

Overview and Scrutiny Commission

28th February 2005

Children Looked After Presentation

1. Introduction

Who are looked after children?

A common misconception about children and young people in care is that they are there because they have done something wrong. This is untrue. The overwhelming majority of children in care are there because of family pressures and problems or because they have experienced abuse or neglect.

Looked After Children

These are children Looked after by the Local Authority through a care order made by a court or by agreement with their parent(s), whether with foster carers, with other members of their extended family or children's home. These are the children for whom the Council is the Corporate Parent. Currently there are 371 Children Looked After in Derby, which is a rate of 6.87 / 1000. They are placed as follows:

Placement type	Children
Foster Care:	
with relative	22
in house carers	212
Agency	38
Sub total	272
Residential Care:	
in house	38
Agency	6
Disabled children agency	7
Sub total	51
Placed in Secure accommodation	3
Placed for Adoption	29
Placed at home	12
Other	4
Total	371

What are the responsibilities of the Local Authority?

The first priority for the Local Authority for the Children Looked After is ensuring that they are safe. Implicit to this is that there are sufficient high quality placements available of a range and type so as to offer choice. Several government key indicators are used to give an indication of this.

PAF A1 measures the number of Children Looked After who have experienced three or more placement moves in the preceding year. The target should not exceed 16%. In Derby we have been as low as 9% and we are currently showing 13%, which maintains us in the top quartile of Authorities.

PAF B7 measures the percentage of Children Looked After who are in family placements. We are currently running at 84%, which gives us 4 star performance.

The Authority needs to ensure that Children Looked After are healthy, that their health needs are properly met and that they receive regular health checks. It also needs to ensure that children and young people are able to fulfil their educational potential. Children and Young people who are Looked After will have invariably experienced disruption and upset that often place them at a disadvantage.

PAF A2 – Educational Qualifications of Children Looked After
Numbers with at least 1 GCSE grade A – G at age 16. In Derby we achieved 55% last year giving 4 star performance and the second highest in our Family group of Authorities.

The Authority should have the same aspirations for the Children and Young People for whom it has Corporate Parenting responsibility as any good parent would.

2. Brief Outline of Current Services

- 2.1 Derby has had high numbers of Children Looked After for an Authority of its size and type. Since Local Government re-organisation in 1997 there has been a sustained strategy to reduce these numbers. There are now 150 fewer children and YP Looked After than in 1997. This has been achieved through investment in preventative initiatives and investment that has been commensurate with the Governments objectives for Children. It has also been achieved through our increase in the use of Adoption for CLA who require permanence and whose birth families cannot for whatever reason provide this.

- 2.2 Whilst the numbers of CLA have reduced overall the level of need has increased. Children with complex needs and challenging behaviour require joined up and co-ordinated services with colleagues within Psychology and the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services as well as within Education.
- 2.3 Generally Children and Young People will do better when placed in Family settings. From the earlier figures Derby does well on the proportion of Children & Young People who are placed in families. Our current breakdown of the Authorities foster carers are as follows:

	Carers	Placements
Time limited and permanent placements	103	220
Specific carers	21	26
Children First (Disabled Children)	18	24
Link Families (Disabled Children)	24	44
Respite carers	14	21

2.4 **Assessment and Care Planning**

Children and Young People can only come to be Looked After following an assessment of their situation and their needs. Thorough exploration of alternative arrangements to meet their needs always takes place. They can be accommodated by agreement with parents or through orders made by Court. The Court process, where proceedings are initiated, are quite rightly thorough and demanding. Assessing social workers are required to submit detailed statements and care plans to the Court and these are routinely 90 – 100 pages in length.

Children are represented in the Court process by a Court appointed solicitor and by a “Guardian” who is an independent worker for the child or young person. Additionally there may be two or three solicitors representing parents and other relatives’ interests. Legal proceedings can be protracted and complex, nine months to a year is not unusual for completion.

The majority of qualified Social Workers who undertake this work are located in teams based at Stanley Road. Some assessment and care planning work is undertaken by Social Workers in the Disabled Children’s team and some within the hospital social work team. Vacancy rates for qualified social workers have been high with a peak last year of almost 40%. Significant work has been done to improve this and vacancy rates are currently 20%.

- 2.5 Some Children and Young People generally in the 11 – 17 age range require residential placements. In Derby we have four children’s homes and one children’s centre that offer a total of 41 places. Children’s residential care is regulated and inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspectorate. In addition regulation requires internal inspection under the Children Act. These are reported in summary to the Corporate Parenting Commission. Each home has a clear statement of purpose in relation to its role and

function.

We also purchase a small number of specialised residential placements from the independent sector. These are for disabled children and a small number of young people with particularly complex needs and challenging behaviour.

- 2.6 Children's placements are expensive. Our average unit cost per week for a Child Looked After is £567. Independent fostering agency placements commence at £750 per week and some can be double that amount. Independent residential placements cost between £3000 and £4000 per week. The costs of these are usually shared between Social Services, Education and Health.

2.7 Expenditure

The projected cost of Children's placements in 2004 – 05 is as follows:

External

- * Agency Residential = £432k
- * Agency Residential - Disabled Children = £452k
- * Agency Fostering = £1,666k

TOTAL = £2,550K

Internal

- * Residential Homes = £3,350
- * Fostering = £2,550k
- * Adoption = £550k

TOTAL = £6,450K

OVERALL TOTAL = £9.0M

3. Children's Stories

1. Molly's story – safeguarding and adoption.
2. Alan's story – a history of moves.

4. Key Issues

4.1 Placement Choice and Commissioning

Placement choice is probably the biggest single issue that affects the quality of outcome for Children Looked After. It is also the area that brings the biggest cost pressures. The Best Value Review of services for Looked After Children that was completed in September 2003 highlighted placement choice and the need for modernisation and improvement. In particular a number of actions related to the fostering service and Cabinet approved an

additional investment of £480,000 in the 04 – 05 budget to implement improvements. The changes made included an up-lift in the basic allowance levels and the introduction of an annual payment direct to carers of £1000. This work is on going with further proposals planned for implementation later this year including the introduction of a new fee based scheme. Improvements to the recruitment, training and support of carers were also introduced. This has helped to improve our recruitment and retention rates and reduce our use of externally purchased placements. Our aim is to bring our allowance rates in line with the Fostering networks recommended level. Our current allowance levels are shown below.

Age Group	Weekly Basic Allowance	Festivity Allowance	Birthday Allowance
0 - 4 years	82.58	165.16	123.87
5 - 10 years	94.12	188.24	141.18
11 - 15 years	117.13	234.26	175.70
16 - 18 years	149.42	298.84	224.13

Regional work is taking place to examine the most appropriate use of external placements and ways of increasing efficiency. Our use of external residential provision is primarily for disabled children and young people with very complex needs and challenging behaviour. Secure residential provision is also used when ordered by the Courts for remands in criminal proceedings. The Youth Justice Board and ourselves meet the costs of these jointly.

For our in-house residential provision the key issues are the quality of the physical environment and the partnership arrangements for meeting complex needs and responding to challenging behaviour.

4.2 Direct work with Children and Young People

An essential part of a social workers role is listening to and talking to children and young people. The Children Act 1989 gave The Local Authority the duty of needing to ascertain 'The Wishes and Feelings' of the child. This is important during assessments and when agreeing care plans. The social worker will need to help the child begin to understand what is happening to them, when for example they can no longer live with their parents and move to live with foster carers. This may involve a detailed piece of direct work.

Independent Reviewing Officers are responsible for ensuring that a CLA has a statutory review that agrees the care plan for the child. Part of this role is to ensure that the child has contributed to the plan and participated in the review. We have two reference groups for CLA – KICK (Kids in Care in Control) and Connectors. This gives CLA a voice in the planning and development of services and policies.