

**REPORT TO:** Children, Young People & Families  
Policy & Performance Board

**DATE:** 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, People

**PORTFOLIO:** Children & Young People

**SUBJECT:** Children in Care, Care Leavers, Fostering and  
Adoption

**WARD(S)** All

## 1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide an overview report on the current issues and progress for Children in Care and Care Leavers and developments in the Service to address the needs and demand.

## 2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

i) Members to note content of report.

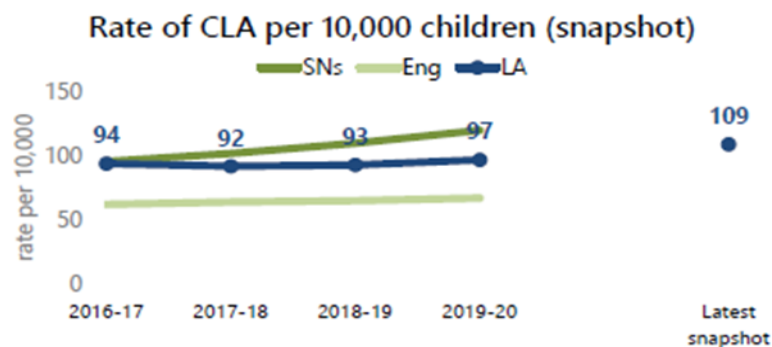
## 3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 3.1 Children entering Care summary

3.1.1 There are currently 313 children in care in Halton with an open episode of care. That is a rate of 109 children in care per 10,000 children.

3.1.2 This is an increase in comparison to the previous year, however, there has been a consistent increase evident over the years with the exception of 2016-17 to 2017-2018. As illustrated below, this increase is also in line with our statistical neighbouring authorities.

### 3.1.3



3.1.4 There has been a significant increase in the number of Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children being accommodated. This is due to the dispersal of these young people into the Daresbury Hotel, Runcorn. Age assessments are ongoing in relation to this cohort.

3.1.5 There are currently 40 ongoing cases in proceedings, that is, 68 children. The Covid-19 pandemic added additional challenges, with many hearings held virtually over the past 15 months and other, more complex cases, delayed. A number of cases are currently backlogged within the Court process due to Court availability. During the COVID pandemic, for a period of time, only urgent initial hearings were being held. Although, Court has now recommenced, there remains a significant backlog of cases.

## 3.2 **Children in Care & Care Leavers (CIC&CL)**

3.2.1 The service promotes the permanency and stability for our children through ensuring we promote and track long term matches with foster carers in respect of the progress of all children and young people.

3.2.3 The progress of matching is tracked via weekly Performance meetings and on a monthly at management meetings. The Resource and Placement Panel is held monthly and tracks all referrals for a placement request, identifies placements that need support so we can ensure services are available to avoid the placement disrupting and secure placement stability for the child.

3.2.4 In the year 2020-2021, to date we have Long term matched approximately 17 Children with their careers. There are a further three children where there is a plan in place to present a long-term match to Fostering Panel in the coming months.

3.2.5 The service continues to ensure where possible and safe to do so, children are discharged from care. As of 08/07/2021, there were 23 children placed at home subject to a Care Order however, there has been significant progress in respect of progressing the discharge of Care Orders for those children who are placed at home. There has been some difficulty in arranging Legal Advice Meetings due to capacity within Legal Services however, this was resolved with an increase in solicitors within the legal department.

3.2.6 There are currently applications for five children being heard within the Court arena in respect of discharging the Care Order and we have Legal Advice meetings held have approved applications to be progressed to the Court for discharge of Care Orders in respect of 3

children with a further eight children under assessment to support the decision making to discharge the care order.

3.2.7 We also discharge children from care utilising a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). There are four children for whom an application has been made to discharge the Care Order in respect of an SGO to their foster carer and a further thirteen children where a plan of SGO is being actively progressed.

3.2.8 We have sixteen children with a Care Plan for Adoption. Monthly meetings are held with Together for Adoption to review the progress of their adoption plan, identify any drift and also solutions to ensure every opportunity for an adoptive family is explored. Of the sixteen children with a plan of Adoption, six children currently linked to a family which is being explored, Family finding is ongoing seven children are currently placed within their adoptive families, for three of these children, formal adoption applications have been made to Court.

### 3.3 **Fostering Summary**

3.3.1 Foster4, a combined Local Authority commissioned service runs the Marketing & Enquiry Management functions for Halton, Warrington and Cheshire West and Chester. They process all initial enquires and send on to Halton Fostering Team to progress.

3.3.2 Carer growth is strong with an increase in Mainstream Carer households of 26 or 44% over the last 2 financial years (29 in & 3 out). Our recruitment conversion is high ie., the ratio between ENQUIRY: APPROVAL conversion. In the most recent 12-month period is 11% against a 3% national average across the sector. This has resulted in a significant growth in in-house placements and a 9% reduction of CYP placed in IFA provision.

3.3.4 Carer retention is good with only 3 Mainstream households deregistered over the last 2 years; this represents an attrition rate of 5% against a sector average of 15-18%

3.3.5 Utilising Carers to complement the work of Children's Support Workers has:

- Contributed to the effort to keep children on the edge of care with their families
- Improved outcomes for children and families accessing early help
- Supported placement stability
- Further contributed to Carer retention

- Improved partnership working with colleagues in Children's Teams

3.3.6 Connected Persons assessment and approval process continues to develop as a significant aspect of service delivery and is impacting on capacity within the team. Currently with an average of 20 ongoing assessments at time of writing.

3.3.7 Parent & Child care placements was identified as an unmet need in Halton, with all placements referred out to Independent providers.

3.3.8 The advantages of having access to in-house Parent & Child Foster Carers are both qualitative and quantitative. The financial advantages of having access to internal Parent & Child resources are stark:

Provision	Cost per Placement (assuming average 12 weeks)	Variance against In-House
HBC approved P&C Foster Carer	£7,392	
IFA approved P&C Foster Carer	£16,200	£8,808 or 220%
Independent P&C Residential Unit	£42,000	£34,608 or 568%

3.3.9 Using the number of Parent & Child placements made internally over the last 2 years as a benchmark we can illustrate that HBC has made significant cost savings when compared to using external provision.

### 3.4 Ashley House

3.4.1 Halton Borough Council is looking to tender a contract to an appropriately skilled provider to deliver Support for Care Leavers that will enhance and improve their individual outcomes and increase their life opportunities.

3.4.2 It is intended that the contract will begin on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 and operate on a 2 year basis plus an option to extend for 1 final year.

3.4.3 The service will incorporate 2 elements:

**Element 1** – The local authority has a refurbished group property in Runcorn (The Butts, Runcorn WA7 2LH), this incorporates 4 individual bedrooms for young people, a communal kitchen/diner, a shared living room, bathroom/toilet facilities and a staff sleep in room / office

The property will need to be staffed 24/7 including sleep ins  
During each year approximately 8-10 young people require a group living placement

**Element 2** - Direct support being delivered to Care Leavers into a variety of community housing settings including Registered Social Landlords, Private landlords along with other Housing provisions (ideally some of this housing requirement will be able to be delivered by the provider)

The hours of support in the community housing could range from 5 hours per week upwards and could, when required, include sleep ins

During each year approximately 10-15 Care Leavers require community based support

3.4.4 The contract is going out to tender on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2021 with a view to contract being awarded and service ready to open on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

### 3.5 **Supported Lodgings**

3.5.1 In October 2020 the service launched its Supported Lodgings Service, offering host families/households (known as Providers) semi-independent living as a bridge to independence.

3.5.2 Designed and developed over 3 months this involved:

- To date the Service has assessed and registered three Provider households, with a further 10 currently in the assessment pipeline. We expect to increase our registered Provider cohort to circa 6 households by Autumn 2021.
- The financial benefits for the LA can evidenced by a young person we currently have placed in supported lodgings. His residential accommodation came in at a cost of £1,800 per week so by bringing him in-house we save £1,673.46 per week. Maintaining him in the placement for a year would result in a saving of £87,019.92 on this placement alone.

### 4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None Identified.

### 5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 None Identified.

### 6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

#### 6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The outcomes and support for Children in Care and Care Leavers are a priority for Halton Council. As Corporate parents members are

committed to ensuring safe and stable homes and access to good quality education and healthcare.

**6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

None Identified.

**6.3 A Healthy Halton**

None Identified.

**6.4 A Safer Halton**

None Identified.

**6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

None Identified.

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None Identified.

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None Identified.

**9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None.