



Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Report to the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Title:	Looked After Children's Strategy
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Purpose of Agenda Item

- This report is provided for information. It is to provide members with the Looked after Children's strategy that outlines the values, principles and key priorities to support the children and young people who are looked after by Buckinghamshire County Council.

Background

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

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

The main issue with our Looked after Children is that 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 2015			
Area	% Within 20 miles of home	% In County	% Out of County
England	77	61	40
South East	69	65	35
Buckinghamshire	54	42	58

Summary

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

Key issues

There is an urgent need to shift our placement provision to ensure that most of our Looked after Children can live within the County. The following 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.

Resource implications

An improvement partner has been commissioned to work with our fostering team. Core Assets successfully won the bid for this role and their team will commence work on 19th September. There will need to be dedicated project support to this work and the details of this are being detailed in the five year plan.

As the strategy is implemented savings will be realised through improved placement sufficiency and more effective market management

Next steps

A LAC Project Board is being established to deliver on this strategy. The Board be responsible for strengthening and driving the performance for LAC.

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 will also be brought to Select Committee.