

# Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee

16 January 2018



## Analysis of the Rise in Looked After Children Numbers

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### Report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships

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#### Purpose of the Report

- 1 The purpose of the report is to appraise members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee of some analytical work that has been carried out into the increase in numbers of looked after children in Durham.

#### Background

- 2 Durham County Council has the lead responsibility for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of children with a key aim to provide early help for children and families and protection for those who need it. The primary legislation that underpins this responsibility is the Children Act 1989. A fundamental principle of the Act is that children should be supported within their family unless it is necessary for their welfare to arrange for them to live outside their family.
- 3 Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be familiar with the work that the local authority undertakes with regard to those children and young people who are looked after. They will also be aware that the number of children and young people in the looked after system has recently been increasing.
- 4 Whilst the local authority would always make decisions based on the best interests of the child before intervention, there are significant implications of an increase in looked after provision, both in financial and human costs.
- 5 Early experiences have long-term consequences for the emotional and mental health and social development of looked after children and young people. Life chances for children and young people who have been looked after remain poor compared to their non-looked after peers.
- 6 An increase in looked after children places increased cost pressures on the council in terms of placement costs and also work pressures in children's social care. The council also has a legal responsibility as corporate parent to ensure that the needs of all children and young people in their care are met.

## Looked After Children Analysis

- 7 There were 776 children looked after by Durham County Council at the end of November 2017. This compares to 760 at the end of November 2016 and 660 at November 2015.
- 8 When comparing with other local authorities, a rate of looked after children per 10,000 children and young people (aged 0-18 years old) is a useful measure. Our rate for Durham has increased significantly in recent years and is higher than the national average but remains well below the regional rate.

<b>Children looked after rate per 10,000 children under 18 (from 2014/15 to 2016/17)</b>				
<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Durham</b>	<b>England</b>	<b>North East</b>	<b>Children's services statistical neighbour group</b>
2014/15	<b>61</b>	64	85	81
2015/16	<b>68</b>	65	88	82
2016/17	<b>81</b>	67	96	87

- 9 Increases in the number of children and young people in the looked after children were noted though regular quarterly performance monitoring reports and a more in depth analysis was commenced to better understand trends and identify any future improvements.
- 10 A presentation of the findings of this analysis will be shared with the Committee.

## Recommendation

- 11 Members of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee are recommended to:
- (a) Note the content of the presentation.
  - (b) Comment accordingly on the presentation.
  - (c) Indicate if any further information or analysis is required.

## Background papers

Corporate Parenting Panel Report – 24 November 2017 – Looked After Children: the Journey into the Looked After System

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## **Appendix 1: Implications**

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**Finance** – The number of looked after children for which the authority is responsible has significant implications in terms of increasing cost pressures.

**Staffing** – An increase in the number of looked after children places a greater demand on children’s social care staff.

**Risk** – The authority has a statutory responsibility to ensure that the welfare of children and young people across the county is actively promoted and that they are safeguarded from risk of significant harm.

**Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty** – None

**Accommodation** – None

**Crime and Disorder** – None

**Human Rights** – None

**Consultation** – None

**Procurement** – None

**Disability Issues** – None

**Legal Implications** – Legislation sets out a general duty of Durham County Council as the local authority looking after a child to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child. This duty underpins all activity by the local authority in relation to looked after children.