas identified as needing improvement will continue to be closely monitored during 2015/16

<b>Areas of strength</b>	<b>Areas for further development</b>
Adoption performance continued to be high. This will need to be monitored closely with changes to legislation proposed over the coming year	Increased recruitment and retention of foster carers. This has improved over the past year but needs to continue to be closely monitored.
Assessment timescales - adoption	Increase quality of assessments - fostering
Permanency Planning for LAC	Reducing the number care leavers who are NEET

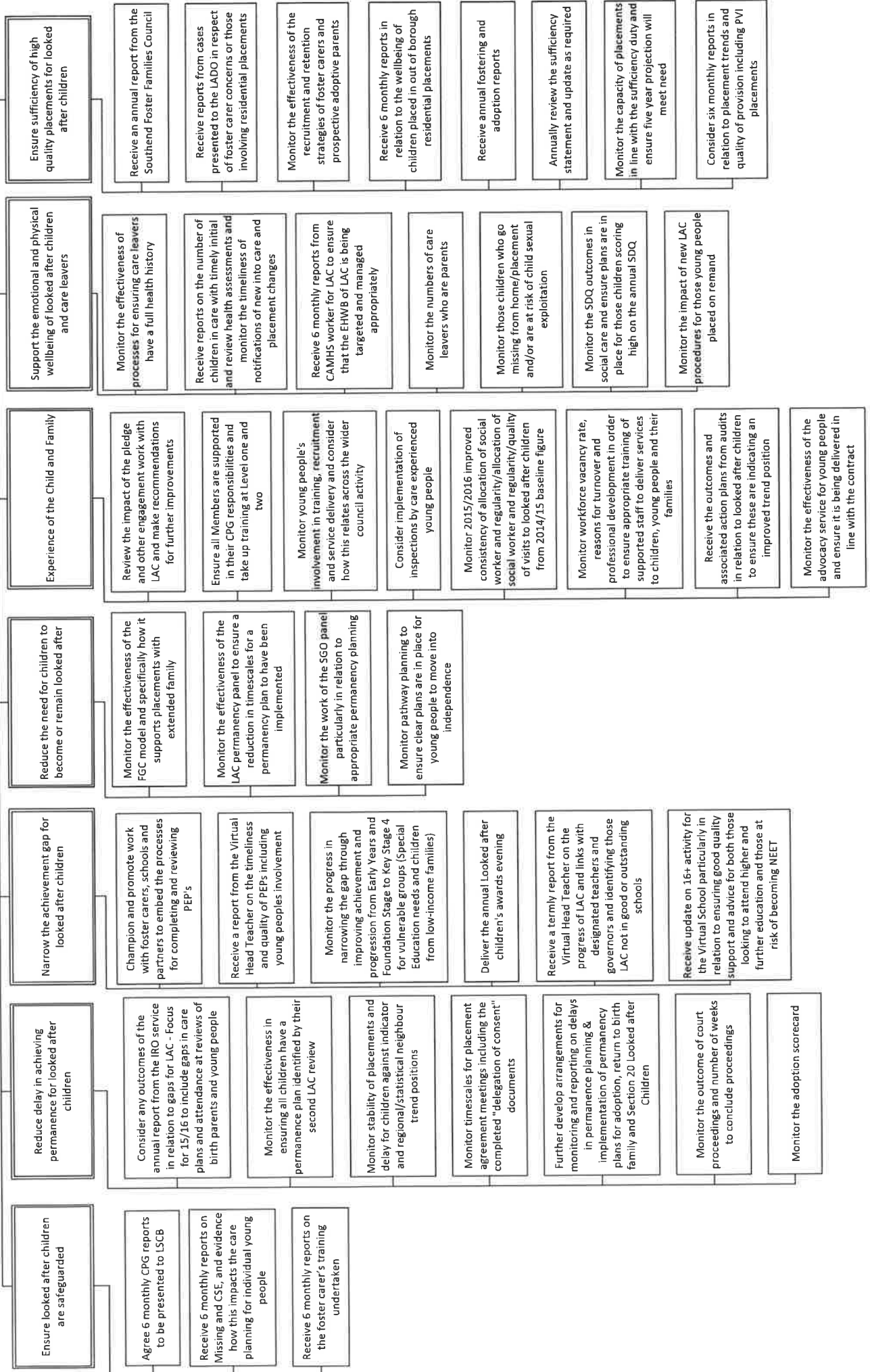
Appendix 1

Stability of placement remains high- ongoing monitoring of this required to ensure that themes and barriers are identified to improve practice further.	Improve the quality and timeliness of Placement Agreement meetings for all foster placements. This has improved over the past 12 months but needs to continue to be monitored.
Care leavers in higher education remains high, CPG to continue to monitor to ensure ongoing improvement through new strategies and the impact of the virtual college.	Improve timeliness for all IHA's
Improvements in the work with missing and CSE	Monitor improvements in the work with missing and CSE and develop new strategies in line with this
Growth of the Children in Care Council	Monitor the numbers of care leavers who are parents and ensure strategies are in place to support where appropriate.
Duration of care proceedings	Sufficiency of suitable placements available and where external provision required, ensure quality and safeguarding within these provisions.
	Improve educational attainment of LAC

Services and outcomes for Looked after Children remains good and elected members, as corporate parents have remained fully engaged in promoting the interests of Looked after Children over the past year, with full cross party support being evident.

Diane Keens  
 Group manager  
 Placements & Resources  
 1.7.15

Overarching Strategic Corporate Parenting Priorities 2015/2016







**Southend Borough Council**  
**Corporate Parenting Strategy for**  
**Looked after Children**  
**2015- 2016**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Pages</b>
Introduction	3
Achievements for 2011-2014	4
Southend's Children Looked after and Care Leavers	5
Our ambition and priorities	7
Priority 1: Reduce the need for children to become or remain looked after	8
Priority 2: Experience of the Child and Family	9
Priority 3: Narrow the achievement gap for looked after children	10
Priority 4: Support the emotional and physical wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers	13
Priority 5: Reduce delay in achieving permanence for looked after children	14
Priority 6: Ensure sufficiency of high quality placements for looked after children	15
Priority 7: Ensure looked after children are safeguarded	17
Monitoring and quality assurance	17
Appendix: Southend's Pledge	18

## Introduction

This is a multi-agency plan that sets out the Council's and its partners commitment to improving the lives and outcomes for Southend's looked after children and care leavers. The plan will support the *Children and Young Person's Plan*.

The Children & Young Person's Plan sets out the Children's Partnership aim to break the cycle of poverty, social exclusion and disadvantage experienced by Southend families and improve their quality of life.

The 'golden thread' linking the Plan to this Corporate Parenting Strategy recognises the role of Children's Social Care as a champion for the promotion of good life chances for vulnerable children. This strategy will support the Plan by ensuring that children looked after receive the quality of care necessary to achieve the best possible outcomes thereby reducing the risk of social exclusion and poverty once they leave care.

This strategy will help the Council to:

- Understand the current and future needs of children looked after aged 0-18 and care leavers aged 18-25
- Reinforce the corporate parenting responsibility of the Council and Partners
- Ensure that the race, gender, disability, sexuality, age, religion and culture of children looked after and care leavers are considered in planning to meet their needs

This strategy will be supported by Southend's *Sufficiency Strategy for ensuring sufficient accommodation for Children Looked After* and by *Southend's Staged Integrated Approach which has been in place since 2007 and is underpinned by the use of the Early Help Assessment and the Troubled Families Agenda*.

Partner agencies have been engaged in identifying key service challenges as well as priorities for future service delivery as set out in this strategy.

The strategy is supported by a multi-agency action plan which has been developed in order to assist the Council and the agencies responsible for corporate parenting to achieve the desired goals and impact.

## 2. Achievements for 2014-2015

### Outcomes for children looked after

The *Children & Young Person's Plan 2014-15* identified a number of targets and actions. There have been significant achievements in relation to the plan that include:

- Improvements in the general stability of placements
- An increase in the numbers of children with permanent placements through Special Guardianship Orders or Adoption
- A improvement in timescales for children between entering care and being placed with an adoptive family
- An increase in the number of young people with a permanency plan in place by the second review
- More children with up to date health assessments and dental checks
- Improvements in school attendance and a reduction in permanent exclusions  
Improvements in attainment at Key Stages 2 & 4
- An increase in the proportion of carers who are in suitable accommodation
- An increase in the proportion of care leavers in education, training employment and at University.

### Local Standards and Targets

In terms of local standards and targets, Southend is doing well in the following areas:

- Reducing the number of children looked after as a result of effective early intervention and permanency planning.
- Placing children with relatives and friends
- The proportion of looked after children placed locally with Southend foster carers (57.2%)
- Long term stability (74%)

### Being healthy

- 90.8% of children looked after had completed Health assessments
- 90% of children had attended in the dentist in the previous 12 months

### Staying Safe

- 94.5% of the looked after population have good school attendance. Only 5.5% missed more than 15% attendance in the last academic year



## **Enjoy and achieve**

- There has been consistent improvement in the educational achievement of looked after children at Key Stage 2
- 100% of looked after children cohort achieved level 4 in reading and 70% in writing and Maths at Key Stage 2.
- Achievements of young people in year 11 achieving 1 or more A\*-G.....
- Achievements also shows improvement for pupils achieving at least 5 A\*-C grade GCSEs at the end of Key Stage 4
- Comparing attainment of Southend LAC with National LAC, Southend achieved above the LAC national average for all headline measures

## **Positive Contribution**

- The proportion of care leavers aged 19 & 20 living in suitable accommodation has increased.
- The proportion of care leavers in staying put placements has increased
- The proportion of care leavers aged 20 in employment, education or training continues to increase

The outcomes demonstrate a trend of continuous improvement over recent years. Most formal performance indicators show performance within the higher bands nationally.

## **3. Southend's Children Looked After and Care Leavers**

### **Southend's demographics of vulnerable children**

In 2013/14 there were 37869 young people under the age of 18 in Southend. This is estimated to rise to 38452 in 2014/15 and to 39511 in 2017. Of the 2013/14 figures;

- 11391 were under the age of 5 a rise of 12 from 2012/13;
- 12240 were aged 5-10 years a rise of 436;
- 9848 were aged 11-15 years a decrease of 334, with
- 4390 aged 16+ a decrease of 138.

It is estimated that by 2017;

- 12864 will be aged under 5 years;
- 13516 will be aged 5-10 years;
- 9317 will be aged 11-15 years and
- 3814 will be aged 16+.

The number of referrals in respect of child in need and the number of children subject to child protection plans has remained stable over the past five years. 2014/15 figures show the number of children subject to ICPC's as 250 (215 in 2013/14) and the total number looked after as 229 (243 in 2013/14).

## **Southend's children looked after and care leavers**

Children looked after are made up of several distinct groups, although they have overlapping as well as specific needs. They include:

- Babies and younger children particularly 0-4yrs (45.8%)
- 16-18yr olds (10.3%)
- Disabled children
- Young People who are parents
- Young people preparing to leave care
- Care leavers from 18-25 yrs

## **Children looked after are a diverse group**

Overall, the statistics for ethnicity have stayed fairly consistent from year to year, with only small fluctuations. Figures of children looked after reflect the Borough trends in general. The latest census trends indicate a changing demographic in the Borough with slight increases in populations from Eastern Europe, Bangladesh and China.

At the end of October 2014 however, 84.4% of the looked after population in Southend were identified as White British.

## **Care Leavers**

There are a total of 87 Care leavers 18-25 supported by the Southend Care Management 16+Team.

## **Children with disabilities**

Eight looked after children have severe and complex disabilities. The transitions team can work with young people up to 25 years if required to ensure a smooth transition into adult services.

## **Children entering care**

Comparing the last 12 months (Nov 13 – Oct 14) to the previous 12 months (Nov 12-Oct 13), there has been a percentage increase in children aged 5-9yrs and 16+. The rise in 5-9 age group ties in with the change in Southend demographics over the same period. The huge rise in those 16+ does not mirror local demographics.

Age Band	1.11.12 – 31.10.13	1.11.13- 31.10.14	% Change
Under 1	25%	23.3%	-1.7%
1-4	21.4%	22.5%	+1.1%
5-9	16.7%	20.6%	+3.9%
10-15	34.5%	23.3 %	-11.2%
16-17	2.4%	10.3%	+7.9%

*For more information see Looked after Children and Care Leavers Sufficiency Strategy October 2014 – March 2019*

#### **4. Our Ambition and Priorities**

Our ambition for looked after children and care leavers is that they experience the lives that we would want for our own children. In 2015/16 we will continue to work towards achieving this ambition through the delivery of one strategic objective that is to be a good and effective corporate parent.

Being a **good corporate parent** requires us to achieve the following strategic priorities:

Priority 1: Reduce the need for children to become or remain looked after

Priority 2: Experience of the Child and Family

Priority 3: Narrow the achievement gap for looked after children

Priority 4: Support the emotional and physical wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers

Priority 5: Reduce delay in achieving permanence for looked after children

Priority 6: Ensure sufficiency of high quality placements for looked after children

Priority 7: Ensure looked after children are safeguarded

In each of these priority areas, our aim is to narrow the gap in outcomes between children looked after and their non-looked after peers, whilst ensuring that the principles of fairness and choice underpin our actions.

To achieve these priorities, we must ensure that corporate parents, elected members and senior officials effectively champion and meet the needs of children looked after and care leavers. We must also ensure that those who have responsibilities for corporate parenting: the Executive members for Children's Services, The Corporate Director for People, multi-agency practitioners and agencies working directly with looked after children do the same.

Being an **effective corporate parent** requires us to make the best use of the Council's resources whilst achieving value for money.

## 5. Our Priorities

### Priority 1: Experience of the Child and Family

#### The current position

- a) Southend Council believes that children should be supported in their families wherever possible and that their families should be given extra support to keep them together.
- b) The Council has continued to develop and support effective multi-agency early intervention and prevention services to help more children to stay with their families
- c) Southend aims to identify families with additional needs at the earliest point and help them to address their need. Research has shown that getting involved early to encourage social and emotional development can significantly improve mental and physical health, educational attainment and employment opportunities. Early intervention can also help to prevent criminal behaviour (especially violent behaviour), drug and alcohol misuse, teenage pregnancy and homelessness. Conversely, waiting for problems to take root and reacting late costs the taxpayer billions of pounds.
- d) Southend has piloted a number of innovative family support initiatives, and have received national recognition with the success of the Big Lottery Bid, A Better Start and additionally the Troubled Family Agenda success.
- e) The number of children becoming looked after has steadily decreased over the past 5 years.

#### Challenges:

- a) The challenge over the coming year is to mainstream the early intervention approach and front door service.

- b) To make sure that we can deliver effective early intervention and family support services to families experiencing greater stress due to the recession whilst operating in a challenging financial context.

**Corporate parenting monitoring:**

- a) Monitor the effectiveness of the Family Group Conference model and specifically how it supports placements with extended family
- b) Monitor the effectiveness of the LAC permanency panel to ensure a reduction in timescales for a permanency plan to have been implemented
- c) Monitor the work of the SGO panel particularly in relation to appropriate permanency planning
- d) Monitor pathway planning to ensure clear plans are in place for young people to move into independence
- e) Monitor early intervention strategies

**Priority 2: Experience of the Child and Family**

**The current position**

- a) Southend has a pledge for all looked after children which highlights what they can expect from workers and generally from the Department. This is monitored to ensure that we meet the targets that we have set.
- b) Southend aims to have the lowest staff vacancy turnover as possible to ensure that children do not have numerous changes in social worker. The average turnover of staff in Southend is around 8%.
- c) Southend aims to ensure that the voice of the child is heard. This is both through consultation and ensuring that there is a clear advocacy service in place that young people are aware of.
- d) Packs are given to each child who enters care which explains what is happening and introduces the NYAS advocacy service from the outset.
- e) Off line phone calls are made to families to look at their experience of working with the Department.
- f) Off line support groups are held for parents of children looked after and separately for those where children are on a child protection plan and changes to service are made as a result of their comments.
- g) The looked after care council encourages young people to become engaged in making future change to children's service. In 2014 they had a "Takeover Day" which was positively received.

## **Challenges**

- a) To get a wider range of looked after young people involved in the children in Care council meetings and consultation groups to ensure that the voice of the child is heard across service.
- b) To engage with more families whose children are looked after or on the edge of care to ensure that their experiences of the Department are heard and taken into account when looking at service development.
- c) To ensure that the children's Pledge is fully integrated into everyday practice.
- d) To ensure that young people are represented at all interviews for staff in children's services.

## **Corporate Parenting monitoring**

- a) Review the impact of the pledge and other engagement work with LAC and make recommendations for further improvements
- b) Monitor workforce vacancy rate, reasons for turnover and professional development in order to ensure appropriate training of supported staff to deliver services to children, young people and their families
- c) Monitor 2014/2015 improved consistency of allocation of social worker and regularity/allocation of social worker and regularity/quality of visits to looked after children from 2013/14 baseline figure
- d) Monitor the effectiveness of the advocacy service for young people and ensure it is being delivered in line with the contract
- e) Ensure all Members are supported in their CPG responsibilities and take up training at Level one and two
- f) Consider implementation of inspections by care experienced young people
- g) Monitor young people's involvement in training, recruitment and service delivery and consider how this relates across the wider council activity
- h) Receive the outcomes and associated action plans from audits in relation to looked after children to ensure these are indicating an improved trend in position.

## **Priority 3: Narrow the achievement gap for looked after children**

### **The current position**

- a) As a corporate parent, the Council recognises that it is crucial to support the education of children looked after and to encourage them to aspire to and achieve high standards.
- b) A solid framework for narrowing the education gap between children looked after and their non-looked after peers is established via the Virtual School, and multi-

disciplinary education team and integrated within the Children's Looked After Service.

- c) The foundation for this framework is placement stability and placing children looked after locally. This has ensured that Southend's children looked after experience the least possible amount of disruption to their education.
- d) The Virtual School has supported the effective delivery of corporate parenting to improve the educational attainment of children looked after. The School supports foster carers and practitioners to become good advocates for children in terms of their education and assists them to understand their roles and responsibilities towards children at the key stages of their education. The Virtual School has provided information, advice and guidance to foster carers and social workers on a range of education related areas.
- e) Children looked after with complex needs are supported by Southend Education in partnership with Children's Social Care through jointly funded care and education packages and, where applicable, with Health partners.
- f) At the end of year 11, the work to support the continued engagement by children looked after in further and higher education has been undertaken by the Southend 16+ Team and the Virtual School who now take a lead with young people aged 16-18 years to encourage successful pathways to further/higher education, training and employment.
- g) The integrated approach to service delivery has achieved the following:
  - Provided consistent support to meet the education needs of looked after children
  - Offered greater opportunities for tracking and monitoring their educational attainments
  - Identified young people who are achieving in the key exam stages and prepared personalised additional packages of support through targeted use of the Pupil Premium and through regular review of the Personal education Plans.
- h) Comparing the attainment of Southend LAC with National LAC, Southend LAC achieve above the national average for all headline measures.
- i) Early years services are now working closely with the Virtual School to ensure that looked after children are picked up at an early stage, pre-school to ensure that their specific and individual educational needs are recognised with the support of the early years pupil premium.

## **Challenges**

- a) We need to ensure that our children looked after continue to have stable experiences in care which will in turn support them to have stable experiences in schools. Although there has been considerable success in attainment, further improvement is needed to ensure that Year 11 children leave school with 5 GCSEs at

grades A\*-C, including English and Maths. The Virtual School has identified that some children who were capable and were predicted to receive these grades over the past few years, then experienced placement breakdown which had an adverse effect on their predicted grades.

- b) The Virtual School can now identify which children at the end of year 9 are predicted to obtain 5 A\*-C GCSEs including English and Maths. We need to ensure that they are targeted to ensure that the support is in place to help them to achieve to their full potential.
- c) Understanding the barriers to progression for children looked after at key stages is crucial to improving their educational outcomes. This requires the key services responsible for supporting the education of children looked after and care leavers to better co-ordinate their work to ensure seamless progression routes for children looked after from the age of 3 to 25 and to ensure that this is reflected in the appropriate plans at key stages.
- d) To ensure that the Pupil Premium funding is used to meet the needs of all children looked after can be challenging. The Council will need to continue to consider how to exercise its corporate parenting responsibilities to provide appropriate support and challenge to schools.

#### **Corporate parenting monitoring**

- a) Receive update on 16+ activity for the Virtual School particularly in relation to ensuring good quality support and advice for both those looking to attend higher and further education and those at risk of becoming NEET
- b) Receive a report from the Virtual Head Teacher on the timeliness and quality of PEPs including young people's involvement
- c) Champion and promote work with foster carers, schools and partners to embed the processes for completing and reviewing PEP's
- d) Receive a termly report from the Virtual Head Teacher on the progress of LAC and links with designated teachers and governors and identifying those LAC not in good or outstanding schools
- e) Monitor the progress in narrowing the gap through improving achievement and progression from Early Years and Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4 for vulnerable group (Special Education needs and children from low-income families)
- f) Deliver the annual Looked after children's awards evening



## **Priority 4: Support the emotional and physical wellbeing of looked after children and care leavers**

### **The current position**

- a) The Council continues with its health partners to reduce the health gaps and inequalities between Southend's children looked after their non-looked after peers.
- b) The health service provided to children and young people looked after by Southend is compliant with relevant legislation and had led to over 90% of looked after children having a current health assessment and similar figures for dental health. (the majority of those without a health assessment are older young people who refuse appointments).
- c) Southend foster carers are trained where required to fully meet the often complex health needs. Both foster carers and children looked after have access to health information, advice and guidance including confidential information for older young people.
- d) The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), currently being updated, provides a summary of needs and identifies areas for improvement. The JSNA will assist the Council and their partners to meet their responsibilities for improving the physical and emotional health outcomes for children looked after and to respond more effectively to their needs.
- e) The introduction in 2014 of a Health Passport for care leavers was favourably received.

### **Challenges**

- a) There are continued challenges in achieving timescales for Initial Health Assessments.
- b) We continue to find creative ways to encourage those in the 16+ team to engage with the health services on offer.
- c) To reduce the number of looked after children and care leavers in becoming parents.
- d) Ensure close monitoring of the mental health needs and emotional needs of our looked after children and ensure that support services are available to meet the needs identified.
- e) Identify and support looked after children with substance misuse problems and train and support their foster carers to manage their needs.

### **Corporate Parenting Monitoring**

- a) Receive reports on the number of children in care with timely initial and review health assessments and monitor the timeliness of notifications of new into care and placement changes.

- b) Monitor the SDQ outcomes in social care and ensure plans are in place for those children scoring high on the annual SDQ
- c) Monitor the effectiveness of processes for ensuring care leavers have a full health history.
- d) Receive 6 monthly reports from the senior MH worker for LAC to ensure that the EHWP of LAC is being targeted and managed appropriately. *(this post has been redesigned and it is hoped will be appointed to early in 2015/16)*
- e) Monitor those children who go missing from home/placement and/or are at risk of child sexual exploitation
- f) Monitor the numbers of care leavers who are parents
- g) Monitor offending patterns for LAC and the impact of the new remand legislation.

## **Priority 5: Reduce delay in achieving permanence for looked after children**

### **The current position**

- a) Once a decision is made for a child to become looked after, the Council is committed to ensuring a successful route out of care via a return to birth parents if it is safe and appropriate to do so or by ensuring that alternative family solutions can be found in a timely way thus avoiding drift and unnecessary delay.
- b) The LAC permanency panel meets regularly to ensure that plans for permanency are in place by the second review and that any challenges to achieving this are considered and solutions where possible found.
- c) Timescales for children requiring permanency through adoption have fallen drastically over the past few years with the support of the adoption grant funding used for additional staffing.
- d) Early tracking of all cases ensures a timely referral to the adoption team and clear parallel planning which ensures no delay later in proceedings wherever possible.
- e) The number of adopters approved annually has tripled in the past few years, ensuring good quality placements for Southend children. This has also enabled Southend to sell families through the national adoption register, which brings in income to enable external adoption placements to be purchased where required.

### **Challenges**

- a) We need to ensure that early consideration is given to any potential family placement to prevent delay at a later stage and find clear monitoring tools to achieve this.
- b) For the past 4 years we have been awarded ring fenced grant money for adoption services which have allowed us to fund several additional posts within the adoption

service. This money will be coming to an end in 2016 and we will struggle to continue to function at the current levels when staffing is reduced by a third. There is a business plan which will be developed over the coming year to look at ways of bridging the gap.

- c) Introduction of a new Post Adoption Fund will come into force during the coming year. Southend have been deemed ready to provide relevant services, however there needs to be considerable on-going work to ensure that the relevant services are available as and when required by adoptive families.

#### **Corporate parenting monitoring**

- a) Monitor the effectiveness in ensuring all children have a permanence plan identified by their second LAC review
- b) Monitor timescales for placement agreement meetings including the completed "delegation of consent" documents
- c) Monitor timescales for placement agreement meetings including the completed "delegation of consent" documents
- d) Consider any outcomes of the annual report from the IRO service in relation to gaps for LAC - Focus for 14/15 to include gaps in care plans and attendance at reviews of birth parents and young people.

### **Priority 6: Ensure sufficiency of high quality placements for looked after children**

#### **The current position**

- a) The looked after children's service has focused its efforts on ensuring that wherever possible children looked after do not experience instability and unhelpful placement moves. This is achieved through providing placements that are of a high quality and which promote the development of strong secure attachments.
- b) There are currently 90 foster carers in Southend including family and friends carers, delivering corporate parenting to looked after children. A sustained programme of training and development is in place and reviewed annually to help carers to manage the emotional and behavioural wellbeing of the young people in their care.
- c) The support offered to carers has been a key factor in maintaining the stability of placements.
- d) We continue to develop annually a comprehensive recruitment plan alongside the adoption service and constantly strive to improve timescales for this.

## Challenges

- a) Research has identified that local placements generally produces better outcomes for children looked after whether provided by the Local Authority or the Voluntary or Private Sector. The exception is where there is a need for a specialist placement or for a child to be placed outside of their local geographical area. The challenge is to ensure that children placed further away from local provision receive equitable services where they are placed.
- b) Ensuring a sufficient supply of local placements is challenging due in part to the national shortage of foster carers. Robust recruitment strategies are integral to meeting this challenge.
- c) A key challenge is to ensure that children who come into care, particularly those who come in an emergency, are initially placed in care placements that are suitable and able to meet their specific needs so that placement stability is not compromised. Ideally the caring resources of extended family should be investigated before children become looked after, however the circumstances in which some children are removed from their parents can impact on the willingness of parents to work in partnership with the Council to identify extended family at the earliest opportunity.
- d) The timeliness of permanency planning is a key requirement to meeting the Sufficiency duty and Southend's ability to recruit sufficient suitable adopters to meet the local and national need is vital if we are to meet the ever changing timescales set by government.
- e) Alongside this we need to continue in our work of developing a robust process for commissioning placements for children and young people.

## Corporate Parenting Monitoring

- a) Monitor the capacity of placements in line with the sufficiency duty and ensure five year projection will meet need
- b) Annually review the sufficiency statement and update as required
- c) Consider six monthly reports in relation to placement trends and quality of provision including PVI placements
- d) Monitor the effectiveness of the recruitment and retention strategies of foster carers and prospective adoptive parents
- e) Receive an annual report from the Southend Foster Families Council
- f) Receive annual fostering and adoption reports
- g) receive 6 monthly reports in relation to the wellbeing of children placed in out of borough residential placements
- h) Receive reports from cases presented to the LADO in respect of foster carer concerns or those involving residential placements.

## **Priority 7: Ensure looked after children are safeguarded**

### **The current position**

- a) Over the past few years there have been considerable changes to the monitoring of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and children missing from home and care.
- b) Statistical data is of an excellent quality allowing the Council to closely monitor trends and actions.
- c) Senior managers are involved in a number of regional and national groups, looking at CSE & Missing alongside gang culture and are able through these groups to influence policy.
- d) In 2015 Southend have appointed a Service Manager responsible for CSE & Missing.

### **Challenges**

- a) Challenges remain in gaining relevant information from external agencies.
- b) Being a small authority, there are always challenges in ensuring that all legislative changes are recognised and implemented in a timely fashion.
- c) Engaging partner agencies appropriately in understanding and working with CSE & Missing.

### **Corporate parenting monitoring**

- a) Agree 6 monthly CPG reports to be presented to LSCB
- b) Receive 6 monthly reports on Missing & CSE, and evidence how this impacts the care planning for individual young people.
- c) Receive 6 monthly reports on the foster carer's training undertaken.

## **6. Monitoring and Quality Assurance**

### **The Corporate Parenting Group**

The Corporate Parenting Group (CPG) has provided effective leadership and direction of the work required to improve the care experience and outcomes of children looked after and care leavers.

The commitment of elected council members to corporate parenting in Southend has strongly contributed to the trend of continuous improvements for looked after children and care leavers and this commitment will continue, retaining a strong strategic focus on all issues that affect children looked after and care leavers.

The CPG meets 6 weekly and is chaired by the Head of Children's Services, with membership being cross party and multi-agency.

The CPG will oversee the delivery of the Children & Young Person's Plan and monitor and review all services for looked after children.

Measuring the impact of service delivery is central to achieving improved outcomes for children and reducing the impact of disadvantage for vulnerable children and young people. Southend has in place a strong quality assurance system that evidences whether or not services are being delivered effectively and is used as an effective tool to raise standards.

Our framework for quality assurance and service improvement is both reflective and proactive. By examining past service delivery against good practice standards and considering service users' views about the services they have received we can measure the impact and quality of service delivery.

Our key performance indicators and a number of agreed local indicators are captured in our monthly Local Performance Data Set which is reviewed by senior management groups and by the CPG.

## **Our Pledge**

### **1. We will spend time with you and listen to you**

We will visit you at least every six weeks

We will come to see you where you are living

We will try very hard to visit you when we will say we will. We will phone your foster carer to tell you if we can't and then we will come to see you as soon as we can

### **2. We want you to be fit and healthy**

We will help you talk to your doctor and dentist and we will explain to them what we think you need and what your problems are. If you move to live with another foster carer we will tell your doctor and dentist.

If you are unwell or have any problems we will get you all the help you need.

We will tell your foster carers things they need to know about your health, like about anything you are allergic to.

We will make sure you have the right vaccinations as you grow up and we will encourage you to have your health assessments and dentist check-ups every year.

If you are at school you can talk to your school nurse but we have nurses just for our looked after children who will help you if they can.

### **3. We want you to feel safe**

We know that we are all different in terms of where we grew up and we know that we all need different things to feel happy and safe. We want you to feel safe with other people, at school and where you live. If you ever feel unsafe we will make sure you know where to go for help.

We will make sure your foster carers know how to keep you happy and healthy. If you are happy where you are living we won't move you, unless there is a problem. We will also try and keep you with the same social worker for as long as possible, If you do have to move, we will give you all the information we can about your new home and your new carers.

#### **4. We want you to get the most out of life**

Before you are old enough to go to school we will make sure you can go to nursery so you can enjoy playing with other children.

We want you to do well at school and we will work with teachers and make sure you have extra help if you need it.

We want you to enjoy your spare time in a healthy way. We can arrange free use of the facilities at some of the leisure centres in Southend, which includes swimming.

We will help you to stay in touch with your friends.

#### **5. We will ask you what you want**

We will ask you what you want before making decisions about you. If we cannot do what you would like we will explain why to you.

We will always try to keep brothers and sisters together when possible. If we think this is not a good idea we will explain this to you.

We will make sure you know your rights and what we should be doing for you.

If you do not feel that your views are being heard we will tell you how to get an advocate who will speak up for you. We will also tell you how to make a complaint if you need to.

#### **6. When you leave care**

We will make sure you have a bank account. We will encourage you to be sensible with your money and continue to save for the future.

We will make sure you have a passport. If this is not possible we will explain the reasons why.

We will talk to you about what you would like for your future, and help you to plan for this, whether you are going to university, into training or into work.

