

Together...Keeping Children Safe

Buckinghamshire Looked After Children Strategy

Responsible Manager: *Service Director Children's Social Care*

Version number: V0.9

Date created: June 2016

Date of next review: June 2017



Contents

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Contents | 2 |
| Foreword | 3 |
| 1. Introduction | 4 |
| 2. Our Priorities | 5 |
| 3. Our Looked After Children | 6 |
| 4. Early Help and Prevention | 11 |
| 5. Life-long Learners | 13 |
| 6. Health..... | 16 |
| 7. Care Leavers..... | 17 |
| 8. Summary of the Issues | 18 |
| 9. Actions we will take | 19 |
| 10. Monitoring and Governance of the Strategy..... | 20 |

Foreword

This Looked After Children Strategy outlines the values, principles and key priorities to support the children and young people who are looked after by Buckinghamshire County Council. We want to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and their families; by working in partnership we can deliver the services children and young people need to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.



David Johnston
Managing Director
Children's Social Care
and Learning



Lin Hazell
Cabinet Member
Children's Services



Zahir Mohammed
Cabinet Member
Education & Skills

1. Introduction

Buckinghamshire County Council and its partners are committed to providing good and effective parenting to all the children and young people it looks after. This also includes all young people who are care leavers, 16 to 24 years of age who have left care following their 16th birthday.

Every parent wants the best for their child and as a Corporate Parent we want to ensure that all children in our care are healthy, safe and happy, do well at school and enjoy good relationships with their peers. That they are able to make the most of leisure opportunities, hobbies and interests, and to grow towards adulthood equipped to lead independent lives and to make their way as adults in higher education, in good careers and jobs, and financially secure.

Corporate Parenting is the responsibility of every employee and elected Member within Buckinghamshire County Council and its Districts, not just those working directly in Children's Services.

Our pledge to young people in our care is:

We will:

- *Treat you with respect and hear your voice*
- *Look after you*
- *Provide a good education for you*
- *Keep you healthy*
- *Support you to be independent*

2. Our Priorities

Our priorities for children and young people in our care are:

1. To ensure that children and young people are able to remain with their own families wherever this is consistent with them being safe, secure and promoting their welfare
2. To provide placements that achieve permanence, in particular maximising the number of children that achieve permanency through adoption or special guardianship
3. To provide placements for children close to their home
4. To place children with foster carers wherever this is appropriate, only using residential provision where this is in the child's best interests
5. To provide a sufficiency of good quality placements for young people aged 16+
6. To keep children and young people in care, and Care Leavers, safe from harm and help young people to keep themselves safe and make good choices
7. To improve outcomes for Looked After Children and Care Leavers including health, education, higher education, employment and training
8. To maximise value for money and value-added from all services

To achieve this Buckinghamshire County Council will ensure there are:

- High quality, multi-agency services available which support families to look after their children and young people and prevent them from entering the care system.
- Robust assessment of needs before children become looked after,
- Sufficient, high quality foster carers available within the County to ensure children in care are placed, wherever possible, close to their family and friends,
- Sufficient, high quality multi-agency support available to enable children to return to their family as soon as this is a safe option for them,
- Sufficient, high quality multi-agency support is available to Looked After Children to ensure they reach their potential through access to quality education, health and social services, and are able to move into adulthood successfully,
- Effective leaving care services that enable young people to transition into adulthood safely.
- Cost effective services which show improved outcomes for children and young people.

3. Our Looked After Children

The Local Authorities which have experienced the greatest success in improving outcomes for their LAC have one overriding feature in common; the managers and all those with responsibility for Looked After Children have a very detailed knowledge and understanding of their care population and can give accurate information about age patterns, proportions accommodated or with care orders, the type of care provider and what the exit options are. In other words being clear about what the cohorts are in the LAC population and applying an approach to each of these cohorts that will be most effective.

How many are there?

In the past seven years there has been a significant growth nationally in the number of Looked After Children and, although Buckinghamshire has seen some rise in the number of children it looks after, it has not been at the same rate and pace as other Authorities.

The number of children looked after in Buckinghamshire and comparator authorities at the 31st March for each year since 2009.

| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 |
|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| England | 60,900 | 64,470 | 65,510 | 67,070 | 68,060 | 68,800 | 69,540 |
| Bucks | 330 | 345 | 390 | 375 | 400 | 440 | 435 |
| Oxfordshire | 415 | 450 | 425 | 450 | 415 | 460 | 515 |
| Surrey | 820 | 765 | 730 | 805 | 830 | 795 | 780 |
| South East LAs | 7,660 | 8,160 | 8,480 | 8,720 | 8,820 | 8,950 | 9,310 |

What is there Legal Status?

The table below shows that there has been a continuing pattern of children and young people who require a court order to be in care, this shows an appropriate use of the care system for those children who are deemed to be at greatest risk.

| Legal Status of Looked After Children | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Legal Status | March 2011 | March 2012 | March 2013 | March 2014 | March 2015 |
| Interim Care Order | 22% | 19% | 12% | 11% | 9% |
| Full Care Order | 33% | 41% | 45% | 44% | 50% |
| Placement Order | 9% | 9% | 15% | 13% | 14% |
| Accommodated | 36% | 31% | 27% | 31% | 28% |

In the past 12 months the number of children subject to care proceedings in Buckinghamshire has increased by 100%, from a steady state of about 45 children per year to 100 as of March 2016.

Who are they?

The age, gender, ethnicity and needs of children entering care are significant in understanding the preventative services that need to be commissioned and the types of care placements required to meet their needs.

Age:

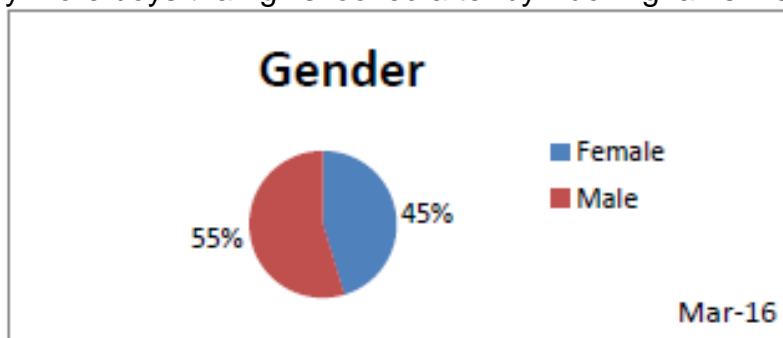
A significant proportion of Buckinghamshire's looked after children population are in their adolescents rather than infant years:

| Age Range | March 2011 | | March 2012 | | March 2013 | | March 2014 | | March 2015 | |
|-----------|------------|----|------------|----|------------|----|------------|----|------------|----|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| Under 1 | 20 | 5 | 20 | 5 | 15 | 4 | 20 | 5 | 20 | 5 |
| 1-4 | 75 | 20 | 65 | 18 | 70 | 17 | 65 | 15 | 65 | 15 |
| 5-9 | 75 | 19 | 75 | 21 | 85 | 21 | 90 | 20 | 80 | 19 |
| 10-15 | 135 | 35 | 145 | 38 | 150 | 38 | 160 | 36 | 165 | 38 |
| 16+ | 80 | 21 | 70 | 18 | 80 | 20 | 105 | 24 | 100 | 23 |

There is evidence to show that adolescent entrants to the looked after system have poorer outcomes than adolescent graduates, i.e. those who enter care before they are adolescent.

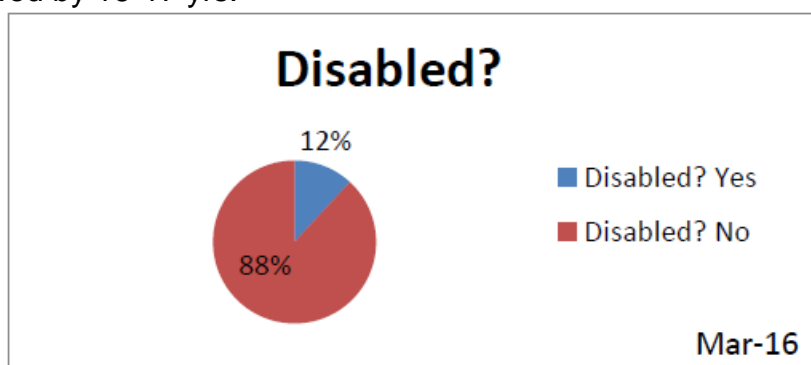
Gender:

There are slightly more boys than girls looked after by Buckinghamshire.



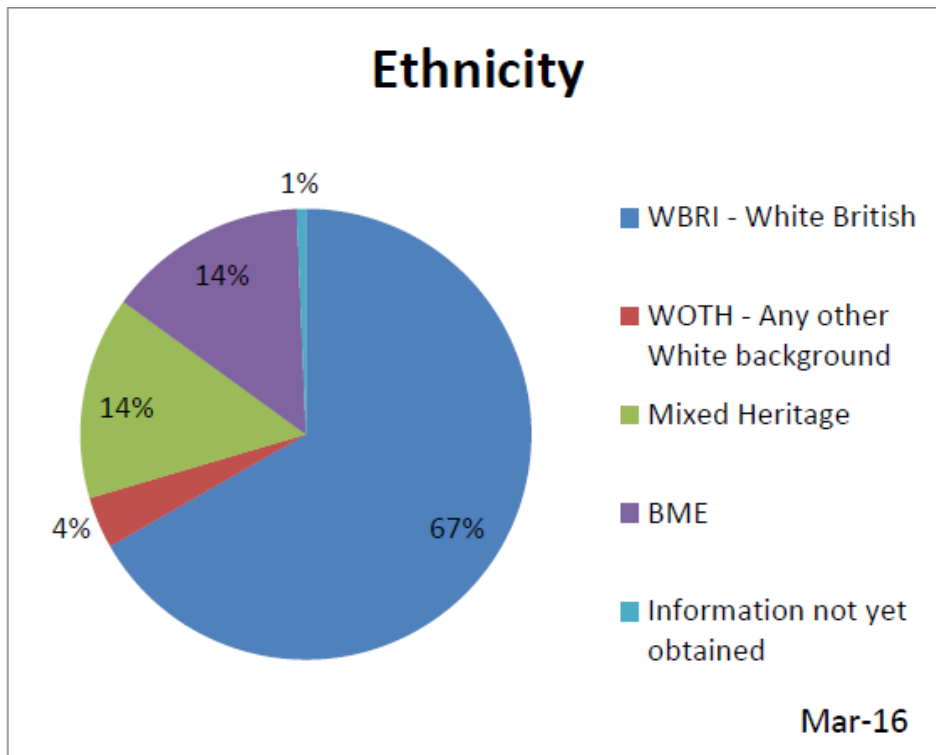
Disability:

Currently, 12% of our looked after children have a disability. The highest age bracket is 10-15yrs followed by 16-17 yrs.



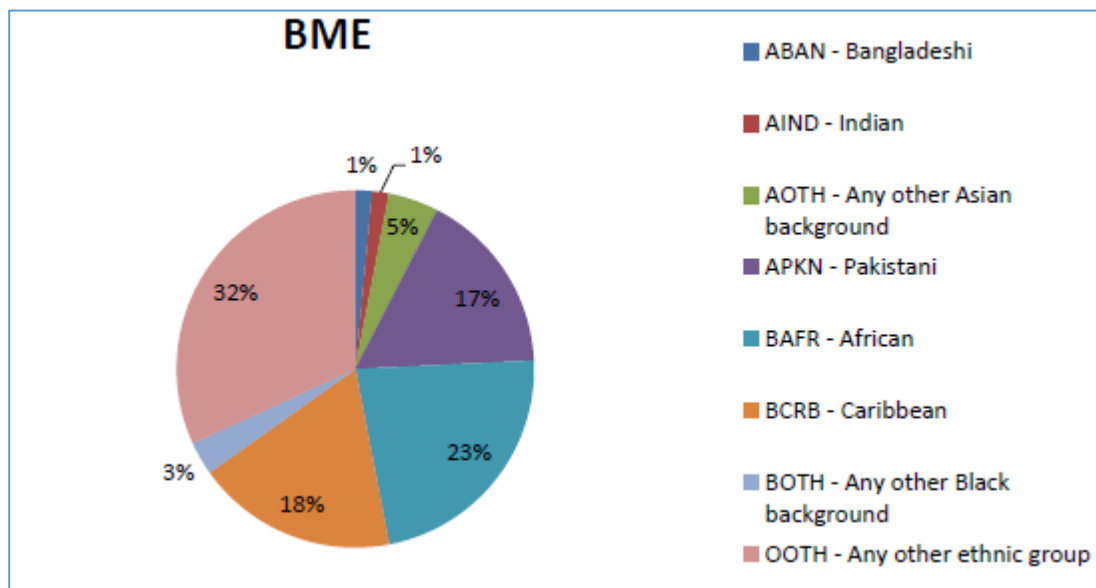
Ethnicity:

29% of the looked after children population are Mixed Heritage/BME.



Currently 14% of Looked After Children are BME in comparison to 18% that are Children in Need and 18% of Children on a Protection Plan. In 2014/15 there were 13% BME. Currently a high proportion (65%) of BME children are male, particularly those with African and Other ethnicities. In relation to age, the highest proportion of BME are those who are in the 10-15yr age group and of those slightly more were male.

Currently there are 19 Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, whose ages range from 15 - 17 years. Of these 4 are of African ethnicity and 15 come under the category of Other, which includes countries such as Iran and Vietnam.



Where do they live?

Currently, over half of Buckinghamshire's Looked After Children are placed outside of the County borders, and approximately 60% are placed in privately owned provision.

| Location of Care Placements | | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Area | % Within 20 miles of home | % In County | % Out of County |
| England | 77 | 61 | 40 |
| South East | 69 | 65 | 35 |
| Buckinghamshire | 54 | 42 | 58 |

Nationally approximately 75% of looked after children are cared for in fostering placements, 10% are in residential care. Currently, Buckinghamshire has a greater number of children in residential care (15%). Residential care should only be used when the complexity of the child's needs cannot be met within a family.

Buckinghamshire County Council only has 1 Children's Home and so when residential care is required we are rarely able to accommodate within our own provision. There is consistent evidence that outcomes for children and young people in care are generally poorer for those in residential settings than in foster care.

The All Parliamentary Group on Children Missing From Care, published in June 2012, recommended urgent action on "out of area placements" to reduce the number of children living outside their own LA citing this as a major factor in causing them to run away and putting them at additional risk. The report highlighted it was difficult to ensure the children placed out of area receive the additional specialist support they need.

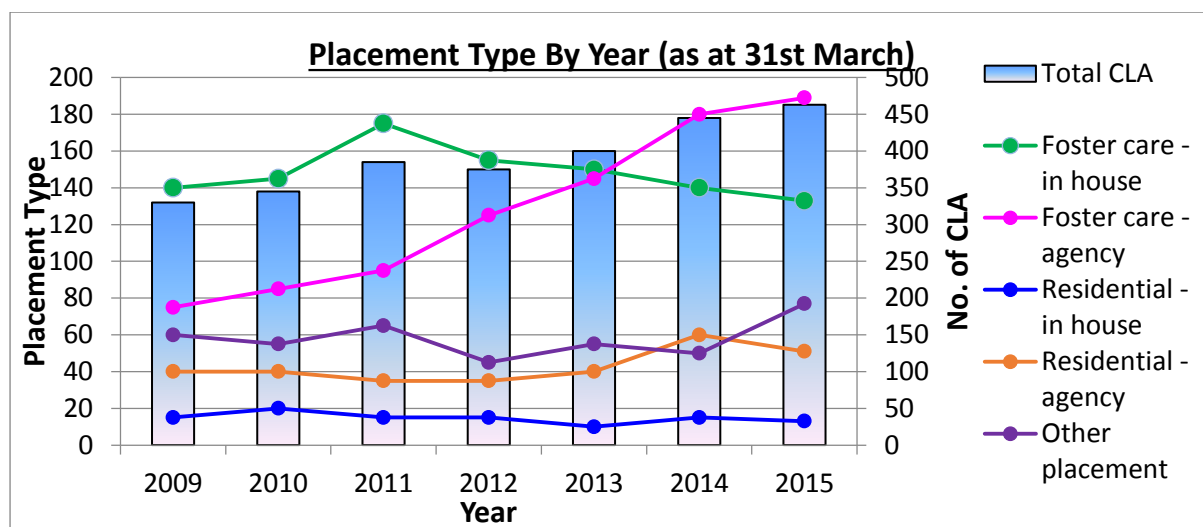
| Types of Provision where Children are Placed 2014-2015 | | |
|---|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| Area | % in Fostering | % in Residential Care |
| England | 75 | 12 |
| South East | 76 | 12 |
| Buckinghamshire | 72 | 15 |

Buckinghamshire places 42% of its looked after children in independent fostering provision, compared with a 27% average in comparator authorities. This means that approximately only 1 in 3 looked after children are placed with the in-house fostering service in Buckinghamshire, compared with around 2 in 3 in comparator authorities.

Until 2012/13 Buckinghamshire's fostering service provided the majority of foster care placements, however the increasing number of children in care has required the independent sector to meet the additional demand.

The table below shows the types of placements children were living in from 2009. It shows the growth of the total population and the increase use of IFA placements to meet the additional demand. During 2012-13, IFA use was greater than in-house use.

The use of residential placements significantly rose during 2013-14, when the first cases of CSE in Buckinghamshire came to light. There was a slight increase the previous year in the use of agency residential following the closure of Chiltern View children's home, which was a BCC home.



The number of foster carers provided by the Council's fostering service has remained the same in the last four years. The recruitment of foster carers in Buckinghamshire is extremely challenging. There was only one fostering enquiry per thousand households in 2013/14. Most comparator authorities have twice as many enquiries.

Whilst recent Council investment in marketing has driven a 25% increase in fostering enquiries in 2014/15, with a doubling of the numbers of people receiving an initial visit and subsequently being assessed, the impact of this on increasing the numbers of foster carers needs to be evaluated to decide where the in house recruitment should focus future activities. The loss of foster carers, through retirement or other factors means that the net gain in available carers is very small.

How much do they cost us?

Even though Buckinghamshire's looked after children numbers are relatively low the costs are rising due to the challenging nature of many of the children and young people by the time they come into care and this impacts on their placement choice.

As would be expected, with the increased use of agency provision the cost of this care increases.

The overall financial commitment in 2014-15 to children in care, those receiving residential short breaks and after care support was in excess of £24m. The greatest expenditure was in residential care and independent fostering placements, £11m and £7.6m respectively.

4. Early Help and Prevention

We want to ensure we have an enhanced Early Help offer that delivers evidence based interventions to ensure only the right children come into our care at the right time. Most children are more likely to thrive and achieve good outcomes if they are cared for within their own family.

Early identification, prevention and intervention are key factors in supporting families to stay together. Buckinghamshire will support families using evidenced based approaches which will enable them to solve their own problems to live a successful family life.

Working Together 2015 states:

- *Providing early help is more effective in promoting the welfare of children than reacting later*
- *Early help means providing support as soon as a problem emerges, at any point in a child's life, from the foundation years through to the teenage years*

In Buckinghamshire we have developed a partnership approach to Early Help which has been agreed by the Buckinghamshire Safeguarding Children's Board and a range of other partnership Boards. The approach is built around the Troubled Families national programme evidence (locally we call this Families First) and is described in the [Early Help Strategy](#).

Within Buckinghamshire County Council, Early Help is delivered through a range of commissioned services including Children's Centres, Connexions and voluntary sector providers such as Barnardo's as well as through in house services such as the Youth Service. The Family Resilience Service is based in locality settings across the County and works with children and families as lead agency through both one to one and group based interventions such as parenting courses. All of these services use the Outcomes Star to measure progress.

We also offer two specialist services targeted at children who are deemed to be at high risk of coming into our care:

- The **Junior CATCH** service provides a flexible and high priority response service to work intensively from pre-birth and primary school aged children and families where there is a risk of children becoming accommodated by the Local Authority and to prevent family breakdown. The service provides support to families out of core hours and over weekends to meet the individual needs of a family. Junior CATCH works systemically within a professional network alongside the child's social worker. All work undertaken is time limited and planned to specifically focus around the families' individual needs using a range of interventions, tools and resources. The services provided include parenting support, pre-birth and post birth support and assessment, adoption breakdown, 1.1 work with children, 1.1 work with adults, reunification support and parenting capacity support.

- The **Senior CATCH** service works with young people of secondary school age up until 17 years of age. The aim of the service is to work with families to prevent young people entering the care system. The service provides short-term targeted interventions to families in crisis situations where there is an imminent risk of family breakdown and/or high likelihood of accommodation by the Local Authority. Interventions provided by can include family mediation, boundary setting, solution focused approaches, parenting support and one to one interventions with young people. They work closely with partner agencies to ensure families are in receipt of thoughtful and coordinated support systems to bring about positive change and keep families together when safe to do so.

Our approach to Early Help in Buckinghamshire is family centred, consent-based and focused on working collaboratively with families to build their resilience. A critical ingredient to successful working is the need for families to make a commitment to change. An assertive, challenging, persistent approach, based on national research, this is the way in which professionals can most often bring about real change in the lives of children and their families.

The Early Help service for the child and their family is coordinated through the multi-agency Early Help Panel. The Panel identifies which is the most appropriate lead agency to provide the lead family worker.

As our business intelligence improves, we will focus on the 'hot spots' in the County for admissions to care to gather information to build a picture of:

- What characteristics the area have that means it is more likely children will come into care
- Whether demand in an area can be predicted, managed and reduced by addressing deprivation alone
- What additional assets the area needs to build resilience in the neighbourhood
- What is the early offer of help in the area
- What local commissioning is there that aims to build resilience in the community
- What do the residents think the solutions are

This knowledge will assist in all partners understanding the profile of their area so that they can evidence their contribution to reducing numbers of looked after children through effective early interventions and provide targeted Early Help services to address those needs, focusing on activities which will significantly improve the outcomes for the child and family. This approach and intelligence will also inform future commissioning at a local level.

5. Life-long Learners

Children and young people of Buckinghamshire will have access to appropriate education, additional support and services which will enable them to reach their potential. A good education is essential in order to become successful, give young people choices and opportunities to live fulfilling lives. We want our children to do well in school and in any further and higher education that they choose to undertake. Most importantly, we want them to achieve their very best in everything that they do.

Some looked after children do very well at school, but they often face additional barriers to success in their education. This includes missing substantial periods of their education, which can occur for different reasons, such as delay in being given a school place, poor health, being excluded from school, placement changes making it harder to get to school, being placed in the wrong school for them and truanting. Having at least one adult in their life who acts as a good role model, encourages them to attend school and supports them in their reading and doing their homework is as important for every school-aged looked after child as being provided with a good school.

Our strategy will focus on addressing the imbalances that children and care leavers face so that they can achieve their very best.

Buckinghamshire's looked after children have told us that, in relation to their education, we should:

- Help to seek work experience opportunities
- Enable creativity
- Encourage goal setting in education, work and training
- Be realistic about what can be achieved
- Have access to the relevant information
- Use positive language in communication
- Be respectful and show faith in them
- Share enthusiasm

The Virtual School

Buckinghamshire's Virtual School is part of Buckinghamshire County Council. All children and young people in our care are part of the Virtual School. The majority attend their local educational setting, although the Virtual School does have a classroom for additional tuition and support in Amersham.

The team of 20 experienced educational staff work directly with schools, social workers, foster carers and the child in order to improve their educational achievements. They also offer support to children who have been adopted and live in Buckinghamshire.

Overall educational achievement in Buckinghamshire is very high and so the gap between looked after children and their peers is large. However the Virtual School can demonstrate the impact that it has on every looked after child and can evidence the good progress made by our children once they come into our care. At the time of writing, we have 14 young people going to University and a number of young people in Further Education.

Performance (2014/15 academic year)

- The Personal Education Plan (PEP) process has become streamlined with the Virtual School (VS) supporting this statutory social care function by co-ordinating the collation and distribution of PEP's. PEPs are completed termly and we usually achieve our monthly target of 100% of pupils having a timely and current PEP.
- The Virtual School have made contact within 10 days of the pupil becoming looked after or moving placements. (Usually 100%)
- 82% of Virtual School pupils attend a school which is judged good or outstanding by Ofsted. There is a narrative for all other children to ensure their provision is at least good. New placements are always in good or outstanding schools.
- Of the 26 children finishing primary school in July 2015, 16 were educated in mainstream schools, with 15 eligible to take the end of Key Stage tests. 60% of those entered achieved Level 4 in both Reading and Maths at Key Stage 2. 96% achieved expected progress and 35% exceeded expectations when compared to prior attainment.
- 5 pupils started university courses in October 2015.

Attainment at Key Stage 1

Key Stage 1 attainment for looked after children nationally continues to improve – increasing slightly for both mathematics and writing and remaining stable for reading. In Buckinghamshire:

- 73% of looked after children achieved Level 2 or above in mathematics (up from 72% the previous year)
- 71% achieved Level 2 or above in reading (the same as last year)
- 63% achieved Level 2 or above in writing (up from 61% last year)
- 77% are meeting national expectations in Reading and Writing
- 92% are meeting national expectations in Maths

Attainment at Key Stage 2

| | Percentage who achieved at least level 4 | | | |
|-----------------|--|---------|---------|----------------------------------|
| | Mathematics | Reading | Writing | Reading, writing and mathematics |
| Buckinghamshire | 42 | 68 | 53 | 37 |
| South East | 62 | 71 | 59 | 51 |
| England | 64 | 71 | 61 | 52 |

Whilst the Buckinghamshire results at Key Stage 2 for looked after children were below both regional and national averages, it must be noted that the Buckinghamshire cohort was very small, with results for a single pupil accounting for approximately 5 percentage points each. However, there is a lot of work to do to get looked after children in Buckinghamshire in line with their peers as 83% of all pupils in Buckinghamshire achieved level 4 or above in all of reading, writing and mathematics, compared with 37% of looked after children.

96% of Buckinghamshire's looked after children achieved expected progress when compared to previous attainment and 35% exceeded expectations in one or more area.

Attainment at Key Stage 4

| | Buckinghamshire | South East | England |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------|---------|
| % 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C | 17.5 | 17.6 | 18.3 |
| % A*-C in English & mathematics | 15.0 | 16.8 | 15.9 |

Given the small number of pupils in the looked after cohort in Buckinghamshire (40 pupils), results are broadly in line with national and regional averages.

6. Health

Good physical, mental and emotional health is an essential pre-condition to successful learning, happiness and success in life. Looked after children and care leavers are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health. Many looked after children come into care with chronic physical and mental health problems that are a result of their early experiences and neglect.

For children who had been looked after for at least a year as at 31/03/2016:

- 88% had up to date immunisations
- 92% had a dental check in the previous 12 months
- 95% had a health assessment completed

There have been extensive and ongoing improvements made to the working partnerships between Buckinghamshire County Council, Buckinghamshire Health Care Trust, Designated Health Care Team for Children in Care, the Children's Joint Commissioning Team at BCC and the CCGs.

Following recommissioning, a new integrated Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) commenced in Buckinghamshire on 1st October 2015. This was a joint commissioning initiative between the Council and the two Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and provides targeted and specialist Child and Young People's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services and referral and step down responsibility for inpatient placements (Tier 4). Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OHFT), in partnership with Barnardos and BEAT (the eating disorder charity) provide the integrated service and this includes a specific pathway for adopted, Looked After Children (LAC) and Care Leavers. Key objectives for looked after children are:

- timely access - 5 working days to initial consultation, including to those placed within an hour's radius outside of Buckinghamshire in border counties
- ensure high levels of information sharing across the different social care teams and CAMHS
- consultation, advice and strategies to children and their carers across the whole care pathway including those eligible under the Care Leavers Strategy
- run training programmes eg. on attachment

Key outcomes of the new CAMHS to date:

- No breaches to 5 day initial consultation access.
- DNAs (did not attend) have continued to reduce to 2% (from 6%) indicating appropriate appointment times and locations to meet the needs of looked after child.
- Buckinghamshire children placed on the borders (eg. Milton Keynes, Slough, Hemel Hempstead) have all received timely access to Bucks CAMHS without need to wait 18 week referral to treatment national NHS criteria to access locally provided CAMHS services.
- Locality based training sessions taking place.
- Information sharing agreement established between the Council and OHFT to enable greater understanding of children in care accessing CAMHS including psychological outcomes.

7. Care Leavers

In October 2013, the Government issued its Care Leaver Strategy with a clear aspiration that care leavers “*should expect the same level of care and support that other young people get from their parent*”.

The strategy sets out the Government’s commitment to remove some of the practical barriers that care leavers face as they progress to adulthood. They want to see “*holistic and quality support provided in all mainstream and specialist services by: local authorities; Jobcentre plus; housing; health bodies; the justice system; and, educational institutions.services that are integrated, simplified and that treat care leavers with dignity and respect.*”

The Government’s Strategy seeks to improve the educational attainment of care leavers and strengthens duties on local authorities to support Children in Care to remain in education and provide support to care leavers aged 21-24 who wish to return to education or training.

If a young person aged over 16 requires supported living, a suitable independence option will be offered to enable them to move into adulthood safely. All placements should prepare children and young people for adulthood, regardless of their age, in order for them to reach their potential within their communities and succeed as adults.

In March 2016:

- 80% of Care Leavers had an up to date Pathway Plan
- 86% of Care Leavers were in suitable accommodation
- 58% of Care Leavers were in employment, education or training

When appropriate, young people living with foster carers who are approaching 18 years of age will have the opportunity to remain with that carer through Staying Put. ‘Staying Put’ arrangements enable young people to remain with their former foster carers in order to help ensure that they are adequately prepared for adulthood, can experience a transition similar to their peers, avoid social exclusion and be less likely to experience a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown. Buckinghamshire has implemented a Staying Put Policy and has increased the number of young people who stay with their foster carers beyond the age of 18.

8. Summary of the Issues

The main issues in relation to our Looked After Children can be summarised as:

- Too many children placed out of County
- Too many young people are living in residential care compared to other LAs
- High unit costs
- Insufficient in house foster carers
- High use of external providers

All these factors have the following impact:

- Too many Looked After Children are required to change schools when they become looked after
- Educational outcomes for children in care are proportionally lower than their peers
- Rehabilitation of children is affected by the physical distance from home
- Access to specialist services, such as CAMHS, is limited to the availability in the locality they are placed in, and they are not a priority
- Financial impact is greater, therefore reducing the financial investment in preventative services
- Valuable professional practice time is wasted on longer travel time when attending visits to children, meetings and reviews
- The costs of resources for Looked After Children are rising as we are more dependent on the external market for provision

9. Actions we will take

There is not a one size fits all approach to supporting families in the community or for improving outcomes for Looked After Children. Different cohorts of children require different approaches and so this strategy sets out how we will do this.

The following overall actions will be taken:

- Create an effective multi-agency Early Help offer and pathway, including targeted specialist support.
- Commission evidence based multi-agency interventions at the edge of care to ensure only the right children come into care at the right time.
- Commission evidence based interventions to enable children in care to return home in a timely manner.
- Increase the number of local foster care placements through a radical partnership with fostering providers.
- Increase the number of children in care placed within the county or within 20 miles of their home address.
- Residential care provided outside of the Buckinghamshire, and neighbouring authority areas will only be used when there is no local capacity or when the complexity of the child's needs requires specialist provision.
- Ensure children are placed in secure family settings, using adoption and special guardianship where appropriate. Also to ensure there is no financial detrimental effect on a foster carer becoming a special guardian.
- Reduce the need for residential care placements by creating specialist fostering placements.
- Ensure young people have the opportunity to remain with their foster carer past their 18th birthday to continue with education, employment and training through promoting Staying Put, and ensuring there is no detrimental financial effect on the carer.
- Transform the culture, management and working practice of all professionals involved in care planning for children in care.
- Promote corporate governance by creating a project delivery board, led by Senior Managers and County Councillors.

These actions are captured in the table below. There are more detailed plans that will sit alongside this to ensure the necessary progress is made.

10. Monitoring and Governance of the Strategy

In addition to monitoring improved outcomes for children and young people through quality measures, a suite of indicators have been developed to enable high level tracking of the impact of the Strategy.

Research conducted with other local authorities highlights the key drivers for good quality and performance for Looked after Children. The findings highlight the following five common characteristics:

- 1) **Strategy and leadership** – a strong focus on securing corporate and elected member buy in to the strategy and active engagement of partners so that everyone is clear how they can and are improving outcomes for LAC and why.
- 2) **Prevention and early intervention** - There is a positive connection between services and support designed to stop needs escalating and the ability to reduce the numbers of Looked After Children.
- 3) **Approach to practice** - Evidence supports that there are different approaches to practice that can influence the numbers and outcomes of LAC within an area, including a clearly defined social work model; sufficient time to work with children and families; robust Quality Assurance and IRO functions; and a different approach to delivering adoption.
- 4) **Partnership working** - a common aim around LAC which is shared by partners and stakeholders, developed by joint planning and shared action
- 5) **Information and intelligence on performance** - Performance information that enables stakeholders to monitor the impact of interventions and to develop evidence of what works, when and who for to ensure that families get the right intervention when they need it.

It is proposed in order to strengthen the leadership for this strategy and develop and embed these characteristics that a LAC Project Board is established to deliver on the work strands. Key partners will be the “owner” of the strand and with the Board be responsible for strengthening and driving the performance for LAC. There will need to be dedicated project support to this work.

The Corporate Parenting Panel will provide support and challenge for the strategy and will have it as a standing item on their agenda. There will be a clear suite of indicators that will measure performance against the key strands of the strategy. A quarterly report should also be taken to Select Committee. The Children’s Council should make a critical contribution to the strategy. It is essential that young people who have experience of being cared for are able to influence current and future practice and provision.

Actions

| | Cohort | Issue | Approach | Impact |
|--|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| Cohorts already within the care system | 0-5 year olds | Target group for permanence. These children have the highest potential of being moved out of care and into adoption. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with Coram as an improvement partner to improve adoption performance and timeliness Tracking of all children under 8 years to ensure permanency in place and no drift. Robust challenge from IROs- improvements in the IRO service New PPM process Progress Foster to Adopt | <p>Reduce drift</p> <p>Identify blockages to timely planning</p> <p>Foster to Adopt improves the outcomes for young children and</p> |
| | All Looked after Children | <p>Increase number of both in house foster carers and the supply if foster carers in County</p> <p>Increase residential placement options for young people with complex needs in County</p> <p>Understanding why children come into our care</p> <p>Improve exits from care</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with an improvement partner from an outstanding fostering agency to improve our own service Investigate different models of future service delivery Partner with Coram for Innovation bid to improve Long Term Fostering Explore options for investment to increase in house residential provision in County Business Intelligence analysing all children that came into care between April15- Feb 16 Working with Coram as an improvement partner to Improve care planning across the child's journey, adoption timeliness and | <p>More children placed in our own foster carers</p> <p>LAC can attend local schools and access health services</p> <p>IRO and social work time can be better spent with children rather than travelling</p> <p>Unit costs for LAC reduced</p> <p>Capital investment may be required</p> <p>Focussing resources and commissioning on</p> |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|---|---|
| | | | social work practice around permanency planning. | services that will reduce incidents of care. Permanence is achieved more quickly |
| 16-17 year olds | A rising number of these coming into care in crisis | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource panel to review all care plans for 15-17 year olds to ensure that care is the right option for them. • Consider what other options we can develop to support young people to remain at home eg Adolescent support services. • A significant number of young people return home when they leave care. We need to focus ensuring this happens where appropriate asap. With appropriate support • When young person leaving a residential placement outside of the County we should consider decommissioning the bed and reduce our dependence on residential beds • Develop fostering scheme to care for difficult adolescents | Reduce the number of 16- 17 year olds requiring care Reduced costs |
| LAC with disabilities | Currently there are a small number of disabled children in care who require specialist external placements to meet their individual need. | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of these cases will be undertaken to ensure quality and effectiveness | Improved outcomes for children living in the right placement to meet their needs |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Those placed in residential care</p> | <p>If we were to have the same proportion of young people in care as our SN then we would have 54 in residential care rather than the 61 we have.</p> <p>Some specialist external placements are necessary where a child's needs are so great that they cannot be met through internal placements. However, these are the most expensive placements. There are a number of younger looked after children currently in residential care that need to move into specialist foster care to improve their long term outcomes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to review who we might be able to target to be safely returned home or onto independence or foster care • Challenge the independent foster care market to provide more carers • Market warming event held in September 2015 • Increase our own numbers • A market warming event took place in Sept 15 to challenge the independent foster care market. We want them to provide "step down" foster care placements in County for this specific cohort of young people. They will be given the profile of these young people. • Plan to move some of these children into foster care placements. | <p>Fewer young people in residential care improving outcomes.</p> <p>Young children with complex needs live with foster carers rather than residential care</p> |
| <p>Section 20</p> | <p>Xx of admissions into care were made under a Section 20. Is this the right solution for these children and young people?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinstating better gatekeeping through the weekly Resource Panel. All new admissions are taken to this panel to assess the quality and suitability of the plan in place. Plans are then reviewed every 4 weeks to ensure progress is maintained. • This centralises decision making on cases at a senior level and facilitates | <p>Reduce drift for CYP</p> <p>Ensure PR is established</p> <p>Right actions are taken for CYP at the right time</p> |

| | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| | | | <p>multiagency working which shares the risk across partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All section 20s to be reviewed and kept under review by HoS for CiN | |
| | Neighbourhood intelligence Approach | <p>Focus on one of the hot spots in the County for Admissions to care to gather intelligence to build a picture of :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What characteristics does the area have that means it is more likely children will come into care • Can demand in an area be predicted, managed and reduced by addressing deprivation alone • what additional assets does the area need to build resilience in the neighbourhood • What is the early offer of help in the area • What local commissioning is there that aims to build resilience in the neighbourhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying the right children, young people and families who need extra help and support at the earliest opportunity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By working together as a strong partnership to deliver an effective local offer of support • By delivering a whole family approach to make a difference and achieve good outcomes | <p>More effective local commissioning focussed on areas of need to reduce demand for social care.</p> <p>More resilient communities.</p> <p>Reduced dependency.</p> |

- What do the residents think the solutions are
- Do the Universal services know the profile of their area and can they evidence their contribution to reducing LAC through effective early interventions;

