

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CORPORATE PARENTING CABINET COMMITTEE

22nd June 2010

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN

PERFORMANCE DATA FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide information to the Corporate Parenting Cabinet Committee on the progress of key performance indicators for Looked After Children.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

2.1 Looked after children are a key responsibility for the Council as corporate parents and connect with the theme 'Children Today Adults Tomorrow.'

2.2 Corporate Parenting supports the following corporate priorities:

- Children today, adults tomorrow
- Supporting our disadvantaged communities
- Creating learning communities

and is connected to the following community strategy themes:

- Young Voices
- Healthy Living
- New Opportunities.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Safeguarding and Family Support Service is required to provide data to the Welsh Assembly Government to evidence its performance against a number of key indicators. Within the service a number of these performance indicators are monitored on a monthly basis to ensure compliance and track progress as well as identification of any areas for further attention. The data is currently in the process of being validated prior to the submission of returns for the year 1.4.09 to 31.3.10. Whilst some of the data contained within this report is still undergoing this validation process, the overarching themes and issues can be considered.

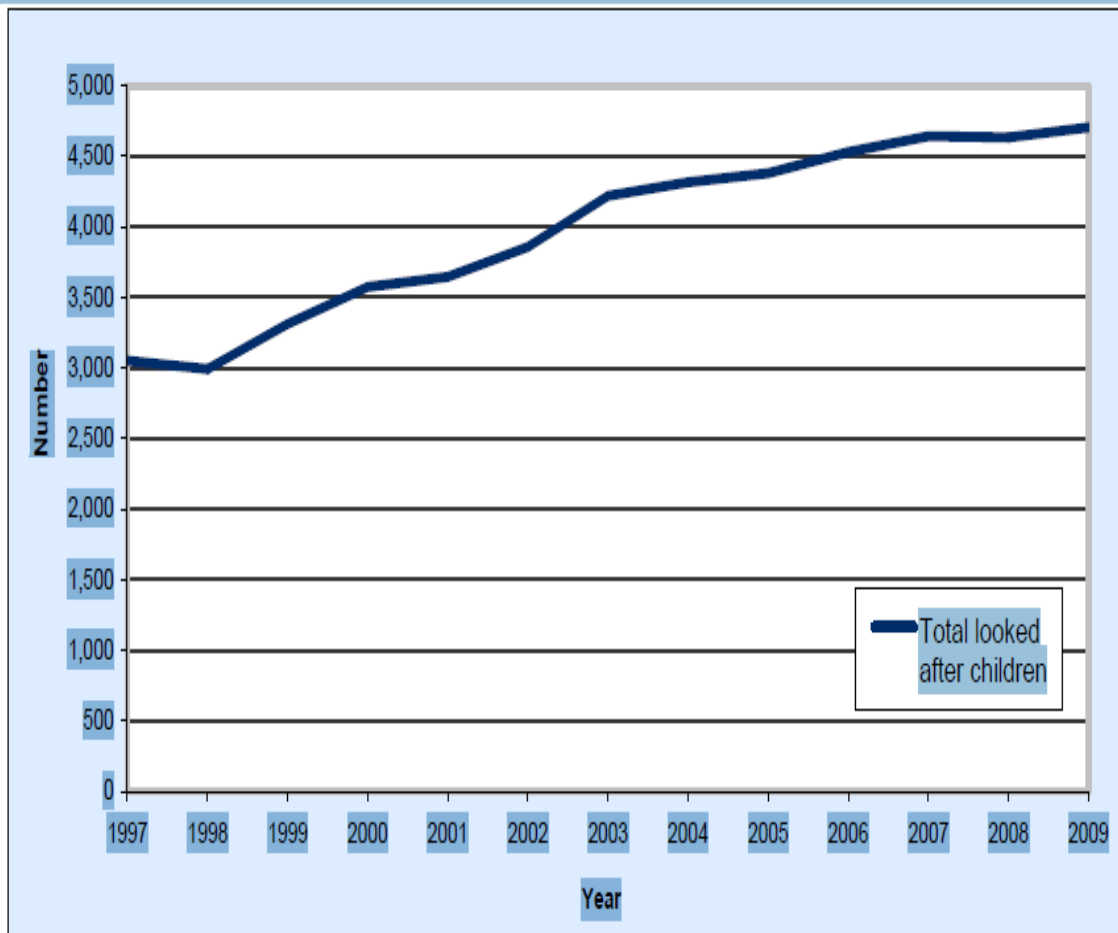
4. Current situation

- 4.1 The National Assembly for Wales has published a research paper entitled 'In Figures: Looked after children Research Paper', providing a statistical overview of looked after children in Wales. This does not include 09/10 figures.

- ▶ Since 1997 the total number of looked after children has increased by 50%. (See Fig. 1 below).
- ▶ In 2009, 29% of children were placed outside of the LA area, compared with 8% of children in 1998, though there is no data on how far from home children were placed.
- ▶ The proportion of children placed in foster care with a relative or friend has increased from 6% in 1998 to 18% in 2009.

Fig.1

Chart 1: Number of looked after children in Wales at 31 March, 1997-2009 (a)



Source: SSDA903

(a) Excluding children looked after in short-term placements

4.2 The Number of Looked After Children in Bridgend.

Bridgend had 289 children who were looked after on 31.3.10. While this represents a 13% increase on the previous year (257), over the three years Bridgend has only increased its number of children looked after by 14. Bridgend's neighbouring authorities Swansea, Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff have experienced significant increases, though the average increase across the 22 authorities in Wales was 9%. Bridgend developed a specific project called the LAC project in 2008 to help identify children who could benefit from permanency outside of the care system through Special Guardianship orders, residence orders, discharge of care orders, adoption and rehabilitation home. This resulted in reductions in the LAC figures and a further concentrated effort is ongoing to ensure that the right children are looked after by the local authority. Fig.2 illustrates the number of looked after children across Wales from 2007 to 2010, using the most recent population data.

Fig 2

Local Authority	Total looked after children 2007-08	Total looked after children 2008-09	Total at 31 March 2010	2009 - 2010 difference	LAC Per 10,000 Population aged 0-17.99 years as at 31.3.10
Neath Port Talbot	285	290	391	101	135.65
Merthyr Tydfil	175	160	167	7	134.43
Swansea	395	430	559	129	122.31
Torfaen	205	205	210	5	104.78
Bridgend	275	255	289	34	99.45
Rhondda Cynon Taf	450	440	479	39	94.09
Newport	300	290	297	7	90.6
Caerphilly	285	315	332	17	85.15
Wales	4625	4705	5129	424	80.88
Denbighshire	130	140	163	23	80.81
Blaenau Gwent	130	125	119	-6	79.38
Cardiff	520	520	530	10	78.49
Conwy	160	160	174	14	77.82
Gwynedd	165	160	172	12	71.08
The Vale of Glamorgan	180	175	187	12	66.55
Carmarthenshire	190	225	243	18	64.33
Pembrokeshire	145	140	145	5	56.58
Powys	140	140	147	7	54.22
Wrexham	120	130	142	12	50.19
Monmouthshire	75	110	93	-17	49.2
Isle of Anglesey	75	70	69	-1	48.66
Flintshire	155	150	158	8	48.53
Ceredigion	70	70	63	-7	46.09

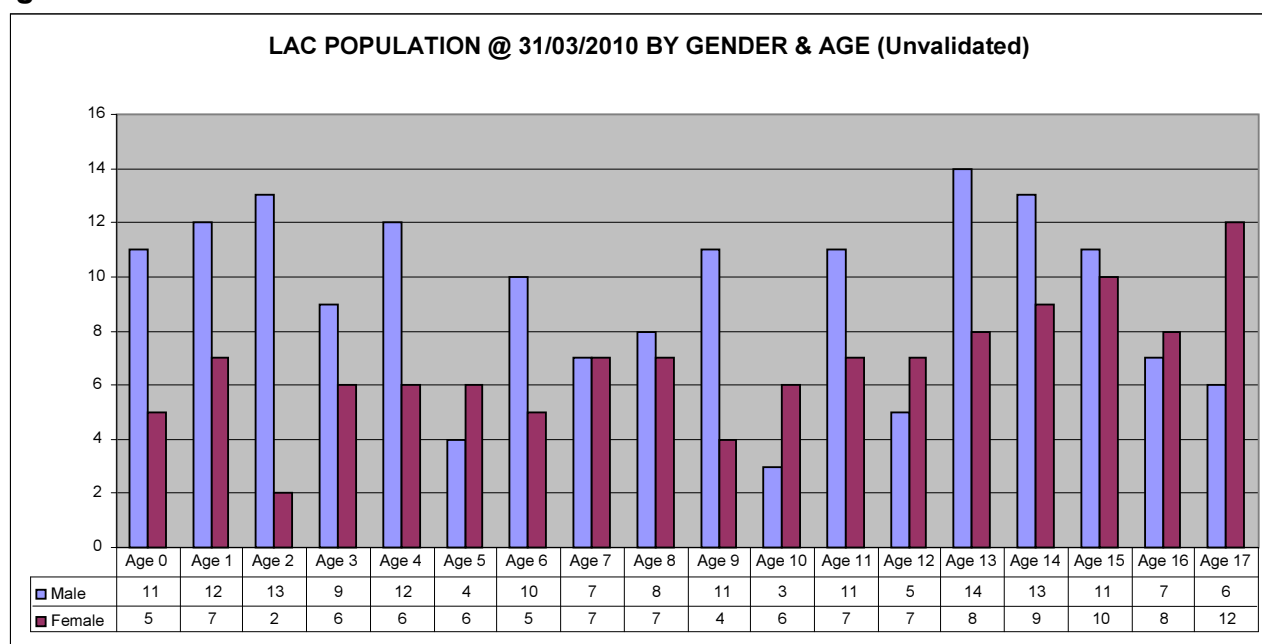
4.3. The gender and age of looked after children in Bridgend:

Of the children Bridgend County Borough Council has responsibility for, 58% are male and 42% female. This is a slight change on last year where boys represented 56% of the overall LAC population. The graph below at Fig.3 shows the spread of age and gender of these children. There are some interesting themes such as there are twice as many girls than boys aged 17, though the opposite is true for 9 year olds so it is difficult to interpret the significance of gender differences for children who are accommodated. The largest cohort of looked after children are those in their early teenage years which see a rise from 12 children looked after aged 12 to 22 at age 13. However a further longitudinal study is needed to examine whether children are more prone to becoming looked after at certain ages as last year's data (08/09)

showed the largest group of looked after children were aged 12, but for this year it was 13 because the 12 year olds from last year were still being looked after this year, but are now 13 years of age. Further work is being undertaken to look at the child's age and circumstances when they become looked after to aid understanding and prevention work.

4.4 Data published by the National Assembly for Wales noted that since 2002, there has been an increase of 29% in the number of children starting to be looked after due to abuse or neglect, but the number of children starting to be looked after due to socially unacceptable behaviour decreased by 59% between 2002 and 2009. Socially unacceptable behaviour is usually perceived as more common during teenage years.

Fig.3



4.5 Placement type

As at 26.5.10, there were 106 children who were being cared for in long term foster placements. Of these children, 62% are in either local foster care or kinship care (i.e. relative or friend), with the remaining 38% placed with independent providers. This translates into 37% placed with in-house foster carers and 11% with relatives or friends when taken as a percentage of the total number of children looked after at 289. Figs.4 and 5 show an analysis of the placements of our looked after children at 31.3.2010.

Fig.4

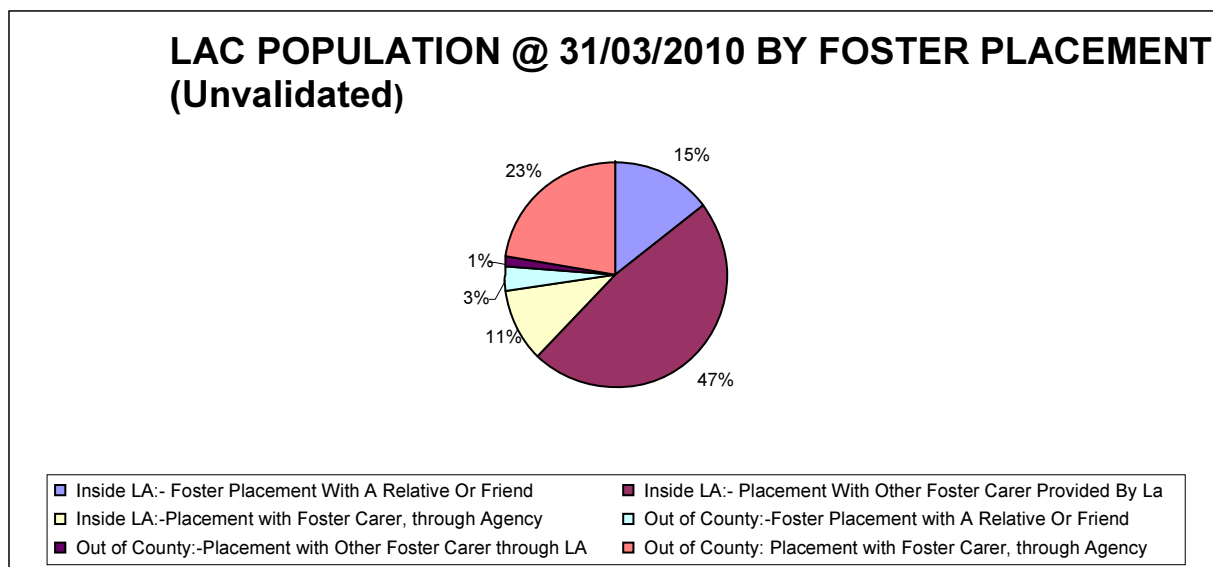


Fig.5

LAC POPULATION @ 31/03/2010 BY PLACEMENT (Unvalidated)

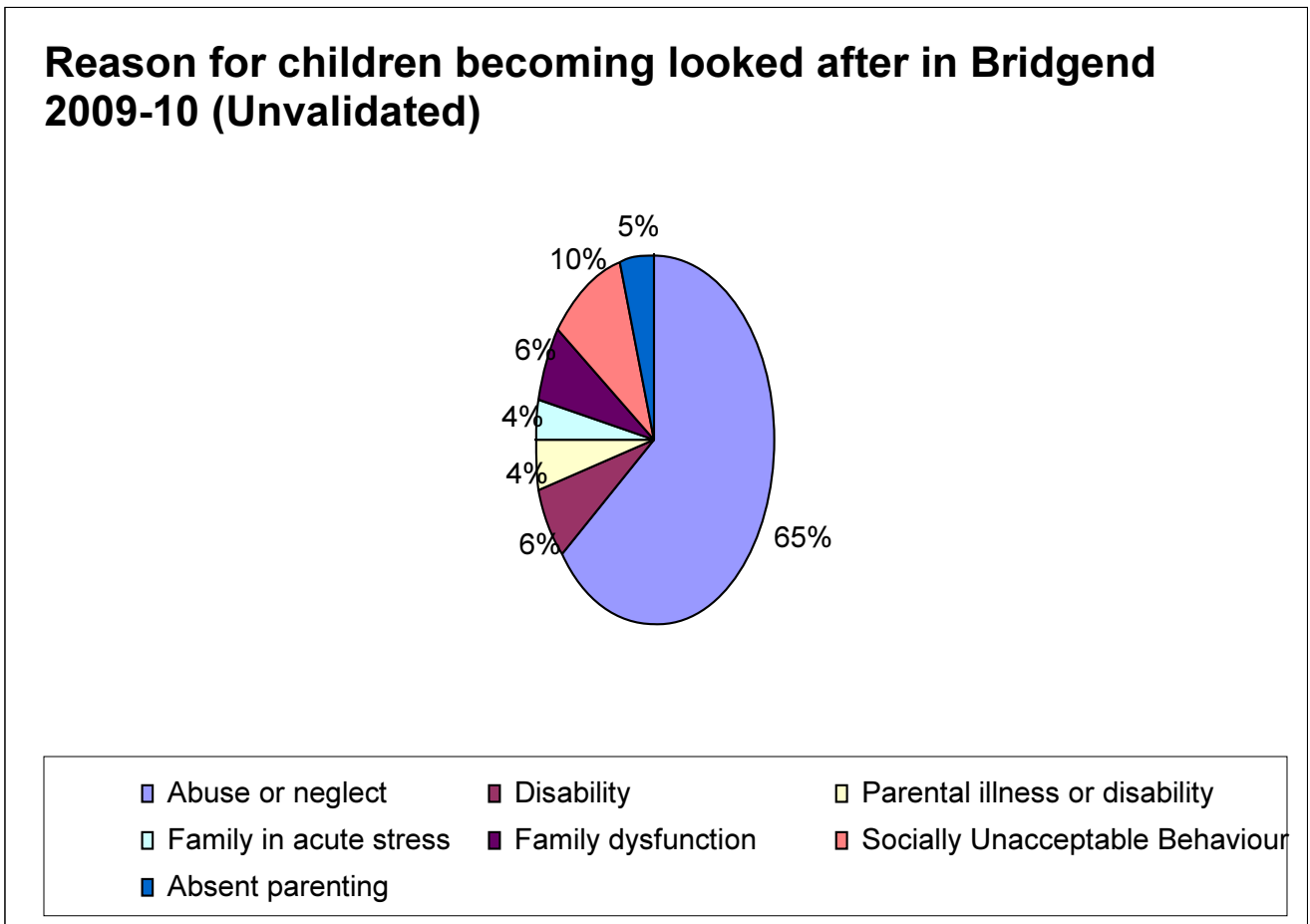
Placement	Total	% of total
Placed for adoption with parental consent	3	1
Placed for adoption with placement order	3	1
Inside LA:- foster placement with a relative or friend	33	11
Inside LA:- placement with other foster carer provided by LA	107	37
Inside LA:-placement with foster carer, through agency	24	8
Out Of County:-foster placement with a relative or friend	7	2
Out Of County:-placement with other foster carer through LA	3	1
Out Of County: placement with foster carer, through agency	51	18
Children Homes Regs:- homes & hostels inside LA boundary	12	4
Children Homes Regs:- homes & hostels outside LA boundary	10	3
Placed with own parents or person with parental responsibility	31	11
Independent living , e.g. in flat, lodgings, bedsit, B&B or with friends, with or without formal support	3	1
Other Residential Setting:- young offender institution or prison	1	
	1	

Schools:-all residential schools, except where dual registered		
Grand Total	289	

4.6 The reasons why children become looked after:

The most common reason for children to become looked after in Bridgend is due to abuse or neglect (see Fig.6). This is reflected across Wales, with the Bridgend Local Safeguarding Children Board (BLSCB) currently developing a multi-agency policy and guidance to support agencies in working with neglect issues in families.

Fig.6



4.7 75% of the looked after children population are subject to some type of court order to secure permanent arrangements for their care. These are largely care orders or, where court proceedings are ongoing, interim care orders to the local authority. See Fig.7 below.

Fig.7**LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN LEGAL STATUS @ 31.3.10 (UNVALIDATED)**

Legal Status	Total
Single Period of Accommodation Under Section 20	70
Care Orders:- Interim care order	62
Care Orders:-Full care order	137
Placement order granted (with a view to the child being placed for adoption)	19
Sentenced to CYPA 1969 supervision order with residence requirement	1
Grand Total	289

Reasons why a child ceases to be looked after:**Fig.8**

CLA Reason (unvalidated)	Total
Care taken over by another LA in UK	1
Returned home to live with parents, relatives, or other person with parental responsibility (not under a residence order or special guardianship order)	47
Special Guardianship Order made to former foster carers	8
Special Guardianship Order made to carers other than former foster carers	2
Moved into independent living & no longer in care, with support	8
Moved into independent living & no longer in care, without support	7
Transferred to the care of adult social services at 18	2
Sentenced to custody	1
Adopted application unopposed by parent	10
Adopted consent dispensed with (consent not given)	5
Grand Total	91

4.8 Since the introduction of special guardianship and residence orders as alternatives to adoption, 70 children in Bridgend have become subject to either a Special Guardianship Order (24) or Residence Order (46) which allows for children to have a plan for permanency, i.e. to have permanent living arrangements (with a family) without being looked after by the Local Authority. Also of note is the number of children who have returned home (47), either following voluntary admission to care or as a result of discharges of care orders. Bridgend has earned a sound reputation in the courts for bringing appropriate applications and for the quality of its evidence.

Performance Information reported to Welsh Assembly Government

4.9 *The percentage of first placements of looked after children during the year that began with a care plan in place (SCC/001a)*

Performance has significantly improved and was reported at 100% for the 3rd and 4th quarters of 2009/10, with the figure for the year at 87%. Comparative data is not yet available for 2009/10 but the Welsh average stood at 91.79% for 08/09. This has been achieved by close scrutiny to ensure that agreement is only given for a child to become accommodated when there is a care plan in place that has been agreed by a senior manager within the service.

4.10 *For those children looked after whose second LAC review was due in the year, the percentage with a plan of permanence at the due date (SCC/001b)*

Permanence is a framework of emotional, physical and legal conditions that gives a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment and identity. It is a key Government objective for children's social services to ensure that all children are securely attached to carers capable of providing safe and effective care for the duration of their childhood. The objective of planning for permanence is therefore to ensure children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond. A range of options exists, all of which can deliver high-quality outcomes for individual children. The planning process will identify which option is most likely to meet the needs of the individual child and takes account of their views and feelings. Placement options for children looked after by the Authority are:

- Placed with Parents (under regulations)
- Fostering (including family and friends)
- Placed for adoption
- Residential care

Bridgend has reported a figure of 88% for this performance indicator (PI). This is a cumulative figure for the year. Performance has improved for quarter 4 to 94% (i.e. 1 exception out of 16 children). For the year 69 out of 78 children had a permanency plan in place by their second review. The Principal Officer (PO) for Corporate Parenting is in the process of scheduling training with independent reviewing officers and team managers to aid their understanding of permanency planning.

4.11 *The percentage of children looked after at the end of the quarter who have had three or more placements during the year (SCC/004)*

A Quarter 4 performance of 8.6% has exceeded our target of achieving a figure of less than 10% (the Welsh average: 9.7% for 08/09), despite a LAC population that risen by 13% this year. When pressures on placements increase, this can lead to poor matching of children with families, creating risk of placement breakdown and a further move for the child. However, only twenty-five children have had 3 or more placements this year. While the most common reason for having 3 or more placements is foster placement breakdown (a third), 2 were planned moves due to arrangements agreed within care proceedings, 3 young people moved on to independence (whilst remaining on full care orders) and another 3 had additional temporary placements because their planned placement was not available at the

required time. Others move into adoptive placements from foster care. Some children benefit from a move into a residential setting, having experienced disruption in a number of foster homes, There is a common theme of the young person getting involved in offending and drug misuse that has contributed to placement difficulties.

4.12 *Percentage of looked after children with an allocated social worker (SCC/13aii)*

At the 4th quarter, 82% of looked after children had a qualified social worker from 67% in the first quarter of the year. This is as a result of ensuring that all new looked after children cases are allocated to social workers and is a much improved position. It will be difficult to increase this percentage without an increase in either social workers or a reduction in caseloads. Unqualified workers are also experiencing increased caseloads because of social worker shortages. Four generic safeguarding teams covering geographical areas of the borough have been created from two looked after children teams and two children in need teams to ensure a more even spread of workloads but the North and East teams, previously the looked after children teams, have over 200 looked after children cases between them as well as now taking on child protection cases. A review of the new team structure will be undertaken in June to identify progress in ensuring that children's cases are being managed in the appropriate team.

4.13 *Percentage of Looked After Children reviews due that were carried out within statutory time limits (SCC/021)*

The cumulative average for the year is 94%. This is slightly below the target for the year (97%) but above the Welsh average figure of 91.4% for 2008/09.

4.14 *The percentage of statutory visits to looked after children due in the month that took place in accordance with regulations (SCC/025)*

There have been concerns about the reliability of this data and validated figures are not yet available. The Principal Officer Corporate Parenting has undertaken random checks and has found that staff are frequently either not writing up the visit in a timely manner or are recording it in the wrong place, or in the wrong way, so that it is missed within data capture. New arrangements in the Safeguarding teams are starting to pay dividends to capture the planned and actual dates of the visits. Work has been undertaken in May to try to address the backlog and produce validated data for the national PI returns in June. The current unvalidated figure is 51%, but this is expected to rise after the work has been completed. At the time of writing this report it is not yet clear what the year end figure will be as the data is being checked for each of the last 12 months.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules.

5.1 There is no effect upon the Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

6. Legal Implications.

6.1 There are no legal implications.

7. Financial Implications.

- 7.1 The rising numbers of looked after children and the use of independent foster placements continues to place a burden on the budgets of the Safeguarding and Family Support Service. This is alongside an increase in the number of care proceedings and the costs incurred for the Authority when making such applications.

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes this report on the performance of the Safeguarding and Family Support Service in meeting the needs of children and young people within its care.

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Background documents

None