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OUT OF BOROUGH PLACEMENT

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 Title: Children Placed Out of Borough

Report Summary

Purpose:

The report seeks to present an over view of the placements of children in care whose placements were outside the Borough of Milton Keynes during the financial year 2012-13.

Background:

This report was requested by panel members in relation to the July 2012 SLAC inspection, that highlighted the numbers of young people placed outside the borough and in relation to current national concerns about the vulnerabilities of young people placed far from home.

Corporate Priorities:

The activities of the Corporate Parenting Panel are covered by the Council's Children and Families - Priorities "To develop and maintain effective intervention that prevent the most vulnerable children and young people in our communities from experiencing additional difficulty and prevents them from suffering significant harm"

Performance Information:

The number of children in the council's care rose from 278 to 282 during 2012/13. This represents a slight fall in the rate per 10,000 under 18 Milton Keynes population and is a lower rate than the England or statistical neighbour average. The report highlights improvements in the distance those young people are placed from Milton Keynes.

Equality and Diversity Impact:

The placement service is provided for children from across the Milton Keynes' community. It therefore needs to provide placements that can meet the diverse needs of the children and young people in the Council's care.

Recommendations /Proposals:

Members are asked to consider and discuss the content of the report .

Full Report

Introduction

Children and young people in Milton Keynes' care are placed in a range of placements according to their individually assessed needs and circumstances. We generally seek to place children locally, but for some children a move away is a positive choice for safeguarding reasons or because the specialist resource they require is not locally available.

2012-13 Placement Analysis

The total number of unique children in care placed by Milton Keynes council through out the period 01.04.12 to 31.03.13 was 398, in a total of 454 placements. These placements amounted to the provision of a combined total of 14,842 weeks' care. The length of stay in these placements ranged from as little as 24 hours to many years.

The gender split of the care population throughout the period was 48% Female and 52% Male with the following age range.

| AGE | Under 1 | 1- 4 | 5- 9 | 10 -15 | 16+ |
|--------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Female | 7 | 47 | 37 | 52 | 49 |
| Male | 8 | 37 | 41 | 63 | 57 |
| Total | 15 (3.8%) | 84 (21.1%) | 78 (19.6%) | 115 (28.9%) | 106 (26.6%) |

In broad terms, 61.5% of placements used to accommodate these children were inside the local authority boundary and 38.5% were outside. On the 31st March 2013, 164 (58.2%) of the 282 children in care were placed within the geographical boundary and 118 (41.8%) were placed outside.

There is a clear correlation between the child's assessed need, their placement type and its location. The following table provides a breakdown of the 118 children classed as out of borough by placement type.

| Out of Borough by Placement Type | |
|---|------------|
| Placed for Adoption | 19 |
| Fostering | 67 |
| <i>Friends and Family</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>With MK carers</i> | <i>27</i> |
| <i>With IFA carers</i> | <i>26</i> |
| Residential & schools | 20 |
| Placed with Parents | 6 |
| Independent Living | 1 |
| Youth Offending Institutions | 4 |
| Mental Health Provision | 1 |
| Total | 118 |

Of the 118 young people placed outside the borough, 16% are matched with suitable carers and placed for adoption and 26% are placed within their own family in either Connected Persons Foster Care or placed with birth parents on an order. These can be considered positive placement choices but are outside the borough.

A further 20 children are placed in residential care for children with special or high level needs, such as children with disabilities and those with challenging behaviour. This includes provision such as residential schools, secure units and therapeutic children's homes that are not available within the borough boundary.

All new external residential placements are made with units which are assessed as either good or outstanding by OFSTED. The placements are closely monitored by the commissioner to ensure that they deliver the level of care which they are contracted to provide. Allocated social workers regularly visit each individual child. The appropriateness of the placement is regularly reviewed by an independent reviewing officer.

The remaining 51 children are placed in foster care. Whilst geographically out of borough, 53% of these are placed with foster carers who are recruited assessed and supported directly by Milton Keynes Fostering service and 47% are commissioned from independent fostering agencies.

There are changes in legislation and practice that since November 2012 require local authorities to regard young people in various forms of custody as looked after children. This has seen a small increase in the children in care numbers in placements relating to custody. Of the 118 out of borough placements on 31st March 2013, 4 young people were in custody or secure accommodation that is not available within the borough boundary. 1 young person is living independently with support in a location of their choice.

Distance from Central Milton Keynes

The relatively small geographical size of Milton Keynes means that the term "out side the boundary" can be misleading and some young people placed "outside the boundary" are relatively short distances from home. For example, a child placed at Newton Longville is out of borough but only 4.7 miles from Central Milton Keynes

An additional proxy measure is the distance from Milton Keynes in miles. The following table provides a quarterly breakdown over the last two years of placement distance from Central Milton Keynes.

| | 2011 | | | | 2012 | | | | 2013 |
|----------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| | Mar | Jun | Sep | Dec | Mar | Jun | Sep | Dec | Mar |
| 0-20 Miles | 207 | 217 | 229 | 224 | 227 | 239 | 238 | 228 | 220 |
| 21-50 Miles | 23 | 19 | 21 | 22 | 19 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 20 |
| 51-100 Miles | 24 | 19 | 19 | 17 | 21 | 23 | 29 | 28 | 35 |
| 101+ Miles | 17 | 15 | 11 | 12 | 11 | 6 | 6 | 8 | 7 |
| % 0-20 Miles | 76.1 | 80.4 | 80.6 | 81.5 | 81.7 | 83.6 | 82.1 | 81.1 | 78.0 |
| Number of LAC | 272 | 270 | 284 | 275 | 278 | 285 | 290 | 281 | 282 |
| | | | | | | | | | |

There has been a reduction in young people placed out side the 20 mile radius of MK. This was at its best in June 2012, when 83.6 % of Milton Keynes children were placed within the 20 mile target. This has fallen over the latter part of the year to 78%, which, while remaining better that March 2011, requires consideration.

A combination of factors contributed to this change, many of which can be viewed as positive. The increased activity of the adoption team, with more children being placed for adoption, has increased the numbers of those placed outside Milton Keynes, as has the increased use of family and friends carers as an alternative to stranger fostering. This is in line with the council's family support ethos and has the advantage of not only retaining children within their birth families but also of providing a potential route out of care through permanency options such as Special Guardianship Orders.

Changes in legislation within youth justice have required a broader range of young people to be regarded as Children in Care. It is believed this will provide better outcomes for these young people, but such placement options are not available locally.

Of the 118 children classed as placed out of borough, 48% are geographically placed within 20 miles of central Milton Keynes in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire or Northamptonshire. The following table provides a breakdown by placement type of the remaining 62 who are placed more than 20 miles away. These figures suggest that 44% of these placements relate to adoption or placement with wider family. A further 29% are in children's homes, residential schools, secure units or health provision that is not available locally and the remaining 27% in fostering or independent living.

| CIC Placed 20+ miles from Central MK | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------|
| | Placed for Adoption | 14 |
| | Friends and Family Carers | 9 |
| | Residential | 14 |
| | Placed with Parents | 4 |
| | Fostering | 16 |
| | Independent Living | 1 |
| | Youth Offending Institutions | 3 |
| | Mental Health Provision | 1 |
| | Total | 62 |

Sufficiency Plan

The council in implementing its "sufficiency plan" has been able to provide a greater range of local placements for children and young people in our care. Our commissioning of external foster placements has been targeted on providers who are able to provide local placements and the council's in-house fostering service has achieved a net increase in the number of foster carers over each of the last three years. We have been able to reduce the numbers and percentage of children in care who are placed outside a 20 miles radius of Milton Keynes. On March 31st 2011, 23.9% of children in Milton Keynes' care were placed beyond this radius. This reduced, by 31st March 2012, to 18.3% and 22% in 2013.

There has been a significant decrease in the numbers of children placed extreme distances (101+ miles) from MK. On the 31st March 2013, 2.5% were placed 101 miles or more away, compared with 6.25% in 2011. This is largely due to the implementation of the sufficiency plan and to our commissioners seeking to source more local provision for young people with special needs.

Conclusion

The above analysis leads me to suggest that we are not placing large numbers of children far from Milton Keynes and that, for the majority who are placed at a distance this is as a result of positive placement choices. We have succeeded in increasing our local placement capacity and continue to work with providers to improve that further.

For those that are placed out of borough in externally commissioned placements, there is a commissioning focus upon delivering good outcomes for the young person and good value for the council, in addition to the quality assurance oversight provided by statutory reviews. Each of those placements are reviewed monthly by a Head of Delivery at either the External Placement Panel or the Permanency Forum.

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