

Corporate Parenting Panel Report



Corporate Parenting Panel Annual Report 2019/20

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Wards affected	All wards

Introduction

Milton Keynes Council is a 'Corporate Parent' and has a 'collective responsibility' including the elected member, employees and partner agencies to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers (CL). As 'Corporate Parents', the Corporate Parenting Panel oversees the Council's fulfilment of its' responsibility to both Children in Care and Care Leavers. This panel is a separate committee and not part of the Council's Scrutiny arrangements.

This annual report is intended to provide Councillors with a summary of how partners/agencies have addressed the needs of our Children in Care (CIC) and Care Leavers over the last year. It summarises the work undertaken and reflects any emerging themes from the data provided. There will be attached reports from key partners adding further information and detail. This report will also summarise the work undertaken by Panel between April 2019 and March 2020 and its engagement with young people during the year and any events attended.

Inevitably, COVID 19 has made the latter part of this financial year particularly testing for all our staff and partners. Risk assessments were undertaken for all our CIC and CL to ensure that the needs of our Corporate Children were not compromised, and a fortnightly briefing was provided to the Children's Scrutiny Board which reflected both how we were supporting our children and how they were coping.

Councillors are invited to comment on any of the issues arising from this report and, as Corporate Parents, consider how they, as a Board, can actively promote the needs of our CIC while carrying out their work as Council Members.

Corporate Parenting Panel 2019/20

The Panel has been chaired by Councillor Norman Miles with the support of the two Vice-Chairs, Councillors Marie Bradburn and Victoria Hopkins. The Cabinet member for Children and Families also attends. Members have visited our children's homes and attended several social and celebration events for our children throughout the year. Members have also met with DFE Advisors, operational staff within the Children in Care and Care Leaving Service alongside our Fostering and Adoption teams. They have had shadowing opportunities with practitioners in order to gain better insight and understanding into these services.

During the year the Corporate Panel received and considered reports presented to them from key professionals who have been working with our Corporate Children and Care Leavers. All agencies have reflected on the key issues and indicators that guide our success and the areas we need to build on to improve outcomes for our children and young people.

Our Vision

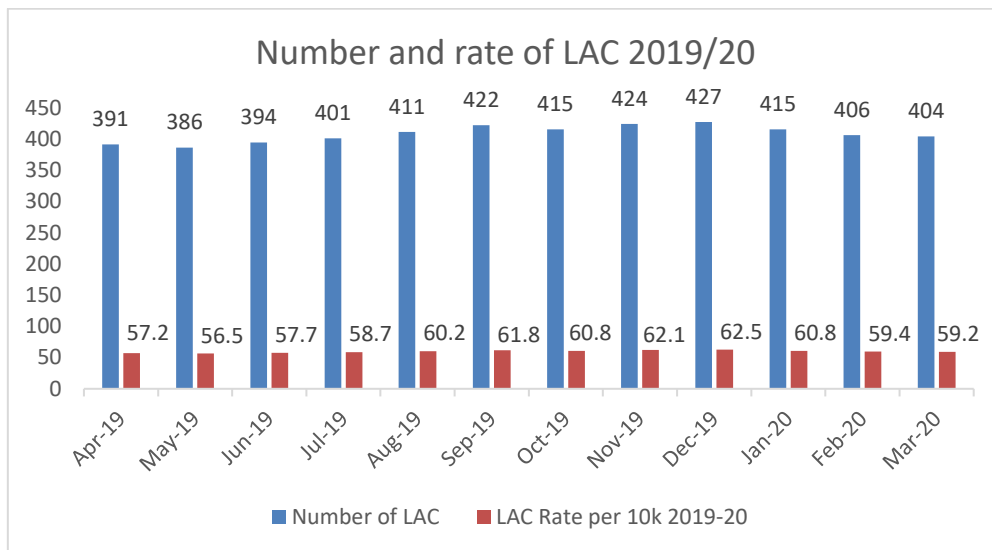
We know children thrive in a family environment where they are nurtured and loved. In Milton Keynes, our approach is to do all we can to support our children and young people ensuring they remain in a caring and stable environment throughout their childhood. Consequently, placing children in care is seen as a last resort. Our vision is to focus on preventative work thus ensuring we have the 'right children in care' with the right support. For us to succeed in this objective, we need clear principles of practice and robust tools to help us do our work.

Our 'Golden Triangle' approach shows our commitment to providing early family support thereby preventing issues escalating and keeping children and families together wherever it is safe to do so. We believe that, by involving the right services and valuing family life, we can make a pivotal difference to our children and young people and, thus, help them fulfil their potential. This approach enables us to focus and ensure that the right services and support are allocated to those children who need our care and accommodation.

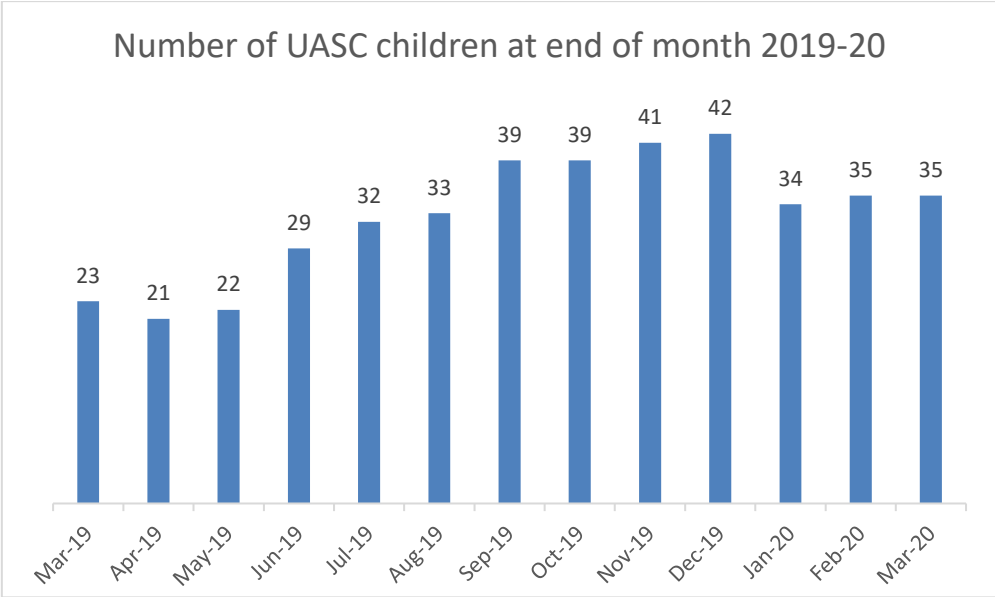


Milton Keynes Children in Care Population

By the end of March 2020, the number of children in care stood at 404 (59.2 per 10,000). Total LAC numbers rose through the year peaking in December 2019 and have declined since then.



UASC Numbers (Currently 35) have followed a similar pattern to the overall LAC numbers but do not account for the all the change.



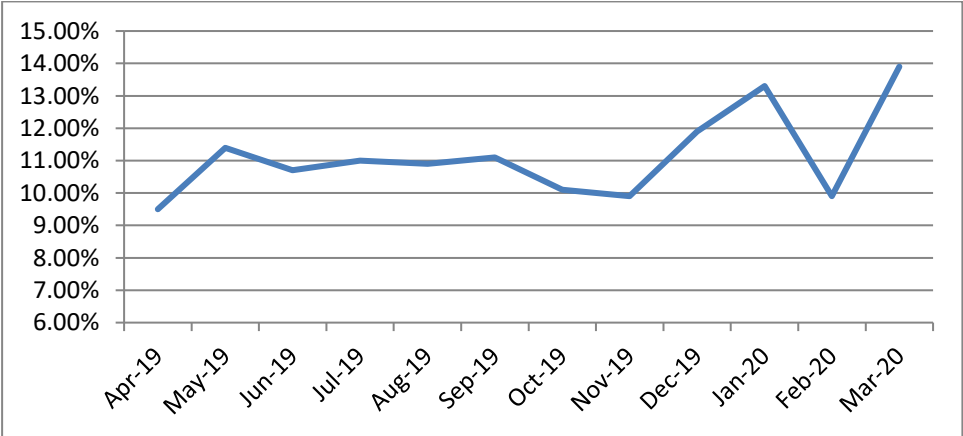
The Corporate Parenting Board saw a steady increase in looked after children since July 2019. There is no main reason for this as children entering care come in for multiple reasons, but the last year in particular has seen an increase in Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers Children (UASC) coupled with a significant incident of gang related violence during Nov 19 which, consequently, led to a further increase in our CIC Population. However, whilst the numbers of CIC increased from June to December 2019, a reduction began to emerge from January 2020. It was evident because, in the main, children entering through the ‘front-door’ was no greater than in previous years, a greater focus was required from the Corporate Parenting Service to progress those Care Plans that would enable the appropriate children to move on from care. The introduction of the Permanency Tracking Panel was implemented to review the Care Plans of children within specific cohorts. These cohorts entailed securing permanency for children who could return home to their parents or family, revocation of Care Orders for those children at home with their parent, placing children for adoption without delay and looking at those carers who could consider a Special Guardianship Order rather than Care. Thus, the emphasis on having the right children in care continued not only at the front door, but also within the CIC Service.

It was also evident that the delay in the number of Court Care Proceedings not concluding within the 26-week period impacted on our children remaining in care longer than necessary. However, some delay can be necessary as further assessments may be required in respect of the family circumstances or given the complex nature of the case.

Placements of Our Children in Care

Type of placement	At 31.03.20	At 31.03.19
Foster placements – U1,2,3,4,5,6	71%	77%
Secure accommodation – K1	0%	0%
Homes and Hostels – K2	6%	7%
Hostels and other supportive residential placements – H5	6%	4%
Residential schools – S1	0%	1%
Other residential settings – R1,2,3,4	0%	1%
Placed for adoption – A3,4,5,6	4%	2%
Placed with own parents - P1	9%	8%
In lodgings, residential employment or living independently – P2,3	3%	1%
Other placement – Z1	0%	0%

Placement Stability - 3 or more placements in the previous 12 months



Over the course of the year, the Corporate Parenting Panel was aware that the ‘Stability of Placements’ had fluctuated. Some children have experienced three or more placement changes due to their complex needs or the risks they present. Consequently, some placements have broken-down and alternate accommodation had to be considered to meet their changing needs. Some children experience a change of placement because a plan of adoption has progressed or a long-term foster placement has been identified, or children have returned home due to positive assessments and support provided as part of their rehabilitation plan. The fluctuation of placement moves between Dec and March may also be the result of some children moving to semi-independent accommodation and care plans changing from foster care and residential.

Unregulated Placements:

These have increased from 18 to 34 during the year

Unregulated provision can be used when children need support to live independently rather than needing full-time care. Whilst, Ofsted does not regulate this type of provision, it can legally be used for young people aged 16 years and over. It is often used as a steppingstone to independence for those children whose needs cannot be best met in foster placements or residential setting; but can be supported within semi-independent accommodation or supported lodging placements. This tends to be the preferred option for some teenagers or our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC). UASCs in particular can struggle to settle into a family environment after a prolonged period of independence during their often difficult and isolating journeys into the UK.

Unregistered provision is when a child, who is being provided with some form of 'care', is living somewhere that is not registered with Ofsted. Milton Keynes Council does not have any children placed in unregistered accommodation (tents, barges, B&B etc).

There are currently 34 Children in Care placed in unregulated placements between the ages of 16 - 17 years. The increase of unregulated placements is due to variety of reasons. Over the last 8 months there has been a focus on bringing YP back to MK and returning them to the local area. This has included a move out of regulated residential settings into semi-independent provisions/Supported Lodgings. The pathway plan and assessment of need deems that our children are ready for independence and require accommodation that will develop these skills further.

Currently (end of March 2020) we moved 6 young people into Supported Lodgings, with 5 carers. These placements have been assessed as being the most suitable provision available. However, we do require more Supported Lodgings carers as they support vulnerable older Children in Care who require the more nurturing environment of a family home balanced with increased independence. This is an area we continue to work on as part of our recruitment strategy and is an area that needs improvement.

MKC had also rented 6 flats from the private sector but decided not to use them as they were considered not cost effective and inappropriate for some young people who required additional support. We have commissioned the provider 'Look Ahead Care' to support this cohort of young people which has impacted on bed availability.

We are looking at our children moving into the new YMCA provision albeit this has been delayed due to COVID 19, but we hope to progress this soon. We envisage 17 of our adult YP to move to this provision by June 2020.

Health

The Corporate Parenting Panel have been updated on our children’s health during the year. We are working closely with our health colleagues and 6 weekly meetings are held with our health partners, LAC nurses, Medical Advisor, CAMHS and Health Commissioners, fostering, CIC Team Managers and Independent Reviewing Office manager to look at how we can work in partnership to improve the health outcomes for our CIC. The meetings are jointly chaired by the HOS and Health Commissioner. We are working on our partnership. Our LAC nurses and mental health worker are co-located within the service.

	MK 19-20*	England 18-19	South East 18-19	MK 18-19
Health assessments	91.5%	90%	86%	98%
Dental checks	88.3%	85%	87%	87%
Immunisations	93.2	87%	83%	92%
SDQ score (4-17 year olds with a valid score)	55%			

*MK19-20 data is provisional – validation comes at DfE submission end August 20.

Health Assessments

Whilst the completion of health assessments has improved this year, the overall timescales still require improvement. There have been delays in receiving reports which has impacted on timescales. Other factors include, Did Not Attend, consent and change of placement. We have reviewed this, and all health assessments will now be recorded from the time the health assessment occurred rather than upon the receipt of the health report. This will improve timescales and support LAC nurses in prioritising reports in line with a child’s health needs. All outcomes will be followed up. We also have Deputy Managers who lead on health and are working closely with our business support to prevent delays from occurring. Health assessments, quality assured by the IRO service, confirmed that they were either ‘Good’ or ‘Very Good’ with none of an inadequate standard.

Our dental checks are being progressed, but those that have not been undertaken are primarily teenagers who, despite encouragement, are reticent about attending the dentist. This continues to be encouraged.

Immunisations

These were originally at a low level due to inaccurate recording, but by cross-referencing health and social care data over 90% of CIC immunisations are now up to date.

Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ)

This is an area of improvement. We are working through our SDQ score and the low completion has been a consequence of two separate systems (Health and Social Care) as those completed by health cannot be automatically inputted into LCS (Social Care system). These are now being manually input, but further work is required to triangulate the scores and ensure that children needs are met.

Education

The Corporate Parenting Board has welcomed presentations of the Virtual Head during the year. The virtual school has worked in partnership with the CIC and Fostering Teams offering advice and Education support to social workers and carers. Another key focus has been supporting the education of children who are not in care and helping parent(s). This preventative work has contributed to maintaining the care of children within the family home. The report reflects that there have been no permanent exclusion and all children in care have a Personal Education Plan (PEP) up to the age of 18 years. The timescales for PEPs have also improved.

Numbers of PEPs Out of Timescale	
March 2019	29
March 2020	12

Equally, the report reflects that there is an improvement of Children in Care contributing within their PEPS where they have voiced their views in respect of their education. The online completion of PEP is being developed and the portal should be launched in September 2020. This portal should improve compliance rates as it will have prompts that will notify both school and social workers when the PEPs are due.

Quality Assurance process of PEPS also reflects an improvement as there are no inadequate PEPs between April and July 19 and the standard of ‘requires improvement’ has risen from ‘inadequate’. The academic attainment of children is mixed (see report) and this will continue to be reviewed. The small steps that our Corporate Children make are an achievement in themselves and something to be proud of as evidenced in page 7 of the Virtual Head Report.

The number of children who are NEET (Not in Employment, Education and Training for Young People aged 16 and over) had increased by 5 at the end of July 19 (see report). The needs of these children are reviewed by a monthly NEET panel and will continue to be reviewed until they are EET. The Virtual School also supports our UASC and those who are awaiting an age assessment are supported through career Sparks which also offers English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

The virtual school work with the SEND team and although children with EHCP plans have increased since 2017, there was a drop in 2020. There is no specific reason why EHC dropped; this is an area that will be explored further. The needs of our SEND Children are discussed in our Complex Care panel attended by the Virtual School Deputy Head.

Overall, the Virtual School continues to maintain communication with partners, schools, social workers, parents and carers. There is a dedicated worker from the Virtual School who works with partners in order to improve educational outcomes for CIC. Training has been offered to carers where the virtual school has contributed to the Skills to Foster training and also delivered 24 sessions of trauma and attachment training to schools.

An Operational Education Group and Strategic Education Panel supports and reviews CIC/CL education needs. The Operation Group feeds into the Strategic Group (formed March 20) and considers improvement of practice relating to specific performance indicators, emerging themes and addressing any other barriers hindering the progress of a child's educational needs.

Independent Review Office Service (IRO)

Independent Review Officers (IRO) review all the Care Plans of CIC and chair all Child Protection Conferences. Whilst there was originally 6.5 IRO's and 1 LADO, a further IRO was appointed in April 2020 in view of the capacity issues. Reviews completed within timescales highlighted in the report slightly dropped from 96.5% last year to 94.2 by the end of March 2020 due to capacity issues but that the additional appointment will assist in addressing this.

The fundamental tasks of the Independent Chair is to monitor and scrutinise the activity of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent, ensuring that it is operating in line with care planning regulations and to challenge robustly where it is not. Quality assurance is key to the work undertaken by IROs and they are expected to report on any themes emerging from audits completed. The majority of Care Plans, Pathway Plans, Placement Plans and PEPS audited were deemed as good or very good. Those few that were RI or inadequate were discussed with colleagues and CIC/16-25 Teams (See report).

The report highlights that CIC experience of their contact and leisure activity was primarily good or very good with 16.7% requiring improvement, 1.4% was inadequate. However, this also raised a number of questions for us as a service; have we accepted the status quo, can contact be unsupervised with family – have we risk assessed this? Can more of our foster carers manage contact with family, have we risk assessed? We have already started work to look at the 'Right Children in Care' where annual assessments are being undertaken for all our CIC as needs and families

change. Some children, of course, 'vote with their feet' when deciding what they want from contact or whether they should return home but as Corporate Parents, we will continue to review this and will keep the Board apprised.

The report confirmed that Children and YP's attendance in reviews is still an area which requires improvement. Whilst there has been an increase from last year from 54% to 57% attendance IRO's and social workers are looking at other means to encourage attendance. Skype and Microsoft Teams will be considered as it is becoming increasingly evident that, during lockdown YP and children are happier to attend their own reviews remotely. We also need to explore better venue options and times for holding reviews (preferably not during school hours).

Whilst attendance requires improvement, participation is good and has risen from last years' 89% to 92%. Our children generally have the same IRO and experience consistency of service and are also consulted and visited between reviews. All CIC are now receiving a child centred letter sharing the recommendations of their review. From the CIC and 16 + Team perspective, the views of children are further considered within the annual assessment which informs the Care Plan. The Permanency Tracking Panel also involves the IRO service and reflects any change of plans. As part of participation, Life Story work is an area to progress for those of our children in long term foster care which will also contribute to a child and young person's view of their care plan.

The report suggests that, whilst Parent and family attendance has improved by 2% on last years' 57% it still requires further work. However, it is acknowledged, at times, it may not be appropriate for parents or family to attend given the risk they present. Some children are in adoptive placements and reviews continue until Adoption Orders are granted, so it wouldn't be appropriate in such circumstances. Again, like our corporate children, participation of parents/family within reviews is much higher, an increase of 3% this year to 92% and the majority of the response is from mother rather than father.

Dispute Resolution is an area that the IRO service needs to further develop. This arises when the IRO challenges on behalf of our child or attempts to resolve a problem arising out of a Care Plan. The Head of Service will respond if the matter cannot be resolved between the TM and IRO. If the IRO is unhappy with the Local Authority response, the last resort is a referral to CAFCASS.

Disruption Meetings are held where it is likely that placements could break-down and Support options to prevent break-down are considered within this. IRO's undertake these meetings from an independent perspective. This is still an area of development as not all have been able to be covered and some placements have broken down due to a 'crisis'.

Adoption

Milton Keynes joined with Central Bedfordshire Council and became part of a Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) on 1 April 2019. The leading authority for this is Central Bedfordshire and our adoption partnership is known as 'Adoption Connect'. We also work in partnership with two voluntary adoption agencies (VAA) - St Francis Children Society and Adoption Plus. This integration has resulted in the ability to utilise each other's resources and a budget that is equitably allocated.

There are two teams within the RAA; a Family Finding and Recruitment Team and an Adoption Support Team. Both teams are overseen by the Adoption Service Manager Nicki Phillips. The Adoption Panel meets fortnightly and considers the approval/termination of adopters, the placement of children, including relinquished children with prospective adopters. Six weekly Operation meetings are held which feed into the Quarterly Adoption Governance Board chaired by the two DCS respectively (Mac Heath and Sue Harrison).

The Adoption Score Card focuses on the timeliness of adoption and tracks delay. Three key indicators were introduced:

- A1: Average time between a child entering care and moving into their adoptive family
- A2: Average time between the courts granting an authority to place for adoption (Placement Order) and LA decision to match with adoptive family.
- A3 Children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving into an adoptive family

Milton Keynes Adoption Scorecard

	2019/20 Q1	2019/20 Q2	2019/20 Q3	2019/20 Q4	Total 2019/20
Adoption Order	2	4	6	6	18
A Placements	9	5	10	1	25
Matches	8	5	10	1	24
PO's	12	3	5	2	22
BID	9	1	5	2	17
Change of Plan	2	0	0	6	8

	2017- 2020	MK: Last 12 Months
A1	431 days	408 days
A1 Foster Care Adoptions	379 days Point of Placement	360 days
A2	201 days	198 days
A3	49 (55%)	19 (35%)

In relation to A1

The national average time is 431 days, which shows an improvement for MK of 23 days from the previous year.

In relation to A2

The national average time is 201 days, which shows an improvement of 3 days from the previous year.

A1 and A2 indicators for MK are improving, and whilst overall timescales have impacted by Foster Carers adopting (last year to this year) this is still positive as children are being adopted by their foster carers, providing stability of placement and consistency of care. A third of Adoption Orders granted in the last year (agency and non-agency) were by the child's Foster Carer. Furthermore, the majority of children waiting for a 'match' at the end of the year are in the 'harder to place' category and a third of these are BME.

In relation to A3

The majority of children have waited less than 14 months between BLA to moving in with adoptive family.

Mac Heath, the Agency Decision Maker for Milton Keynes approves the Plan of Adoption and Matches of Prospective Adopters. During this financial year, the Agency Decision Maker decided that adoption should be the plan for 17 children. This compares to 38 in 2018/2019 showing a significant decrease in plans for adoption. However, whilst there has been a reduction in adoption, there has been an increase in children being placed within their families and over the year, 56 SGO orders have been granted.

Recruitment A11 of Adoption Score Card

The report highlights that the RAA uses a number of approaches to recruit prospective adopters including, radio, social media, newspapers, lamppost banners, drop-in information sessions and newsletters. 235 initial enquiries were

received as a direct response from such recruitment and marketing activity. The majority were seeking further information on the adoption process. 46 Registrations of Interest were received and progressed to Stage One. 25 recommendations for approval were presented to panel and approved by the Agency Decision Maker. One key Area of improvement is the recruitment of BME Adopters.

Adoption Support Fund and Overall Support

Adopters can access the Adoption Support Fund if there is specific therapeutic support that the adopters require for children up to the age of 21(or 25 if special needs). During this financial year 51 applications were made to the Adoption Support Team, where support has been offered.

There is a good local support offer within the RAA which includes links with virtual school, drop-ins for families to access educational advice and annual training. There is a termly Youth Club and family events. The 'adoptee voice' was created and the plan is to create a youth panel. Adopters recruitment continues and there are good training programmes as part of the recruitment process. As a RAA we share learning and resources. Please see attached report.

16-25 Team

The 16-25 Team was formed in October 2019. This was in line with the recommendation of Mark Riddell, the Government Advisor for Care Leavers. The rationale for a specialised team was to give a greater focus for our children transitioning to adulthood and ensuring they receive the right support in respect of their overall needs. This team has 1 Team Manager, 1 Deputy Manager, 5 social workers, 10 Personal Advisors and 1 Business Support. The team works with two charities, Transitions UK and Grand-mentors who provide additional support to our young people's health, education and employment. This compliments the work of the Personal Advisor, as some young people prefer the support of a non-statutory based organisation and welcome the additional assistance provided which also includes work outside office hours. The 16-25 Team have a co-located 16+ Education worker and CAMHS worker who offer support one day a week to our young people.

Case Loads

The case loads are averaging 19 per Social Worker and over 20 for our PA's. However, the needs of our Care Leavers vary according to their age. A care leaver over 21 may not need the same level of intervention required by an 18-19 year old.

Currently the team is working with **183** Care Leavers and **75** young people in care aged 16 to 17 years old. The break-down of placement includes

Number of CIC 16-17 (75) Number of Care Leavers (183)	MK April 19- March 20*	England 18-19	South East 18-19	MK 18-19
In touch	97.8%	93%	91%	91%
In suitable accommodation	91.3%	85%	84%	87%
In education, employment or training	52.5%	52%	50.7%	40%

*MK19-20 data is provisional – validation comes at DfE submission end August 20.

Staying In Touch

The creation of the 16-25 Team and Care Leaver service has resulted in an increase in our ability to Stay In Touch with our Care leavers as both Personal Advisors and Social Workers are specifically focusing on YP transitioning to adulthood rather than the overall CIC population within Milton Keynes. Also, the Manager's oversight helps ensure the improvement of practice and compliance.

NEET

The new 16 - 25 Team has enabled a greater focus on employment, education and training which has resulted in a lower NEET figure. The strong partnership working with Transitions UK, Grand-mentors and our 16 + Education Officer has been part of this improvement.

The Corporate Parenting Week (22 October 2019) resulted in the LA, Councillors and Local Business making pledges of support to our care leaver and corporate children. It gave the 21 Local Businesses and private sector a sense of the barriers our CIC and Care Leavers experience and face. The Pledges made included Business's offering additional support to improve accessibility to employment and education for our young people. MK Council itself pledged Council Tax exemption until 25 years old for Care Leavers, a 'favoured status' approach to Council Apprenticeships and Jobs providing the criteria was met. Alongside this, a pledge was made that all our Care Leavers will be given Band 1 priority for council housing.

Good News Stories 16-25 Team

The team has great good news stories (see attached) including a young person who accessed appropriate accommodation, a young person who is no longer using drugs, another young person who did not wish to engage with his PA is now doing so and another who has gone to Oxford University. All these achievements are huge given what each individual young person has experienced and where he or she was at emotionally.

What the Team want to build on

The team are undertaking annual assessments for our 16-17 year olds. This is still in its early stages but is an area they wish to improve on. Transitions to adult social care requires the adult service to undertake an Assessment of Needs. There is still delay in this process and we are working with the Adult Service to resolve this. The Team wish to continue the partnership with the police when supporting and assessing the age of our UASC young people.

Mark Riddell Visit: Government Advisor for Care Leavers April 19 and Feb 20

Mark Riddell visited Milton Keynes Council in April 19 and Feb 20. Our Chair Norman Miles and Lead Member Zoe Nolan, met with Mark and appreciated his passion. Mark made a number of recommendations on how we could improve the outcomes for CIC transitioning to adulthood and leaving care (see attached letter). We are proud to say that we have adhered to many of them. We developed a specialised 16-25 Team. The Corporate Parenting board now has a Themed Board for each meeting focusing on key aspects of CIC and Care Leavers needs. We have a worker who will specialise in working with our UASC cohort. We have presented the Champion Model to the Panel where our Councillors could consider focusing on key aspects of the CIC care journey. The council has prioritised housing and council tax exemptions for our Care Leavers.

There was a follow up visit by Mark on 22 February 2020 and he welcomed the improvements we had made. During the visit he made further recommendations, including structured allocation of cases based on age and level of need. He further recommended an Emotional Wellbeing Worker to support the specific mental health needs of Care Leavers as well as the focused participation of young people, for example, peer mentors to 'get the experts into the family business'. Mark is yet to formally write to us about his visit in February and this is something we are following up. We are working through some of his suggestions.

Children in Care Team

The team originally worked with Care Leavers, but this changed in October 19 when the team was divided into a CIC Team and the 16-25 Team. Since then there has been a high staff turnover as the new team created four vacancies. Consequently, agency staff were recruited whilst permanent staff were sought to fill these positions. The team now has two vacancies to fill, but sadly, over half of our children have experienced one or more changes of social worker since October. The team consists of 1 Team Manager, 1 Deputy Manager, 3 Social Workers, 4 Senior Practitioners and 2 Social Work Assistants.

Case Load: Average 20 children per Social Worker

By the end of March 20 there were 400 children in care. Out of the 400 children, 192 children are currently open to Children in Care Team and others are opened to the children with disability service, Family Support Service via care proceedings or Care Orders and our 16-25 team. The case loads of staff is averaging 20 as a result of the two vacancies and the gradual allocation of two newly qualified workers.

What's Gone Well

The Team Manager has worked hard on 'Throughput' with the Head of Service to ensure that we have the Right Children in Care. This has entailed regular tracking via the Permanency Panel and monthly meetings with the Adoption Manager as well as the Fostering Manager. This robust approach has resulted in children's care plans progressing and a reduction of children in care, the securing of adoptions, SGO and long term fostering where appropriate. The team are now undertaking annual assessments and, although this is still a work in progress, the efforts have reflected either a change in a child's care plan or identified support for that individual child. The team has making and effort to ensure life story work is completed and developed 'My Care Plan' to support children's understanding of their plan in simple terms.

Good News Stories

There are many good news stories. A number of children are now adopted, and one child wrote a lovely poem about his experiences in care. A child who was at home on a Care Order had the care order discharged because of the progress the mother had made. A child with complex needs who had a number of placement break-downs has now been settled for a considerable time given the support and partnership work of all involved. (See attachment).

What we need to build on

Improving timescales and following up Health Assessments, SDQ's and immunisations. Monthly meetings with our LAC nurses are being held to progress these. We need to continue to build on the completion of annual assessments so that every child in care has an assessment. Staff training to continue relevant to their individual development needs.

Fostering Recruitment Team

The Fostering Recruitment Team is responsible for recruiting and assessing carers for mainstream fostering and undertaking Connected Carer Assessments for children who could potentially remain within the family (Reg 24). Special Guardianship Assessments are also completed by the team and are either private or known to us as

these are families who are subject to care proceedings. A Viability Assessment will be completed to determine whether a full assessment should commence for those cases within care proceedings. For mainstream fostering assessments, once enquiries are received a decision is made to undertake a visit which determines a Full Assessment for Fostering or Supported lodging. The team also undertakes all Private Fostering Assessments.

Staffing

The Team Comprises of 1 Team Manager, 7 Senior Practitioners, 1 Social Worker and 1 Social Work Assistant.

Case Loads

The average case load per worker is determined by the number of assessments undertaken for the approval of mainstream Foster Carers and Kinship Carers. At any one time 3-4 assessments are undertaken per worker between a 12 and 20 weeks. In addition, the team undertake viability assessments and, where appropriate, follow up enquiries where visits are progressed for potential mainstream carers.

The team has held a number of recruitment events including fostering recruitment week last May 2019 which led to a rise in enquiries during August and September 2019. The lead up to Christmas tends to result in a reduction in enquires (although this picks up after January). During the year, it was unfortunate that 4 families withdrew just before the assessment, or after the assessment process. This was due to a change in family circumstances and two carers struggling with the assessment process (one withdrew when panel deferred approval).

Our recruitment strategy includes use of social media and radio, events held with John Lewis and MK Pride. We have gained 12 mainstream foster carers and 24 kinship carers.

We are mindful that, although we recruit for all ages 0-18 years, we do want a greater focus on recruiting for teenagers and children with complex needs. Equally, we are aware that further work is required for the recruitment carers of Black, Ethnic and Minority Groups as the number of enquiries from these groups has been minimal. We would like our councillors to be part of our recruitment strategy.

The key themes that have emerged during the recruitment process include:

- Smokers wishing to care for under 5's.
- No right to remain in this country.

- Low number of BME enquiries.
- No further contact from applicants (not communicating despite our follow up).
- Following initial visit, coming to a decision that fostering is not for them or not the right time.

What has gone well for the Recruitment Team and Achievements?

This is a stable team and the team are pleased that they are receiving a weekly performance report. The Team have developed the Skills to Foster training to include SGO carers. We have purchased a stand to use for our fostering events and fostering information sessions are being held monthly.

Areas we need build on

We work closely with both our Family Support Teams and Fostering Supervising Teams. The Family Support Team will rightly consider placement with families during safeguarding emergencies, but on some occasions, it is evident that fostering standards cannot be met by some of these families. We hope to work through some of these issues by being involved in decision making at an earlier stage. Equally, we are building on the transition and transfer of newly recruited carers to our fostering supervising team where that team becomes involved at an earlier stage. We need to explore further the recruitment families from BME groups.

Fostering Supervision and Support Team

The Fostering Support Team supervises all carers who have been approved as internal mainstream carers, Kinship Carers and Supported Lodging Carers. The team works in partnership with the CIC team, Recruitment Team and the Fostering Household Reviewing Officer (FIRO) who, as an independent person, reviews whether carers are meeting fostering standards.

Staffing Information

The team have struggled with vacancies over the year, but we are now in a better place and have recruited 2 new team members. The team is comprised of 8 Social Workers and 3 Social Work Assistants. A Post-SGO project worker is also based within the team as part of our commissioned contract with Grandparents Plus. Two members of staff are on Maternity Leave and one full time vacancy is in the process of being filled.

Case Loads

The average workload is 17 per worker.

Data

From year end, the Fostering team are supervising 95 mainstream Foster Carers, 7 Supported Lodgings carers and 44 Kinship Carers. The Fostering Service looks after a total of 194 children as of March 2020, this equates to 68% of our children placed within our in-house fostering service. Our carers have reduced in number since last year as some were deregistered due to not meeting fostering standards, retirement and, more positively, some have taken SGO and pursued adoption.

What has gone well

New support groups are now embedded in the service with guest speakers as well as workshops to support those carers completing their TSDS portfolio. In addition, the long standing CAMHS support group has been re-formatted so as many carers as possible can make use of this. The group is run by a Senior Child Psychotherapist on behalf of CAMHS and provides 6 group work sessions per 6 months. Foster Carers can also access clinical supervision on a one to one basis with an Attachment Expert who is also just beginning to offer evening workshops.

Key achievements including some good news stories

Foster Carers engagement in training has doubled from the previous year with excellent feedback about PACE training, in particular, making a difference to the carers' day to day responses to traumatised children

Post-SGO support has significantly improved and increased with the creation of the Post-SGO Project Worker post as well as development of pathways on LCS to allow for better oversight of needs and responses of this cohort of carers.

What we want to build on

Foster Carers are keen to be part of the wider department offer and the team will be developing a Peer Mentoring Scheme where experienced foster carers support those newly approved or anyone who is having difficulties with a child and may need a 'listening ear'.

The frequency and timescales of the supervision that carers receive must be improved on. We are working with carers to better evidence a 'child's lived experience'.

Consideration for a possible Specialist Fostering scheme as some of our more complex children, mostly teenagers, are often placed in external provision away from Milton Keynes which impacts on all areas of their lives. A specific scheme for Foster Carers, who are skilled in managing and understanding trauma, may reduce the number of older children needing to be placed outside of Milton Keynes.

For Milton Keynes a specific risk is that many of our existing fostering household are in the older age bracket and are coming to an end of their fostering careers and thinking about retirement. We, therefore, need a big drive in recruitment to ensure our carers numbers do not drop.

Residential Homes

Our Corporate Parenting Panel is aware that we have three Milton Keynes Council's Children's Homes. All our homes are for children and young people with special needs and staff have the skills and experience to communicate with our children and meet their needs. Each home has had a two-day unannounced inspection in the 2019-2020 cycle, and all were graded 'Good'. Although, there are three homes, one of these will now be closing and Ofsted has been made aware of this. Each home works in partnership with social workers, education, health alongside parents or carers. All Reg 44 visits by the Independent Individual have been positive and have not raised any major issue or concern.

Walnuts

The biggest change to the service was the addition of The Walnuts. The children's home became part of MKC Corporate Parenting Service at the beginning of August 2019. This led to a review of the staffing structure in order to consider staffing needs and harmonise this with the other MKC children's homes. The home was specifically kept open for two young people with a view to potential closure once they transitioned to alternative accommodation.

The service cared for two young teenagers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and additional learning needs. Staffing entailed a full-time staff team of 9 which included 1 deputy manager and registered manager. One of the successes of the home noted by Ofsted in August 2019 was the vast reduction in restraint as a behaviour management tool. However, this home will be closing as the one of the young people has returned home and the other has moved to our other home. Therefore, a review will be progressed to consider how best to utilise the premises.

Westminster House

Westminster House is the council's other long stay children's home which currently provides care for five young people aged between twelve years old and eighteen

years old. There is a team of thirteen staff, equivalent to 10.5 full time workers, a full-time deputy manager and registered manager. The group of young people is mixed between those who have high health and mobility needs and those with ASD. It is challenging to ensure that the home meets the diverse needs of the young people, but it achieves this by its child centred and individual approach. All our young people went on holiday to Derbyshire during the school summer holidays. We took several lodges and decamped the whole home to the Derbyshire Dales. It was a great success and is something we are looking to repeat.

As part of the child centred approach we listened to one young man when he said he wanted to live alone. Through careful management and discussion with all professionals and parents, he is now living in a self-contained flat attached to Furze House.

Furze House

Panel are aware that this home provides a Short Break Service for five days each week. It also has the council's emergency bed and, with support from staff in other homes, will open full time to provide this support when needed. The service works with young people aged five years to nineteen, all with special learning needs. The service currently works with seventeen families for short breaks and is in the process of introducing another six young people. Furze House also provides long stay residential care to one young person living in the flat contained within the home.

Residential What's Gone Well

Some Panel Members experienced the True Triumph Event held in October a celebration of the young people's achievements. In December, we held our annual Christmas party. These are enjoyable events where there is a celebration of our young people and also meet families and carers in an informal setting.

What We Want to Build On

For the future we want to ensure the children's homes continue to meet the needs of young people in Milton Keynes and continue to develop the different services offered. Our aim is to ensure that children remain in their own communities and maintain relationships with their families and peers.

Summary of Key Presentations to the Corporate Parenting Panel considered during 2019/2020:

UASCs

The Head of Corporate Parenting presented the key areas of development within this cohort of CIC and Care Leavers. The HOS expressed concern that courts tend not to accept our age assessments of those we deem to be adults which has serious implications when identifying potential placements involving younger children.

Young people attending Corporate Parenting Panel

The Corporate Parenting Panel held during 2019/20 sometimes experienced children attending panel. However, this is an area we need to improve on since losing our Participation Officer. Panel experienced presentations from the CIC/CL Team Managers who shared an update on the service. They also supported our young people in articulating their perspectives on being in care and experience as care leavers in Milton Keynes.

Mark Riddell Visits July 2019 and February 2020

See earlier notes, the Lead Member and Chair met with Mark and appreciated the suggestions made to improve outcomes for children. The panel now have a themed board to reflect key areas of our children's needs and their journey.

Breakfast Event Following Corporate Parenting Week

This was a follow up event to consider what progress we had made with businesses since pledges were promised. We welcomed Councillor Zoe Nolan's attendance and the support she offered. See attached presentation.

Achieving Permanency

The Panel received a presentation from the Head of Delivery Corporate Parenting about achieving permanence for the Council's Looked After Children, which she defined as being achieved by providing consistent care, stable relationships and a secure family base in life.

The Head of Delivery Corporate Parenting outlined the planning that went into achieving permanence and the importance for a child's wellbeing of achieving permanence as early as possible in the child's life.

The Panel noted the work undertaken by officer colleagues to ensure that organisational barriers were minimised.

Transitions UK

The Panel received a presentation from Transitions UK and its work to support young vulnerable people towards adulthood, independence and in so helping them to attain their full potential. Transitions UK outlined the four projects it supported nationally and its aspiration to be able to offer each of the projects in Milton Keynes as soon as possible. It was noted that 25 local young people were currently being supported. The Panel was also advised of some of the achievements of the young people.

The Head of Delivery for Corporate Parenting referred to the success of two of the mentoring programmes currently being offered by Transitions UK, which provided a number of persons to support the young people, which helped to reduce the social isolation they often experienced.

Grand mentors

The Panel received a presentation from the Volunteer Manager about the Volunteering Matters organisation and its Grand mentors scheme for Care Leavers, which provided practical support from older, experienced volunteers from both the public and private sectors.

The Panel was advised that in Milton Keynes there were currently 29 young care leavers being supported, although one of the project's biggest challenges was how to engage young care leavers with the programme.

The Panel was also advised that 82% of young care leavers who participated in the programme were able to find employment within six months.

Corporate Parenting Week

The Head of Corporate Parenting reported on the success of the Corporate Parenting Week in October and positive feedback had been received that was being evaluated, thanking all the Councillors that had attended.

Ofsted Inspection

Panel received a summary from the Director of Children's Services in relation to the second national Joint Area Targeted Inspection by Ofsted. This visit focused on the mental health of young people and concentrated on a range of services delivered by the Council and partners such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAHMS), Youth Offending Service and the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH).

Mac Heath, Director of Children's Services highlighted the key themes noted by the Inspectors were:

- the ambition and commitment to Mental Health Services for Children and Young People in Milton Keynes;
- the collaborative approach by the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH);
- the challenges of 3 years ago about thresholds for intervention had improved and were now consistent;
- prompt service Out of Hours given;
- positive response by the MK Youth Offending Team (YOT) and Mental Health needs for young people.
- auditing of shared understanding of good practice across services to be strengthened.
- there was provision of school nurses in Milton Keynes but this needed further resourcing by Health and it was anticipated that this would be considered within the Health and Wellbeing Board;
- referrals to the MASH team by other services in Milton Keynes does not always include full information, however the Director of Children's Services indicated that an Action Plan was being drafted to help strengthen this; and
- there was a range of services available to support Young People but the understanding of these by young people and their carers was not always clear.

Regional Adoption Agency

The Panel received the statistical data regarding Adoption Agency 6 Month Report which identified key trends and challenges within the service.

Residential Homes Update

The Panel received a presentation from the Residential Manager of Furze House, The Walnuts and Westminster House. The presentation highlighted the transition of young people to independence, the achievements of young people and how much the young people enjoyed their summer holiday in Derbyshire.

Edge of Care

Panel considered the presentation from the Group Head of Service, Children and Families who summarised the Strategy which was launched in January 2016 as a response to emergency situations.

The Group Head of Service and the Director of Children's Services answered questions from the Panel members with reference to the presentation.

Virtual School Summary

The Panel received a presentation from the Virtual School Head Teacher who summarised the outcomes and indicated that these were still provisional as the Key Stage 4 results had not yet been received. The progress of Children's Education needs are reviewed and monitored by their Personal Education Plans. It was confirmed that under half of our CIC children had taken their GCSEs. Children post 16 who had English as second language is supported via ESOL.

The Virtual School Head Teacher suggested that the academic results did not reflect how well young people were doing in learning practical skills such as plastering, which could result in paid work.

The Director of Children's Services indicated that Councillor Miles (Chair) attended the Virtual School Governors Panel and had raised at those meetings that the curriculum options should be widened to include practical as well as academic skills. It was acknowledged that there was more progress to be made with this issue.

The Board Making a Difference to the Lives of Young People in Care

Councillor Miles (Chair) attended a wreath laying service in Wolverton as part of Armistice Day and had met with a family of foster carers who indicated their support for the Milton Keynes Council fostering service.

Councillor Brown indicated that Children in Care had attended work experience at his place of work.

Councillor K Bradburn indicated that as a school worker she had worked with Children in Care at her place of work on an Inset day and had received positive feedback from them about support staff at that school.

Top Ten Tips for Social Workers

The Panel noted the You Tube video that had been produced by the East of England Participation Group and featured Children in Care from Milton Keynes. The film can be accessed at [Hertfordshire & Milton Keynes - Ten Top Tips for Social Workers](#).

Key Celebrations

Corporate Parenting Members attended many events, including achievements events at our residential units, Christmas Parties, Corporate Parenting Week, Follow up Breakfast with local Businesses and Foster Care Achievements.

Overview of Report

'It takes a village to raise a child', this report reflects how we as collective Corporate Parents have contributed towards meeting the needs of our Children in Care and Care Leavers. Our Corporate Children welfare is paramount and we thrive to promote this. This report demonstrates that whilst there is much good work going on, we are not complacent. We don't always get it right, but we learn and will continue to build on improving the outcomes of our Corporate Children.