

Corporate Parenting Panel

21 July 2017

Looked After Children Annual Report
2016/17



Report of Carole Payne, Head of Children's Services, Durham County Council

Purpose of the report

- 1 This report seeks to provide an overview of the Looked After Children by Durham County Council during 2016-17 and the achievements, challenges and strategic priorities in relation to looked after children and young people moving forward.

Looked After Children

- 2 In UK Law, (Children Act 1989) a child is considered to be "looked after" if they are in the care of the local authority for more than 24 hours. A child in care may be living:
 - With foster carers
 - At home with their parents under the supervision of the local authority
 - In a residential children's home
 - In other residential settings like schools or secure units
- 3 A child may be placed in care with the agreement of the parents, or may be in care under the order of the Court, where a child is at risk of significant harm. The threshold for care requires the "risk of significant harm" to be assessed and demonstrated. Harm may be physical, emotional or sexual and includes the harm caused by neglect.

Looked After Children Activity and Trends

- 4 At 7/7/17, 789 children and young people were looked after by Durham County Council. This figure does not include children in the care of other local authorities who may be placed in County Durham.
- 5 Approximately 65% of these children will have a plan for permanence (a long term placement), whilst the remainder will either be short term or will not yet have had a plan determined.
- 6 Over the whole year, care was provided for 1137 children and young people, an increase of 182 on the previous year.

Table 1 - Children looked after, between 1 April - 31 March

2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Difference to last year	
871	920	1109	+189	Child looked after (excludes under an agreed series of short term breaks)
54	51	31	-20	Child looked after under an agreed series of short term breaks
39	35	28	-7	Child looked after exclusively under an agreed series of short term breaks
910	955	1137	+182	TOTAL CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

- 7 This reflects the fact that some children stay in care for a relatively short period of time, whilst others are long term. Table 2, below shows that 440 children started to be looked after in 2016/17, an increase of 139 on the previous year. One hundred of these were looked after on voluntary orders in the first instance. Over the same period, 303 children ceased to be looked after, an increase of 51 on the previous year.

Table 2 - Children who started to be looked after by legal status, between 1 April - 31 March

2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	Difference to last year	
33	47	71	+24	Interim care order
3	3	7	+4	Full care order
208	223	322	+99	Voluntary agreement under section 20 single period of accommodation
0	0	0	0	Freed for adoption order
0	2	0	-2	Placement order
6	4	5	+1	On remand, committed for trial, or detained
12	22	35	+13	Emergency protection order, police protection order, or child assessment order
262	301	440	+139	TOTAL CHILDREN WHO STARTED TO BE LOOKED AFTER
26.1	30.0	43.9	+13.9	RATE OF CHILDREN WHO STARTED TO BE LOOKED AFTER PER 10,000 POPULATION
48	74	113	+39	OF WHICH: TOTAL CHILDREN TAKEN INTO CARE
18.3%	24.6%	25.7%	+1.1%	% OF CHILDREN TAKEN INTO CARE

Legal Orders

Table 3 - Children looked after by legal status, at 31 March

31st March 2015	31st March 2016	31st March 2017	Difference to last year	
35	64	78	+14	Interim care order
328	366	424	+58	Full care order
197	167	239	+72	Voluntary agreement under section 20 single period of accommodation
0	0	0	0	Freed for adoption order
59	80	74	-6	Placement order
0	3	2	-1	On remand, committed for trial, or detained
0	0	0	0	Emergency protection order, police protection order, or child assessment order
619	680	817	+137	TOTAL CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

- 8 Table 3 shows the legal orders to which looked after children were subject in 2016/17. There are significant increases in interim and full care orders, as well as in voluntary agreements under Section 20. This reflects regional and national trends. An increase in care orders of 114% over the last ten years has been reported nationally. It is unclear how much of this increase is driven by need and how much by changes in Court and social work practice.

Looked After and Permanence Service Overview

- 9 Children and young people with care plans of permanence or adoption are managed through the LAC and Permanence Service and the remaining looked after children cases are held with Child Protection, 0-13 Disability Team, Families First Teams and a small number with the 14-25 Transitions Team.
- 10 In addition to children in care, there are 189 Care Leavers being supported by the Young People's Service (YPS) as of the 31 March 2017. A separate report has been prepared in relation to Care Leavers.
- 11 The Looked After and Permanence Service consists of:
- a. A Young People's Service consisting of a North and South Team. These teams support children and young people aged 15+, care leavers and former relevant young people.

- b. Three Looked After Social Work Teams that safeguard and case manage children and young people who are permanently looked after by the Local Authority and those who require adoption.
- c. The Fostering Service recruits and assesses carers, provides ongoing support and development to long-term and short term foster carers and oversees family and friends placements. The Placement Team is responsible for identifying appropriate in-house foster placements and external placements with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs) where required and to ensure oversight of placement availability and capacity.
- d. The Adoption Service which recruits and assesses potential adopters, identifies appropriate adopters for children with a plan of adoption, supports children and families throughout the adoption process. It also provides post adoption support and counselling services to adopted adults.
- e. The Residential Children's Service consists of 7 x long-term homes and 1 x home for younger children (aged 8-11) totalling 32 available placements for children who are in the long term care of the Authority. In addition Park House offers short break overnight accommodation for 5 disabled children and young people and an emergency bed for disabled children.
- f. Full Circle, provides therapeutic services for looked after children, adopted children and young people, and children in need.

For more information in relation to the structure of the LAC and Permanence Service, please refer to Appendix 2 of this report.

12 The aim of the service is to :

- ensure stable and secure care for all looked after children, young people and care leavers;
- to safeguard all looked after children and young people;
- to maximise the potential of looked after children, young people and care leavers and promote best outcomes in all areas of their lives;
- to promote their smooth transition to adulthood and
- to provide consistent social work support

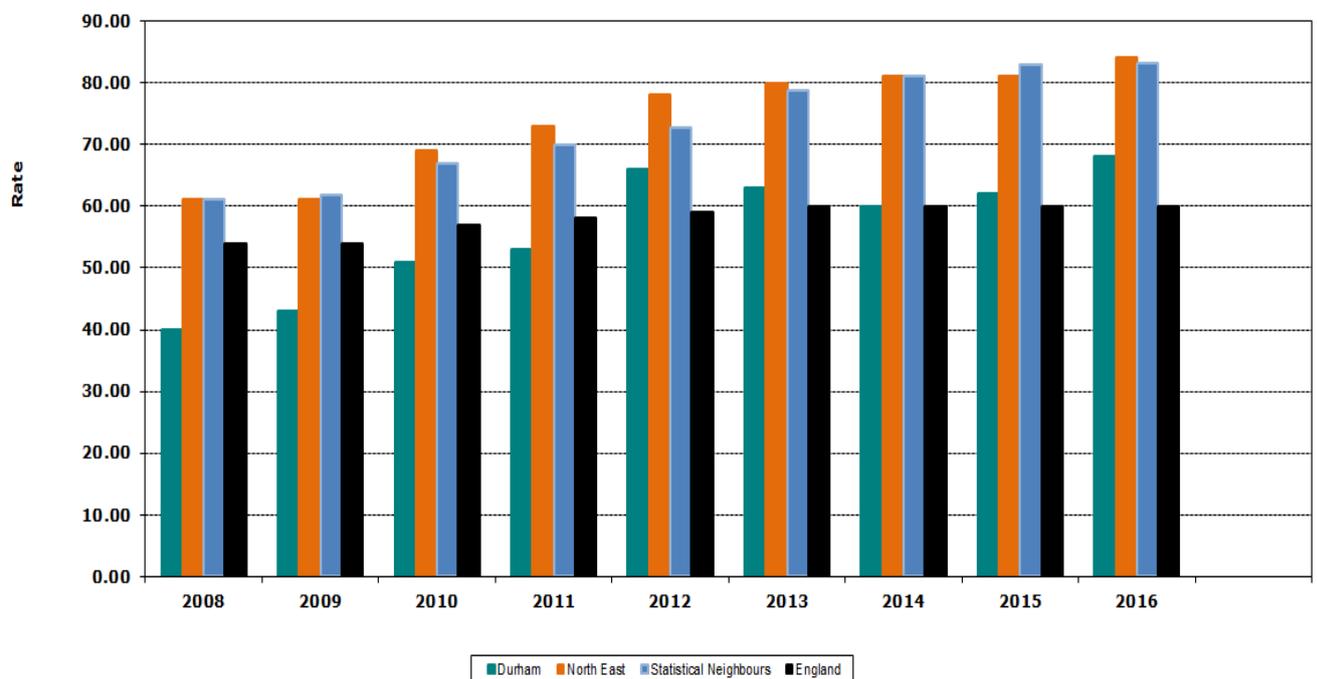
13 Cases transfer to the LAC service once a plan for permanence is agreed. The LAC and permanence service is responsible for 455 of 789 LAC cases currently, or approximately 58% of the total population. The remainder are subject to ongoing assessment or are not expected to require long term / permanent care.

Looked After Children Trend

- 14 In April 2015 the number of looked after children in Durham was at 622 providing a LAC rate of 62 per 10,000 population, which increased to a rate of 68 in 2016. This was significantly below the rates for both regional (84) and statistical neighbours (83.2) but slightly above the national average rate of 60 per 10,000 population.
- 15 Since April 2016 (677) the number of looked after children has continued to rise, reaching a peak of 817 during April 2017, beyond the numbers previously projected. Durham's LAC rate as at April 2017 has exceeded previous rates reaching 81.5 per 10,000 population.

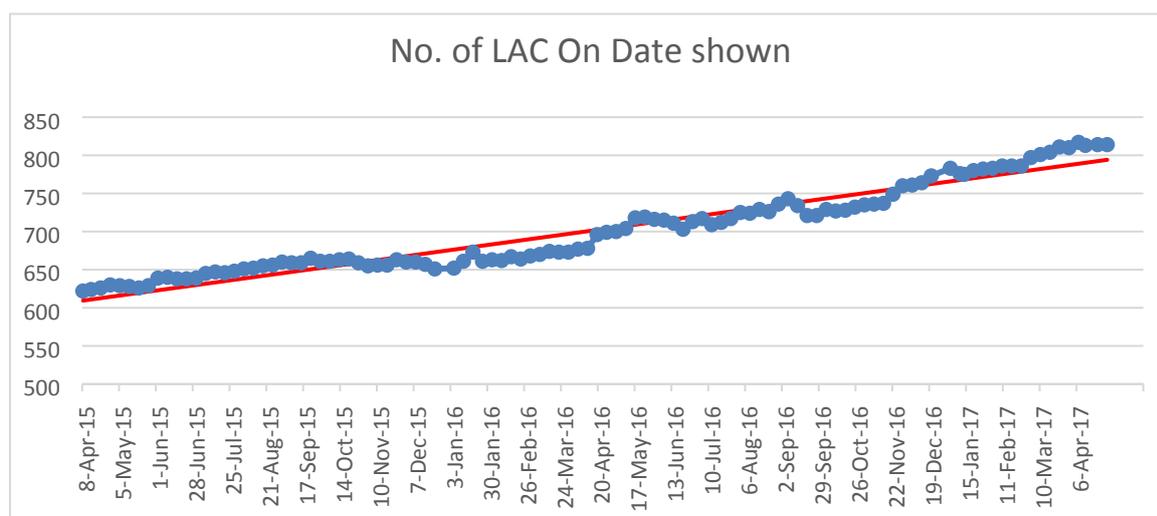
Table 4

Children looked after rate, per 10,000 children aged under 18



- 16 Table 4 demonstrates the trend in Durham's LAC rates in comparison to regional, statistical neighbours and national rates from 2008 to 2016.
- 17 Whilst the looked after population has fluctuated somewhat during 2015/16, over the past twelve months there has been a clear upward trend. Numbers have increased by 31.8% since April 2015 which equates to an additional 196 looked after children in the care of the local authority.
- 18 The rate per 10,000 child population has increased from the low point of 68 since 2014. However Durham's rate remains well below the regional rate of 84 per 10,000.

Table 5 - LAC Actuals and Monthly Trend (April 2015 – 2017)



Placement Pressures

- 19 As looked after numbers have risen quickly, this has directly impacted the availability of suitable placements for children and young people. With in-house placement provision being explored as a first option, capacity is currently limited. This has resulted in an increased usage of external placements, both foster care and residential provision.
- 20 In response to the high number of children in care, significant demand on services and projected budget overspend, a Placement Efficiency Plan has been developed.
- 21 The current budget for LAC placements excluding in-house residential totals £13.5m in 2017/18. The service is already projecting a potential overspend between £1.8m and £3.3m in the current financial year on placement costs for Looked After Children as a result of these increased demands.
- 22 A Placement Efficiency Plan has been developed to provide a framework, setting out a strategy, to deliver both service improvements and placement efficiencies. The Plan aims to meet the required £2million savings target, identified within the Medium Term Financial Plan, over 2018/19 and 2019/20. Further information about the Plan is detailed in the 'Strategic Priorities' section of this report.
- 23 In relation to placement provision, Table 6 clearly outlines:

In-House Provision:

- 48% of children and young people in the care of the local authority are placed within in-house fostering placements, this represents a 12.3% increase since April 2015. This excludes family and friends care placements.
- In-house residential presents a 3.5% increase and is currently operating at 100% capacity.

- The largest increase is represented by Family and Friends placements showing a significant increase of 81% since April 2015 with almost 20% of the LAC cohort living in this type of arrangement, which provides stability and reduces moves for children.
- Placement with Parents arrangements have shown an increase of 115%; however this only represents an additional 23 children/young people living with their parents.
- Adoption placements have increased by 56% which equates to an additional 13 adoption placements. This is welcome following a number of years of reduction in adoption numbers.

Table 6 – Placement Numbers and Mix (1 April 2015 to 12 May 2017)

Care Provider Classification	01/04/2015	12/05/17	% of LAC 12/05/17	Care Provider Classification	Change in Number of Placements Since 1st April 15	% change since 1st April 15
External Residential (incl. children's homes and res school)	15	24	2.91%	External Residential (incl. children's homes and res school)	9	60.00%
IFA	80	121	14.68%	IFA	41	51.25%
In House Foster Care	350	393	47.69%	In House Foster Care	43	12.29%
Friends and Family	90	163	19.78%	Friends and Family	73	81.11%
In House Residential (incl. Children's homes)	28	29	3.52%	In House Residential (incl. Children's homes)	1	3.57%
Secure (incl. YOI and prisons)	2	4	.49%	Secure (incl. YOI and prisons)	2	100.00%
Independent Living (incl. Supported Lodgings)	9	11	1.33%	Independent Living (incl. Supported Lodgings)	2	22.22%
Placed For Adoption	23	36	4.37%	Placed For Adoption	13	56.52%
Placed With Parents	20	43	5.22%	Placed With Parents	23	115.00%
	617	824	100.00%	-	207	33.55%

External Provision:

- The increase in LAC has necessitated increased use of external provision and as a result there has been a 51.2% increase in the commissioning of Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) placements since April 2015. As of the 12 May 2017, 14.7% of the LAC cohort are placed in IFAs, in comparison to 12.3% of the LAC cohort on the 25 February 2015. To provide a further comparison neighbouring Local Authority data shows that 14.7% of Northumberland's LAC cohort are placed in IFAs and 26.8% in South Tyneside.
- The current demand for IFA placements is high across the region reflecting the increase in LAC in almost all Local Authorities across the

region. The high demand has presented particular challenges when trying to match and place children and young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour.

- When comparing the number of external residential placements as of 1 April 2015 (15) and 1 April 2017 (24), there are 9 additional placements. The young people moving into external residential placements present complex and challenging behaviour and it is unlikely that in-house provision would have been able to meet their needs. Specialist foster care placements, through the Fostering Xtra Scheme, may provide an alternative placement option for some of these young people, but not all.
- Whilst the increase in IFAs and external residential is low in comparison to the total LAC population, the cost of these placements are significantly higher than in-house provision. This has resulted in significant pressure on the placement budget.

24 The average weekly placement cost is outlined in Table 7 below.

Table 7 – Average Cost Analysis of Placement Mix

Placement Type	Average weekly cost (£)	Average annual cost (£)
External Residential Care	3,340	174,157
External Residential School	2,941	153,352
In house residential care	2,852	148,711
IFA	780	40,671
In House Foster Care	392	20,414
Independent Living	277	14,444
Friends and Family	164	8,551

Budget

25 The budget for foster care and external residential placements was overspent by £3.42m in 2016-17 and as a result of the number of LAC increases by 137 (20%) from 673 at the end of 2015-16 to 810 at the end of 2016-17. During the same period the number of placements in more expensive external residential and fostering placements increased from 112 to 140 (25%).

26 The Placement Resource Panel (PRP) was established in April 2017. This group provides a 'gatekeeping role' and has oversight of placement requests, review of external placements and consideration of cases when an external placement needs to be sought. It also provides information to support a future needs analysis.

Adoption

- 27 The adoption service was judged as “good“ by Ofsted in their 2016 inspection. The number of adopters recruited in 2016/17 reduced to 29 from 37 the previous year, however the number of children adopted increased from 28 to 53.
- 28 There has been a reduction in the interest in adoption over the last 12 months. The **Recruitment and Marketing Strategy** has continued but apart from some interest over Christmas/New Year, this has largely failed to generate interest from prospective adopters to apply to adopt with Durham County Council. Marketing continues on Durham’s website and Facebook page as well as more broadly in the community. In recent months, there has also been ongoing advertising for both fostering and adoption on Durham pool cars. The Recruitment and Marketing Strategy seeks to maximise enquiries.
- 29 The experience in Durham has been mirrored by Local Authorities both regionally and nationally, despite a lower overall level of interest, 65 children were approved for adoption during 2016-17 in comparison to 53 in 2015-16 and 46 in 2014-15. This demonstrates that there is a year on year increase in relation to children being approved for adoption.
- 30 During 2016-17, a total of 51 adoption orders were granted. This was a significant increase on the previous year (28). The number of birth parents who contest the Placement Order, or oppose the granting of the Adoption Order at the Initial Birth Parent Hearing has increased and is now the norm. In the majority of cases their application or appeal is not granted but this has continued to cause hearings to be adjourned until a later date, causing delay in the granting of the Adoption Order. This creates anxiety for adopters who require and receive extensive support from their adoption worker at this time and delays permanence for the children involved.
- 31 Due to the lack of available adopters within Durham, particularly those who could consider a child with complex needs, there was an increase in the number of children placed with Voluntary Adoption Agencies and other Local Authorities, as the Adoption Team remain committed to placing children with their new families at the earliest opportunity.
- 32 During 2016-17, one child who had been placed for adoption by DCC was returned to the care of the Local Authority following an Adoption Disruption. Thankfully these unsuccessful adoptions are rare in Durham.

Adoption Feedback

- 33 Feedback from adopters has been positive throughout the year:

“The service we received from the outset has been outstanding. From the moment we walked into Durham Resource Centre we were made to feel at ease, everyone was so warm and friendly. The staff from Durham County Council were

professional, helpful and patient. Everything you would expect and more. We were very impressed”.

“To date we have had a very positive experience with Durham. Considering what we hope to gain, we would gladly work closely with this agency and others in the future. We actually spoke to four adoption agencies prior to making our decision to proceed. One of the reasons that we chose Durham was the provision of the Full Circle therapeutic support service”.

Post Adoption Support

- 34 It is acknowledged that children placed for adoption and their families often require additional support over the period of their childhood. Durham has been a forerunner in the provision of support due to The Full Circle Therapeutic Service, which provides bespoke therapeutic interventions in a timely manner. This sets Durham apart from our regional neighbours and has often been the reason why prospective adopters choose to come to Durham Adoption Agency.
- 35 Adoption support systems and processes have been reviewed and re-designed to provide a more effective, efficient and responsive service for all affected by adoption which underpins the implementation of the **Durham Adoption Support Passport**. Adopters and their families are informed that they have a right to request an assessment of their adoption support needs throughout the life time journey of their adoption experiences until the child reaches the age of 18.
- 36 Adoption support needs are evaluated during assessment, matching and placement in order to achieve positive outcomes and where required, additional support from a wide range of services is available, including:
- Dedicated Looked After Nurses, life story co-ordinator, Full Circle Therapeutic Service and Clinical Consultant Child Psychologist all contribute to provide excellent support to adopters and professionals in addressing any health issues. A Consultant Paediatrician meets all adopters during the linking and matching process.
 - Informal “buddy” support from approved adopters for newly approved adopters and those who need “friendly” support and advice.
 - The LACES (Looked After Children Education Support) Service offers a wide range of support, advice and guidance to adopters and professionals with regard to educational issues. The use of Pupil Premium Plus continues to be promoted.
 - Out of Hours support is available for adopters through the Durham County Council Emergency Duty Team (EDT) when required.
 - The dedicated Consultant Clinical Child Psychologist provided consultations to adopters which helped them to understand the impact of trauma and neglect upon children’s behaviour and relationships as

well as thinking about the children and young people's developmental, emotional and mental health issues and concerns and promoted placement stability. This is especially important during matching.

- Attachment Training is delivered by Full Circle to staff and carers and receives excellent feedback from adopters and is invaluable to assist them in their understanding of the needs of children and some of the challenges their behaviour may bring, ensuring that adopters offer suitable therapeutic parenting to children from the outset. All adopters are offered the opportunity to attend the attachment course either prior to or following placement.

Full Circle

- 37 During 2016-17, 396 referrals were received by the Full Circle Service. This consisted of 272 requests for one-off consultations and 124 request for on-going therapeutic work.
- 38 Of the 124 requests for ongoing work, the child or young person's living status was:
- 15 accommodated with relatives;
 - 3 at home;
 - 98 in foster care;
 - 3 pre-adoption placement; and
 - 5 in residential care
- 39 One off consultations involved reflective discussions with Social Workers, residential staff, foster carers and adopters prior to the placement of a child or young person. All children who are being placed for permanence (either through a fostering or adoption route) have a consultation with the Consultant Clinical Psychologist at the point of matching.
- 40 On average there have been 176 open cases for looked after children during the year. Including work ongoing from previous years.
- 41 Full Circle have delivered therapeutic parenting courses to foster carers, based on the Kim Golding 'House Model' of parenting. This intervention is recommended by NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) to provide support for the emotional needs of looked after children through increased placement stability, providing carers with an understanding of attachment and trauma and increasing carer resilience and confidence.
- 42 The Nurturing Attachment Course has been delivered to 35 fostering households (40 carers). A total of 3 courses are run each year for Durham foster carers.
- 43 The Connected Person's Therapeutic Parenting Course was delivered to 9 carers from Regulation 24 fostering households.

- 44 The Full Circle Service also supports and provides a therapeutic input to young children placed at the West Rainton Home. Children referred to the home have experienced several placement breakdowns and often present attachment issues. A multi-agency approach is adopted which aims to stabilise the behaviour of children with a view to moving them onto long-term foster care.

Adoption Support Fund

- 45 The Adoption Support Fund (ASF) has been available to families throughout 2016/17. This has funded therapeutic support for adopted children and their families. During 2016-17, Full Circle has claimed £101,137.01 (for 32 children / families) with a further £20,392.50 being claimed following assessment of Children's post adoption support needs from outside therapeutic organisations (for 8 children / families). In 2015-16, £145,122.27 was claimed from the Adoption Support Fund. The reduction is due to the amended claim criteria and the 'fair access' limit introduced by Government in December 2016 to manage the high number of applications and their associated costs across the country. The ASF is expected to continue until at least 2020.

Regionalisation of Adoption

- 46 Discussions have been ongoing throughout 2016/17 in relation to regionalising adoption. In March 2017, After Adoption as the lead agency submitted a Practice Improvement Framework (PIF) bid. This bid detailed the proposal that Durham County Council Adoption Service, with Cumbria County Council Adoption Service and Sunderland (now 'Together for Children' registered as a Voluntary Adoption Agency), along with the 4 existing voluntary agencies - After Adoption, Barnardos, ARC and DFW Adoption, should set up a collaboration with a view to forming a Regional Organisation in the future. The bid has been submitted, but no response is expected until at least September 2017.
- 47 Plans to move towards a 'regional alliance' are ongoing but in the very early stages. The establishment of a regional alliance looks to embed a culture of early permanence planning across all agencies and to reduce delay for children who require permanence through adoption and foster care at the earliest point. It is a child centred approach which will build on existing partnership arrangements and support the initial development of a new cross sector East/West collaboration on which to build a future Regional Adoption Agency.

Performance in Permanence in Foster Care

- 48 There have been 29 children and young people referred to the Fostering Service for a long term foster placement in the year 2016-2017. These children were added to the existing list of all children with a ratified plan of permanence via long term fostering. On 31st March 2017 there were 131 children and young people with a ratified plan of permanence via long term

fostering. Of these, 45 children had no identified permanent placement in 29 sibling groups.

- 49 To reduce the need for re-assessment of foster carers, wherever it is appropriate to do so, newly approved foster carers will be approved to offer both long term and short term placements. This means that although they may wish to offer only short placements, if their position changes at some future point, they can offer long term placements without the need for re-assessment.
- 50 On average, children waited an average of 7 months 10 days to be matched into a permanent placement.
- 51 As a result of the increased number of children being referred for long term foster placements, the authority does not have a sufficient supply of in-house long term foster carers. In December 2016, the Commissioning Service and the Fostering Service developed a process which enabled IFAs to be approached for 5 children that required a long-term placement. The children selected for this process were those who had been waiting longest.
- Only 2 of the 5 children could be placed in an IFA Placement due to their complex needs. This indicates the need for the development of specialist carers willing and able to look after children with complex needs.

Family Finding

- 52 From July 2017, a new approach to finding a permanent family for children will be introduced.
- 53 The Permanence Team undertake monthly matching and selection meetings to consider current long term vacancies, future vacancies, and the needs of individual children.
- 54 Once the placement is deemed as appropriate, an introduction planning meeting, chaired by the Permanence Team Manager, which sets a plan of introductions will take place. This includes initial visits, overnight stays, as well as activities around the child and families involved. The introduction period can take between 4-6 weeks depending on a number of factors including going at the child's pace.

Recruitment of Foster Carers

- 55 The recruitment of foster carers in Durham continues to be a challenge. There are currently over 30 Fostering Services in the North East with 16 Fostering Services having an office in Co Durham. It is therefore a competitive market place.
- 56 Table 8 shows the activity at each stage of the Recruitment Process. National research indicates that the number of prospective carers progressing to the next stage of the process reduces by 50% at each stage.

Therefore it is imperative to attract a large number of potential foster carers in anticipation of a much smaller number completing the process.

Table 8 – Fostering Recruitment Activity

	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
Initial Enquiry	18	34	27	31	15	27	16	27	25	59	31	31	341
Attending Drop In Session	1	24	4	11	9	17	6	5	6	24	10	13	130
Expression of Interest Forms	8	13	10	18	10	11	7	10	10	19	21	10	147
Initial Visits	2	3	7	11	5	7	4	3	7	5	10	6	70
Application Forms Accepted	1	1	6	0	1	7	3	1	4	0	3	5	32
Attending Training	-	-	6 (1 f&f)	-	-	11	0	7	0	4	0	17	45(1f&f)

57 The total number of enquiries made in 2016-17 was 341. This is a slight increase from 2015-16 (331). There is a clear correlation between specific campaign publicity and an increase in enquiries. The number of enquires per month range from 15 in August to 59 in January, which underlines the importance of marketing.

58 A total of 25 carers were approved during the year. The majority of assessments were completed in under 6 months. From this cohort of carers:

- 40 placements have been provided;
- One carer was matched with a sibling group of 4 on a permanent basis;
- One carer is providing care to a sibling group of 3 on a short term basis;
- 5 carers had previous fostering experience;
- All carers provided a placement within the first month of their approval.

Ofsted Inspection, actions and progress

59 Ofsted’s Single Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers and a review of Local Safeguarding Children Board was carried out between 22 February 2016 and 16 March 2016.

60 The outcome was an overall judgement of **requires improvement**. The graded judgement for Children Looked After was also “requires improvement” but adoption services and services for care leavers were graded “good”. Many strengths in services for looked after children were identified as well as areas for improvement.

Strengths

- Placements with friends and family members are used to provide a safe place for children and young people to live.
- Placements are of good quality and meet children's needs.
- There is a good range of placements available for children. The means that most live near home, and brothers and sisters can live together.
- Social workers visit children regularly and take account of their wishes and feelings.
- The virtual school, through LACES team, provides good-quality support for the education of children looked after.
- Children looked after have their health needs considered effectively in most cases.
- The Full Circle service provides timely and effective support for children's and young people's emotional and mental health needs.
- Children's care plans are regularly reviewed.
- The adoption services is child focused. Children are identified early and are found appropriate placements without undue delay.
- Care leavers are well supported to achieve independence and the vast majority engage very well with leaving care services.
- The majority of care leaver are in suitable accommodation.

Areas for improvement

- Delays in completing assessments of friends and family members as foster carers mean that children are not always deemed to be looked after as quickly as they should be. There are also delays for some children within the pre-proceedings phase of the Public Law Outline (PLO) and where the plan is for a special guardianship order.
- Some children have had too many changes of social worker.
- Personal Education Plans (PEP) are of variable quality.
- There have been recent improvements in the timeliness of health assessments when children first become looked after, though there is more work to do on this.
- Further improvements are needed in updating written pathway assessments to include specific targets and fully consider and collate health histories.

61 An improvement plan to address the recommendations of Ofsted's inspection report was submitted to Ofsted on 28 September 2016.

62 A detailed Ofsted Improvement Plan was developed which provides the performance framework for the monitoring of the programme overview. The Quality and Improvement Board chaired by the Director of Children and Young People's Services, meets monthly to provide strategic oversight on the detailed improvement plan and to lead improvement in quality across the service. Progress made since the inspection includes:

- Establishment of additional social work posts in the Looked After Service.
- The Corporate Parenting Panel have agreed new terms of reference and their membership has been reviewed. 'Political Oversight' liaison meetings between the Cabinet Member, Scrutiny and Corporate Parenting chairs, supported by the Corporate Director have been established to support cross referral of issues between cabinet, scrutiny and the Corporate Parenting Panel to, drive strong political oversight.
- A new electronic case file recording system has been procured and a new case management system will be introduced for social work.
- A new Performance Management Quality (PMQ) Framework has been developed providing oversight to political and senior managers which will be fully implemented from September 2017.
- Assessments for looked after children are now regularly updated.
- Improvements to Placement with Parent reports have been implemented.
- The Regulation 24 arrangements have been strengthened for temporary foster care.
- Private fostering arrangements in line with statutory guidance have been strengthened through an ongoing awareness raising campaign.
- A service level agreement with the Youth Offending Service is now in place for the provision of an independent visitor service.
- An Adoption Recruitment Strategy has been developed outlining Durham's approach to regionalisation.

Children's Home Inspections

- 63 From April 2015, children's homes including Aycliffe Secure Services have been inspected under Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Homes Framework.
- 64 From 1 April 2017, Ofsted will inspect children's homes including secure homes under the Social Care Common Inspection Framework ([SCCIF](#)).
- 65 Table 9 captures the inspections that occurred under Ofsted's Inspection of Children's Homes Framework during 2016-17 and up to 24 April 2017.

Table 9 – Children’s Home Inspection Judgments

Name	Full inspection date	Full inspection Overall Judgement	Interim Inspection Date	Interim Inspection Overall Judgement
Park House	17.05.2016	Good	20.12.2016	Sustained effectiveness
Attlee Estate*	31.05.2016	Good	07.02.2017	Improved effectiveness
Newton Drive	07.06.2016	Outstanding	25.01.2017	Sustained effectiveness
Moorside	28.06.2016	Requires improvement	31.01.2017	Sustained effectiveness
New Lea House	12.07.2016	Good	09.03.2017	Sustained effectiveness
Aycliffe Secure	27.09.2016	Good	15.02.2017	Sustained effectiveness
High Etherley	16.05.2017	Good	16.06.2017	Improved effectiveness
Cedar Drive	25.10.2016	Good	09.02.2017	Improved effectiveness
Blackgate East**	11.10.2016	Good	14.02.2017	Improved effectiveness
West Rainton	21.12.2016	Outstanding	27.03.2017	Improved effectiveness

*Attlee Estate was inspected again on 30.5.17, the outcome is awaited **Blackgate East was inspected again on 06.06.17, outcome is awaited

Care Leavers

66 Given the importance of care leavers and the work that has taken place during the year, a separate Annual Report has been prepared which focuses on the work of the Young People’s Service.

Education of Looked After Children

67 The 2016-17 information which highlights the educational attainment and progress of our looked after children and young people is not available until September 2017. The update below therefore focuses on key information and messages from 2015-16 data.

The Durham Virtual School for Looked After Children is focused on improving educational outcomes and accelerating learning from Early Years to the end of Year 13. We ensure all children in Durham’s care have aspirational, challenging and meaningful targets and they have access to the support needed to enable their personal education plan to be achieved.

68 There are currently 98 Looked After Children with an Education Health and Care Plan.

69 In Key Stage 1, looked after children perform less well than all children in Durham; however they perform better than children identified as “in need”. As identified in Table 10, only 48% of the reported LAC cohort achieved expected standards in writing. As yet we do not have any national data for either looked after or children in need.

Table 10 – Attainment in Key Stage 1

	Durham LAC (Reporting cohort with results)	Durham overall	Durham CiN	National Emerging overall from NCER – internal use only
Expected Standard in Reading	61%	75%	52%	74%
Expected Standard in Writing	48%	70%	44%	66%
Expected Standard in Maths	57%	75%	51%	63%

- 70 Looked after children with an identified special educational need, attain better than similar children in Durham and similar children who are classed as “in need”. Provisional national data also suggests that Durham Looked After Children outperform children with an identified SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) nationally.
- 71 This is not the case, however, for children without a special educational need. When compared to all Durham children, children in need and similar children nationally, looked after children in key stage 1, without a special need underperform in all areas.
- 72 Overall, by the end of key stage 2, Durham looked after children, attain less well than all Durham children, but outperform children in need as outlined in Table 11. This demonstrates the beneficial impact of “care” on Children in Need.

Table 11 – Attainment in Key Stage 2

	Durham LAC (cohort 25)	Durham overall	Durham CiN	National Official
Expected Standard in Reading	60%	69%	35%	66%
Expected Standard in Writing	52%	78%	42%	74%
Expected Standard in Maths	56%	75%	40%	70%
Expected Standard GPS	48%	75%	40%	72%
Expected Standard RWM	44%	59%	22%	53%

- 73 Only 48% of the reported LAC cohort achieved the expected standard in grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- 74 In Key Stage 2, Durham Looked After Children with an identified special educational need, outperform similar children in Durham overall. When compared to provisional data for similar children nationally, Durham looked after attain higher in all areas.

- 75 This is not the case, for looked after children without an identified special educational need. Durham Looked after children without an identified special educational need outperform similar children in Durham and nationally in reading but no other area. They do however, attain higher in all areas, except writing, than children in need.
- 76 From attainment data , outcomes for young people looked after by Durham County Council who left school in 2016 have increased by 16.3% at 5A*CEM and by 16.8% at A*CEM. National data is not yet available for key stage 4.
- 77 For young people reaching the end of their secondary school education, an aspirational target of 23.6% was set for 5A*CEM. This target was exceeded, see Table 12.

Table 12 – Key Stage 4 Attainment

KS 4	5A*CEM	A*C Maths	A*C English	A*CEM
2016	29.7%	32.4%	37.8%	32.4%
2015	12.9%	16.1	35.5%	16.1%
2014	4.4%	31.0%	22.2%	11.1%

- 78 The following key messages are identified in the 2015/16 Annual Durham Virtual School Report:
- At Key Stage 2 Durham looked after children have higher value added than other children in Durham.
 - At Key Stage 4, a third of looked after children achieved 5 A*CEM.
 - Looked after children with an identified SEN attain higher than similar children in Durham.
 - Overall, Durham’s looked after children outperform “children in need” .
 - Durham’s looked after children attend school regularly.
 - Looked after girls outperform looked after boys.
 - There have been no permanent exclusion for looked after children in 2015-16.
 - Almost half of all Durham’s looked after children (49.1%) have an identified special educational need. At key stage 1, this rises to 70%.
 - Almost 40% of all Durham’s looked after children who have a special educational need have been identified as having social, emotional or mental health issues.

Health of Looked After Children

- 79 Both the proportion of children looked after for 12 months or more who have had a dental check or health assessment have decreased in comparison to last year and both are now below 90%. This is outlined in Table 13.

Table 13 – dental checks and health assessments

Measure	2016/17 Qtr 4	Target 2016/17	2015/16 Qtr 4	DoT	England	North East	Statistical Neighbour
Percentage of children looked after continuously for 12 months or more who had a dental check [accumulative exceptions in brackets]	87.1% [63]	Tracker	95.5%	↓	84.4% (2013/14)	86.3% (2013/14)	
Percentage of children looked after continuously for 12 months or more who have had the required number of health assessments [accumulative exceptions in brackets]	84.8% [74]	Tracker	89.0%	↓	88.4% (2013/14)	94.7% (2013/14)	

80 Additionally, the timeliness and completion of Initial Health Assessments (IHA) within the statutory timescale of 20 working days has caused concern. This may have an impact on health needs not being met in a timely manner. In Q4, 64% of children (69 of 108) were seen for an IHA within 20 working days of entering care. This has increased from 53% in Q3 continuing an upward trend quarter on quarter. The number of joint actions have been agreed to improve performance.

Strategic Priorities

81 The Looked After and Permanence Service will focus on the following 'strategic priorities' in 2017-18:

- Placement Efficiency and budget pressures
- Early permanence in foster care and adoption
- Recruitment of foster carers and adopters
- Regionalisation of Adoption
- Care Leavers
- Corporate Parenting and Political Oversight

Placement Efficiency and Budget Pressures

82 Children and Young People's Service are currently developing a 'Placement Efficiency Plan'. This seeks to set out a strategy to deliver both service improvements and placement efficiencies. The Plan aims to meet the required £2 million savings target, identified within the Medium Term Financial Plan, over 2018/19 and 2019/20 by providing a cost effective mix of placements to meet the needs of our LAC population.

83 The current budget for LAC placements excluding in-house residential totals £13.5m in 2017/18. The service is projecting a significant overspend in the current financial year.

- 84 The Plan is committed to developing and implementing changes to meet the demand of the most vulnerable children, young people and families in our community. Whilst understanding the need for best value in service provision, the plan also recognises both the authority's duty to secure sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of our looked after children and the commitment to deliver early help and prevention services to children, young people and their families.
- 85 The Placement Efficiency Plan will be delivered as part of a 'whole-system' approach underpinned by a number of key priorities, including;
- Ensuring the availability and efficiency of placement provision;
 - Understanding the LAC cohort;
 - Developing cusp of care provision;
 - Ensuring effective decision making and planning for permanence for children who require to be looked after;
 - Engaging our partners;
 - Modelling full cost of care provision over time.
- 86 The Plan will be finalised over the coming months.

Early permanence in foster care and adoption

- 87 For those children who are unable to live within their birth families, a permanency plan will be in place by the child / young person's second looked after review (four months after becoming looked). Providing permanence for looked after children is a key priority for everyone involved in delivering high quality care services for our most vulnerable children.
- 88 Improvements to be made during 2017-18 in relation to early permanence will ensure:
- That children are referred to the permanence team in a timely manner and to minimise delay wherever possible.
 - That the referral process to the Permanence Team is well embedded into practice.
 - That an alert system which to those children who have been waiting for a permanent placement for some time is developed.
 - That a lead for championing the needs of children waiting for permanence to ensure drift and delay is limited is created.

Recruitment of foster carers and adopters

- 89 The recruitment of foster carers and adopters remains a priority for the service moving forward. Due to the high numbers of children and young people in the care of the authority we need to continue to develop our in-house foster care provision through the recruitment of new foster carer households. During 2017-18 there is a recruitment target of 250 new fostering households.

Regionalisation of Adoption

- 90 Due to the requirements to work towards a Regional Adoption Agency by 2020 and for all Local Authorities to have plans for the above outlined by 2018, the authority will continue to work in partnership the local authorities and VAA's (Voluntary Adoption Agencies) as previously outlined to progress the development and establishment of an 'Alliance'.

Care Leavers

- 91 Offering appropriate support, improving life chances and supporting transitions to independence for care leavers continues to be a key priority for the Young People's Service throughout 2017-18. Whilst the last Ofsted Inspection provided an overall judgement of 'good' in respect of support, improving outcomes and opportunities for care leavers, the inspection did identify some areas for improvement particularly in relation to pathway plans being undertaken with young people and the need to include specific targets and health histories.
- 92 Another key priority for the Young People's Service is the need to ensure that an appropriate menu of accommodation and support services is available for young people aged 16+ with low, medium and high to complex support needs. The Young People's Service is working with Housing Solutions and Commissioning to ensure that accommodation options are developed, which are appropriate for young people, meet their support needs and provide value for money.

Children in Care Council (CICC)

- 93 Over the past year Investing in Children have facilitated on-going dialogue with managers and staff from the authority and members of the CICC have tried to change things based on what Looked After Children and young people have told us. Improvements have been made in a number of areas for looked after children. These are outlined in detail in Appendix 3 of the report. Further detail on care leavers is provided in the Care Leavers Annual report.

Good News Stories

- 94 During the year there have been a number of 'good news stories' reported by staff across the Looked After and Permanence Service. Some of these are captured in Appendix 4 of the report.

Report Summary

- 95 This report summarises the Council's activity for looked after children over the last year.
- 96 The year has been characterised by increasing demand for LAC services and fostering and residential services have struggled to cope with the demand. Budgets have failed to cope with the cost of services provided.

- 97 Following a number of years of decreasing adoption rates following changes to Family Court practice, the rate of adoption increased last year to its highest ever rate in County Durham, supported by a range of post adoption support services, primarily the Full Circle service.
- 98 Efforts to increase foster carer recruitment have been redoubled through more imaginative marketing campaigns employing social and other media, but these have yet to meet demand.
- 99 Looked after children perform relatively well in education, illustrating the beneficial impact of care. However performance in health assessments need to improve. Progress has been made in addressing the improvement areas identified by Ofsted in their 2016 inspection.
- 100 Service strategies to balance placement, types, cost and quality are under development, as is a sub-regional adoption agency.

Future priorities for the service in 2017/18 are:

- Placement Efficiency and budget pressures
- Early permanence in foster care and adoption
- Recruitment of foster carers and adopters
- Regionalisation of Adoption
- Care Leavers
- Corporate Parenting and Political Oversight

Recommendations

- 101 Corporate Parenting Panel is recommended to note the report, the achievements, progress and remaining challenges.

Contact: Karen Robb, Strategic Manager – Looked After Children and Permanence. Tel: 03000 265 759

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – The report sets out the budget, costs and pressures associated with children looked after by Durham County Council.

Staffing – The report indicates a shortage of foster carers and the need to continue to recruit adopters. These are not employed positions, but provide income to families prepared to look after children.

Risk – The duty to protect children and young people is one of the Council's basic statutory functions. Inability to meet the needs of children who cannot live at home as a result of the risk this causes would constitute a catastrophic failure under statutory duties. The report sets out actions being taken under the Placement Efficiency Strategy to mitigate this risk. Risks relate to risk of harm to children as well as financial risk to the council as a result of escalating costs.

Equality and Diversity/Public Sector Equality Duty – Looked after services are available to all children and young people in line with legal duties.

Accommodation – The report describes the range of accommodation available to looked after children and young people.

Crime and Disorder – Crime and disorder of looked after children is closely monitored. In Durham, there is a relatively low level of cautions and convictions of looked after children.

Human Rights – Children have a right to a family life and this is supported wherever possible, except where a child is at risk of significant harm. Thereafter a substitute family is sought wherever possible. The child's voice is sought at all stages of the planning and review process.

Consultation – N/A

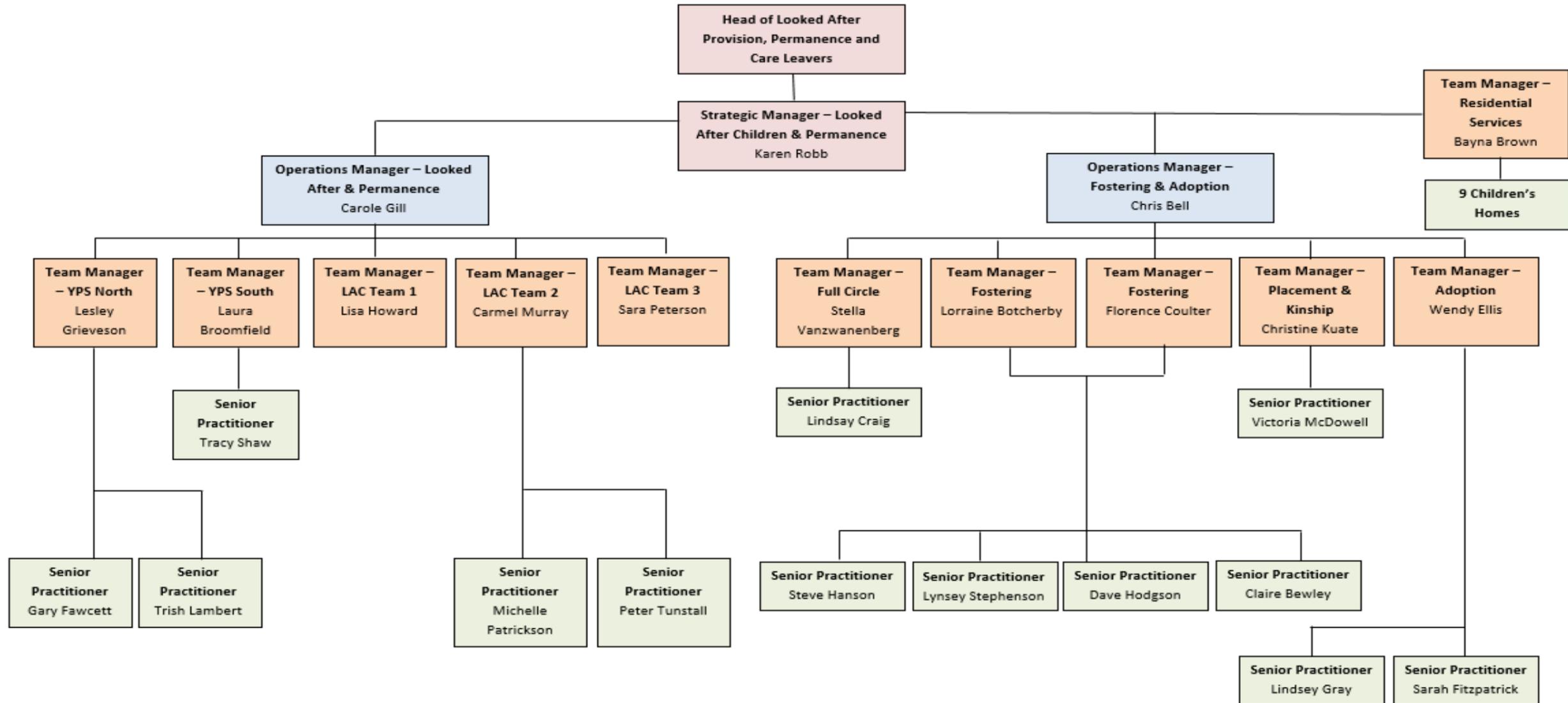
Procurement – DCC procurement policies are followed wherever required. In this case, the new electronic record system has been procured through this route.

Disability Issues – Children with disabilities may need to be looked after. Their needs are fully assessed when making placement choices.

Legal Implications – Looked after services are provided under the Council's legal duty.

Appendix 2 – Looked After and Permanence Service Staffing Structure

Children's Services - Looked After & Permanence

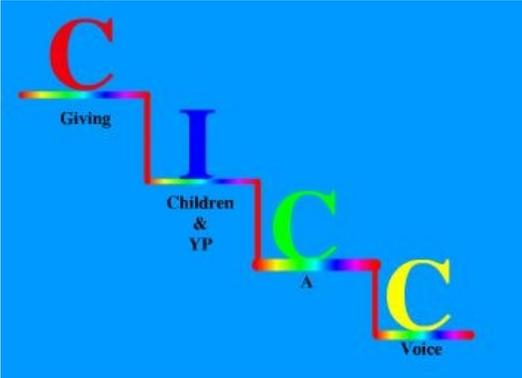


Appendix 3 - Changes made by the Children in Care Council (CICC)

	What young people wanted...?	What has changed.....?
Sleepovers	<p>Young people wanted a chance to be able to have sleepovers without the people they were staying with having to have lengthy checks.</p> <p>Young people felt they were isolated from their friends because they were not allowed sleepovers.</p>	<p>Young people are now able to sleepover without the people they are staying with having to have DBS checks done. They can go to their foster carers and ask if they can stop out and it is at their discretion if they allow this to happen. Young people feel this is a positive thing and that it makes it so much easier to ask and feel like any other young person.</p>
Pocket Money	<p>Lots of children and young people were saying that it all depended on where you live to how much pocket money you get. They all agreed this wasn't right and that everyone should be treated the same!</p>	<p>Young people are now more aware of what they are entitled to and feel more able to approach their foster carers/social workers if they are not getting the right amount. We have also taken their concerns to fostering so that all carers are made aware of individuals pocket money entitlements.</p> <p>Fostering also agreed to challenge any carers not giving the correct amount of pocket money.</p>
Care Plans	<p>Young people said that their care plans were too long, not easy to read and are not child friendly. They asked that more child friendly care plans were created and featured the information they felt was relevant in the larger care plan</p>	<p>Young people worked with the IRO's (Independent reviewing Officers) to make the care plans more child friendly, easier to read and much shorter. They were also given the opportunity to design more child friendly care plans and now children can add things they are interested in and personalise them.</p>

	What young people wanted...?	What has changed.....?
Review Meetings	Young people said that they wanted to be able to chair their own review meetings and also have more of a say on who they want and don't want to attend.	The young people and the IRO's have been working closely to ensure all children and young people get a chance to chair their own reviews. They are now heavily involved in the planning of these. Young people have told us of their experiences of this as it now happens.
Freedom Cards	Young people wanted more say on the Freedom Cards and to be involved in making decisions about the activities that are on offer.	Young people are now involved in reviewing the Freedom Card Scheme. The CICC are asked their views when the budget is getting low and gave the idea of the cards only being used in the last three months (to save money) in DCC leisure Centres. This worked!
Traineeships / Apprenticeships	Looked After Young people wanted more opportunities within the council 'the family' for traineeship and apprenticeships. They also raised the fact that often care leavers don't have the qualifications needed to get an apprenticeship and more work needed to be done around this.	Lots of opportunities have been created for care leavers to access traineeships into their career path. These offer support, skills and qualifications for young people to progress into apprenticeships. Care Leavers are now guaranteed interviews for apprenticeships with in the council and lots more work is in place to support Looked After Young People in this area. Watch this space!

	What young people wanted...?	What has changed.....?
Recruitment and Selection	Young People wanted more of a say and to be more involved in the recruitment and selection of staff.	Young people are now involved in the recruitment and interviews panels. They decide the questions/activities that they think are relevant to ask each candidate. Young People have said it is a great thing to be involved in as we are the ones they will be working with. It is also great for our CV's and we feel much more respected as our opinions and views are valued and we feel equal. In the future they would like children and young people to be involved in all the different teams/services recruitment.
Social Workers	Young people reported that on occasions their social workers did not show up for their meetings or would turn up late without contacting the young people or their carers.	Everyone agreed that it is not acceptable and have been working with social workers to raise their concerns and stop this from happening in the future. We feel things are improving and will continue to work with the social workers to make sure it gets even better.
Social Work Academy	Young people asked to be involved in the recruitment of social workers for the new Social Worker Academy in Durham.	3 members of CICC sat on the recruitment panel and went through a scenario suggested by the CICC. In January CICC members planned and delivered a group supervision session to the social workers in the academy. In March 6 young people sat on a second round of interviews.

	What young people wanted...?	What has changed.....?
CICC Logo	Members of the CICC asked that the council have its own logo.	<p>JW designed the new CICC logo and took it to the CICC meeting for approval. The logo is now on the CICC website.</p> 
CICC Website	Following on from looked after young people asking that the CICC have its own website and it going live. They asked that regular updates take place on it and that more information was available about the YPS, IRO's and more opportunities to have a say through it.	The site now has sections for all three of the things they asked for and is checked and monitored regularly.

Appendix 4 – Good News Stories

“I am so proud of JD he has worked so hard and established stability in his permanent placement. He was previously subject to sexual abuse and neglect and missed lots of school. He was educated last at Walworth School and then the Meadows with the support from an EHCP. J was previously known as a very complex and challenging young boy. He has worked really hard and we supported him to transfer back to Mainstream school in September and he has since moved up several sub levels in his lessons and taken part in the school play and the school staff are very proud of him and his carers and it is as though he has been in that school all along. He is now working with only the support of a SEN support plan, it is felt that an EHCP is no longer needed”.

By Senior Practitioner, LAC Team 1

“I have two children that are siblings. When they were accommodated they were more than 2-3 years behind their peers. In two terms they have both made phenomenal progress. They have progressed in a number of areas with the female showing two years progress in just two terms. The male child has also made significant progress in some areas”.

By Senior Practitioner, LAC Team 2

“AF is a 13 year old boy who is placed with an IFA carer on a permanent basis. He has ongoing fears and anxieties of abandonment which are due to the neglect and abandonment which he experienced whilst in the care of his birth parents. A likes to have a regimented diary and to know exactly where his carer is even when he is at school. Although A’s fears have decreased over the last 2 or 3 years, they still remain a feature and difficulty for A. Pauline, his carer, has supported A and has offered security and stability which has greatly improved A’s fears. When A and Pauline go to new places, A would at times follow her to the toilet due to fear of being left and her not returning. A has been very brave in trying out new activities and the most prominent one has been that he has joined the Air Cadets. Due to A’s anxieties he was nervous about meeting new people, the carer leaving him there and whether he would understand what he was supposed to do. To A’s credit he was able to overcome these fears and thankfully he thoroughly enjoyed the group and he has become a member, attending two nights a week every week. He has also began to help other children and young people who have started that group and he has helped them settle in. He has made new friends and has not shown anxiety over his carer leaving him. A has been on various trips and has also assisted to fly a plane! A has took great pride in the Air Cadets and has demonstrated his learning of mechanics and flying. From my observations and discussions with him he has made significant improvements in his social skills and has made great progress to support overcoming his fears and anxieties.

I am very proud of A for achieving this!!”

By Social Worker, LAC Team

“F and J were subject to child protection plans since 2013 due to significant neglect they suffered in parents care. In Feb 2016 they were accommodated into foster care aged 6 and 4. In August 2016 the LA were successful in gaining Placement Orders for them despite their guardian being apprehensive about a plan of adoption given their ages which were then 7 and 5.

J and F were successfully matched in March and placed with their prospective adopters last month. They have settled extremely well. F is now aged 8 and J will be 6 in June.

They are loving being in their new family and meeting their new adoptive family”.

By Social Worker, LAC Team 3