

Directorate of Children's Services

**Looked After Children
Annual Report**

Contents

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Listening to Children in Care
4. Celebrating Achievement
5. Children in Care – numbers
6. Placements
7. Improving Life Changes of Children in Care
8. Care Leavers
9. Conclusions and Priorities for 2011 / 12

* The term Looked After Children is a legal term from the Children Act 1989 and it is used interchangeably in this report with the term Children in Care and refers to children and young people 0 – 18 and care leavers provided with care, accommodation and support as a result of a Care Order, Voluntary Accommodation or Leaving Care Services.

** All data used in this report relates either to the period 31 March 2011 or the period 01/10/2009 – 30/09/2010 and school year 2009/10.

1.0 **Introduction**

This report provides information about the outcomes for children in the care of Dudley Council for the period April 2010 – March 2011.

The intended audience for this report is Elected Members of the Council, the Children & Young Person's Partnership and managers and Staff of the Council.

2.0 **Background**

Children and Young People in care have a unique place in society, having a special relationship with the state due to the fact that they are in care either through a Care Order or by voluntary agreement with their birth parents.

Dudley Council along with our partners in the Children and Young Peoples Partnership and individual professionals and carers all share responsibility for ensuring that children and young people in care receive the best possible outcomes and improve their lives – as we would want for own children.

We must be committed to improving all aspects of their lives – placement stability, education, health, the daily experience of being in care, successful transitions to adulthood and to ensuring that children move on to successful permanent placements without unnecessary delay.

In a recent Government response (May 2011) to a Select Committee Report on looked after children the following views were articulated..

“Change for the care system must be locally owned, driven by the sector, and should free up front line professionals and carers to make decisions and devote more quality time to these children. Crucially, children's voices need to be at the heart of all decision making.”

This report is intended to assist us in seeing how well we are doing to improve the lives of children in care.

3.0 **Listening to Children and Young People In Care**

Children in care in Dudley continue to make important contributions to, and have a say in the development of services and plans.

During 2010/11 children in care and care leavers have been involved in:

- Prioritising issues contained within the pledge;
- Delivering Total Respect training for multi-agency staff as part of the child's journey through care training.
- Meeting with other children and young people involved in care councils in other local authorities

- The Chair and Vice Chair of the Children in Care Council meeting the Children's Minister Tim Loughton to discuss the children in care councils.
- Providing feedback on foster carer review forms and other key policy and procedures developments / changes e.g. Internet Safety.

In addition all children in care are encouraged and supported to have their say as individuals, through involvement in their reviews and other meetings in relation to their care plans. Specific support for involvement in this process is available from the 'Black Country Children in Care Advocacy Service' provided by the Children's Society.

Children in our own children's homes are encouraged to give their views via individual key working sessions and group meetings.

For those children and young people who wish to make a formal complaint, support is also available from the Black Country Children in Care Advocacy Service.

4.0 **Celebrating Achievements and Successes**

The successful annual awards evening for older young people in care (16+) and care leavers took place in November 2010. As in previous years a number of young people, staff and carers received awards in recognition of significant achievements, and contributions to supporting care leavers.

In particular we have had some success with young people enrolling in apprenticeship schemes, being accepted to undertake degrees at University and gaining Duke of Edinburgh awards.

For the first time this year we had a number of children and young people involved in a singing project – "Voice Box." This initiative was run by Sound It Out a community music organisation that works with groups to make music and inspire dynamic and creative results. The funding came via Sing Up and culminated in an extremely enjoyable concert at Netherton Arts Centre in December. As a result of this initiative a number of foster carers have been trained to support a choir that now meets regularly involving children in care and birth children of foster carers.

Clearly no discussion on recent successes would be complete without mentioning Chatback which has continued to go from strength to strength.

Chatback – young people's drama groups' most recent production was the Handle with Care short film starring children and young people in care and the local Old Hill actress Josie Lawrence and premiered at the Showcase Cinema Dudley.

This film is about children's experience of domestic violence and has been shown and shared at a number of high profile conferences and achieved a number of awards – two in particular were top TV awards at the Royal Television Society Awards for the Midlands where the production won best short film and best production craft skills.

Chatback continues to flourish and is now working on a project to do with the education of children in care.

5.0 **Children In Care Numbers**

There continues to be a rise in the number of children in care. Over a five year period, since 2006 there has been an increase from 450 – 612 (excluding respite / short-breaks). The largest rise was during the period 2008 – 2010 where numbers increased by nearly 100 from 512 – 610.

Year	Number of CIC (excluding respite / short-breaks)	Variance from previous year
2006	450	+25
2007	468	+18
2008	512	+44
2009	545	+33
2010	610	+65
2011	612	+2

The sustained rise in the numbers of children in care has created significant challenges and pressures for social work services, placements and resources generally.

We continue to look after slightly more boys than girls 318 (52%) and 294 (48%) respectively with the largest number being in the 10 – 15 age group – 241 (39%). This is comparable to the England average.

480 children and young people are either subject to an Interim or Full Care Order (78%). This is above the England average which in 2010 was 59%.

521 (85%) are white British and 67 (8%) are of mixed ethnic origin. The England average from 2010 shows 76% of children in care as being white British.

During the course of the year 2010/11 we at some point looked after 780 children and young people with the same number being admitted to care as left care – 173.

6.0 **Placements**

As at 31st March 2011

- 474 (77.5%) of our children in care were placed in foster carer. 114 (18.6%) of these were with family or friends approved as foster carers. The national average for children placed in foster carer is 73%
- 290 (97%) of under 10's were cared for in family placements
- 48 (7.8%) were looked after in children's homes

Placement stability is crucial to the well being of children in care and is a significant contributory factor to the achievement of positive outcomes for this group. Considerable resources are focused on avoiding unnecessary placements and disruptions.

A national indicator NI62 – stability of placements of children in care measures placement moves during the year. Low rates of placement moves and stable placements are correlated with better outcomes. Good performance is seen to be a low percentage of children and young people with 3 placement moves or more.

Our performance in Dudley against this indicator has consistently been in the highest band and we have achieved our lowest figure for five years in the year 10/11 of 62 (10%) children with 3 or more placement moves. The figure of 10% is also lower than the England average, West Midlands and statistical neighbours average.

157 out of 248 children who have been in care for 2.5 years have been in the same placement for 2 years or were placed for adoption. This is a measure of long-term placement stability which as with the previous indicator correlates with positive outcomes.

Some of our children in care are placed in children's homes and with foster carers provided by private agencies. The majority of placements in private children's homes are because of the need to find specialist placements that meet the very complex and challenging needs of the young person concerned and / or to keep them safe from risky adults. With regard to placements with private foster care agencies the profile of placements made has changed significantly over the last 18 months largely due to the rise in the numbers of children in care.

In March 2009 there were 21 young people in private residential children's homes and 68 with private fostering agencies.

As at 31/03/2011 there were 24 in private children's homes and 135 in private foster care placements.

A total of 21 children were adopted during the year and 35 children placed for adoption, with 14 out of the 21 being placed within 12 months of the plan for adoption being agreed (66.7%).

7.0 **Improving Life Chances**

Educational achievement is a key factor in improving the life chances of children in care.

7.1 **Key Stage 2**

In Dudley 09 / 10 (School year) Key Stage 2 tests were not taken, teacher assessments are available however which show that 43.8% of children in care for 12 months or longer achieved level 4 in English. This is comparable with the

England and West Midlands average but considerably lower than all Dudley children which was 82%.

Results for Key Stage 2 Maths were 34.4% this is lower than England / West Midlands and Statistical Neighbour average (44% & 49%) and significantly lower than all children in Dudley which was 82%.

KS2	Number eligible to sit Key Stage 2 tasks and tests ²		Number eligible to sit Key Stage 2 tasks and tests who participated ^{2,3}	Percentage eligible to sit Key Stage 2 tasks and tests who participated	Percentage who achieved at least Level 4 ⁴ in the following:			
					English	Mathematics	Science ⁵	English & Mathematics
ENGLAND	2,400	1,800	74	45	44	53	36	
WEST MIDLANDS	295	210	70	42	44	52	35	
Dudley	32	15	44	44	34	44	31	

31.6% 12 / 38 people of young people in care in Dudley achieved 5 or more A* – C including maths and English. This figure is higher than the England and West Midlands average and puts us third highest in the country amongst other Local Authorities. The figure for all Dudley children is 53.6% and it can be seen from this that there is a narrowing of the gap between children in care and all children in terms of achievement in G.C.S.E's.

73.7% of young people in care achieved 1 G.C.S.E. grade A* – G and is on a par with both the National and West Midlands average. However a higher number than the National and West Midlands average achieved 5 G.C.S.E's A* - G in Dudley – 68.4% as compared with 52.9% (West Midlands) and 50.6% (National).

KS4	Number eligible to sit GCSEs ²		Percentage entered for:		Percentage achieving ³ :				
			at least one GCSE or equivalent	at least five GCSEs or equivalent	Any pass	1+ GCSE at grades A*-G	5+ GCSEs at grades A*-G	5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C	5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C including English & mathematics
ENGLAND	5,100	77.6	58.9	78.0	72.5	50.6	26.1	11.6	
WEST MIDLANDS	610	79.3	62.4	79.6	72.6	52.9	27.8	12.6	
Dudley	38	78.9	71.1	76.3	73.7	68.4	42.1	31.6	

It is evident from the improvement in G.C.S.E. results particularly in respect of grades A* - C including Maths and English that the focus on the provision of extra tuition and the use of personal education allowances has been extremely beneficial to our young people in care.

As at the 31/03/2010 there were 315 children in care who had been looked after for 12 months.

Attendance at school was good during the period with authorised absences at 3.7% and unauthorised absences at 1.3% both figures below West Midlands and National Averages.

The Creating Chances Charity – established in 2009 following the ending of the HSBC monies continues to provide additional and complementary teaching and skills training for children in care in order to support better longer term life prospects. In the current academic year the charity has facilitated over £125,000 worth of funding for week in week out extra tuition and sports opportunities.

7.2 Offending

During the year 2010/11, 9 young people (3.2%) were convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year for an offence committed whilst in care. This is a reduction from the previous year which was 15 (5.6%) and significantly lower than the England average of 7.9%.

We continue to work closely with our youth offending colleagues to identify children at risk of offending and develop intervention strategies where necessary. The Circle Project using a restorative justice approach has impacted positively on this as has the approach to behaviour management utilised within the children's homes.

7.3 Health

The health needs of children in care are monitored by annual health assessment and regular dental checks. 73% of children in care have had a health review and a dental check within the year. It is unlikely that performance in this area will ever be 100% as some older young people in care decline to have an annual health review. We are working with the two designated nurses for children in care to find ways of improving this figure. One of the nurses (recently appointed) is working directly with the 16+ team and building relationships with some of the young people via drop-in.

In general children in care experience significantly worse mental health than all children in the general population. In order to assess this, the main carer of each child is asked to complete a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ). A score is then obtained on a scale 0-40. Councils have been required to submit an average score for the last 3 years. Our average score for the year 2010/11 was 13.5. Scores of over 20 were 62 / 341 (18.2%). This is significant number and the clinical psychologist for children in care is involved in overseeing these children and young people and ensuring that the appropriate support and interventions are in place.

Emotional and behavioural health of looked after children - Average score for children looked after at 31 March for whom a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)	2009		2010		2011	
	Percentage of eligible children for whom an SDQ score was submitted	Indicator	Percentage of eligible children for whom an SDQ score was submitted	Indicator	Percentage of eligible children for whom an SDQ score was submitted	Indicator
England	65	14.0	68	14.2	Awaiting Publication	
West Midlands	55	14.5	50	14.4	Awaiting Publication	
Dudley	81	13.8	81	13.6	Awaiting Publication	13.5

8.0 Care Leavers

At the 30th September 2010, 30 school leavers out of a cohort of 41 were in education, employment or training – 73.2%. 11 were not in education, employment or training.

Destination	Total
Full-Time Education	23
Full-Time Training	2
Full-Time Employment/Planned Training	1
Part-Time Employment/Education/Training	5
Unemployed due to ill health or disability	1

Unemployed for any other reason	9
Grand Total	41

17 care leavers who were 19 years old during the year 10/11 out of a cohort of 37 (46%) were in education employment and training. Whilst this is an improvement from previous years it continues to demonstrate the difficulties in maintaining care leavers in education, employment and training.

It is hoped that the work that is being progressed by the Economic Well-being Group will be effective in improving these particular outcomes for young people in care.

The Economic Well-being Group is a well established multi-agency group with representatives from education business partnership, Specialist Services, Connexions, Virtual School and 14-19 Office. The focus of the group has been to review every year 10, 11 and rising to 19 young person to ensure that:

- Work experience and placement needs relating to personal interest and curriculum particulars are met
- Any specific work experience and placement needs of under graduates have been addressed
- Apprenticeship placements are facilitated
- Employment aspirations and opportunities for each individual young person have been adequately supported.

We are in regular contact with 76% 28/37 of care leavers aged 19 who were looked after on the 1st April in their 17th year and 73% 27/37 are known to have suitable accommodation. This is a slight drop from previous years.

9.0 Conclusions and Priorities for 2011 / 12

- Outcomes for children in care in Dudley have shown improved or continued good performance in the key areas of placement stability, educational achievement, offending behaviour and numbers of children adopted.
- Our focus for 2011 /12 will be maintaining (and improving where possible) the good performance mentioned above as well as targeting activity and resources to:
 - Increase numbers of care leavers in education, employment and training, both immediately post year 11 and on their 19th birthday
 - Continue to focus on the needs of young people in Key Stage Outcomes to maintain good performance in G.C.S.E. results
 - Review the pledge for children in care in order to assess how well we are doing

- Work with the Children in Care Council to promote effective working with the Corporate Parenting Committee
- Ensure delivery of Total Respect training to key staff and partners
- Support young people who progress to university to undertake degree courses (this could be as many as 15 over the next 2 years)
- Focus on the availability of and securing apprenticeships for care leavers

.....
Jane Prashar
Divisional Manager, Children's Resources
Dated: July 2011