



To: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2)

Date: 8th October

Subject: Quality Assurance – Children's Placements

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 In Coventry there are approximately 600 children in the care of the local authority. The majority of these children live either with foster carers or in residential homes. The Council is committed to ensuring that it commissions or delivers the best quality services possible within available resources. This report outlines how the City Council ensures that the placements it procures for looked after children provide good quality care and value for money.

2 Recommendations

The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Board (2) is recommended to:

- (1) Note and comment if appropriate to the Cabinet Member for Children on the arrangements for ensuring the quality of placements for children and young people.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 A child is looked after by a local authority if he or she is in the care of the local authority or has been provided with accommodation by the authority for a continuous period of more than 24 hours. Children generally enter the care of the local authority either through section 20 or section 31 of the Children Act 1989. Section 20 is a voluntary agreement between the parent(s) and the local authority that the child should become looked after. An example of this might be where a child or young person needs time away from their birth family while a package of support is put in place to try to rebuild family relationships. A parent can remove the child from care under section 20 at any time.
- 3.2 A significant number of children come into care through Care Proceedings through the courts. This is where the local authority (and frequently also partner agencies) has concerns about the care which parents are able to afford their children.
- 3.3 Most children who come into care do so because of neglect and/or emotional abuse. Some parents have themselves experienced poor parenting and do not have good parenting skills themselves. In many cases, there is parental drug and alcohol misuse, and in addition there may be domestic abuse. Some children come into care because they have complex disabilities and need to be placed in specialist residential schools, and a very small number are looked after because they are in the youth justice system. In some cases, the person who has been caring for them has been prevented (whether or not permanently, and for whatever reason) from providing them with suitable accommodation or care.
- 3.4 The number of looked after children and young people has increased over the last decade – the overwhelming majority are looked after for their own care and protection:

- 3.5 The majority of children who are looked after by the local authority are placed with foster carers as it is believed to be best for children to live within a family environment. For some children however, residential care may be more appropriate. Examples of this may be where a young person has had several placement breakdowns in foster care or where specialist therapeutic care is needed, at least for a period of time. This may allow the young person to move back in to foster home when they are more able to live within a family.
- 3.6 The City Council has two residential homes (Gravel Hill and The Grange) in the city with a total 12 beds. Gravel Hill undertakes 12 week assessments and The Grange provides longer term care. The Family Placement Service can provide homes for 238 children with foster carers. Approximately 360 children and young people are in placements which are commissioned from external residential providers in the private sector or from Independent Fostering Agencies.
- 3.7 Most of these placements will be local to Coventry, and some within the wider West Midlands region; however, some may be as far away as Kent, which has a large number of children from other local authorities placed within its boundaries. Out of city placements are generally made because more local placements are unable to meet a child's needs. The map attached at Appendix 1 shows the spread of placements across the UK.
- 3.8 In 2014/2015, the Council spent £9.5m on external residential placements, and £10.4m on external fostering placements. The total spend on externally commissioned placements was £19.9m. This is an area which has a significant financial impact as it represents one of the highest areas of spend within the People Directorate.

4 Overall Approach

- 4.1 Ofsted has overall responsibility for the inspection of children's homes. In addition, the quality assurance regime in Coventry involves a range of stakeholders, including the commissioning team, procurement service, placements team, social workers, and providers themselves. Feedback is also sought in a variety of ways from children and young people.
- 4.2 Coventry's approach is to place children in provision which is rated good or outstanding. Children are currently placed with approximately 35 Independent Fostering Agencies, and 22 residential providers, and given the numbers of providers and children involved, concerns about the quality of provision do arise from time to time. The response to any concern will be proportional and will depend on the nature of the concern, the level of risk to the child, and the length of time the child has been in placement.
- 4.3 Contract monitoring officers carry out a range of checks on provision before a child is placed, and undertake quarterly monitoring visits to the 10 residential homes in the city (this is a mixture of external and internal including disability provision). On-going feedback is received via social workers and other professionals.
- 4.4 If a provider receives an inadequate Ofsted rating, they are required to develop an action plan which shows how they will address Ofsted's concerns within a given timescale. If the provision is in Coventry, a local authority monitoring visit is carried out immediately, and contract officers will monitor the implementation of the action plan and any other issues which they feel need to be addressed. Social workers visit the child or young person to review whether it is appropriate for them to remain at the home and ascertain whether needs are still being met. In the event of the provider not meeting their needs, a decision will be made on whether a child is moved from the home; this will often depend on the type and severity of the concerns. A 'placement stop' is considered in consultation with the

Assistant Director for Social Care and Early Intervention. A case of study is attached at Appendix 2.

- 4.5 In relation to out of city placements, social workers aim to visit all out of city placements prior to the young person moving into the home. A placement planning meeting takes place with the residential home and social worker which will stipulate how the provider will meet the young person's needs. On-going feedback on out of city providers is sought from social workers, who regularly visit children in out of city placements. Out of city providers provide action plans in response to inadequate Ofsted ratings and in most instances, local authorities where a children's home is located will carry out monitoring visits in respect of any concerns raised by a placing authority. A further source of information is through regional commissioning meetings and network, which enable local authorities to share information about different providers and discuss concerns.
- 4.6 The roles of the various stakeholders are set out below.

5 The Role of the Commissioning and Procurement Process

- 5.1 The Council's approach to commissioning and procurement seeks to achieve affordable good quality services through a number of elements including need and demand analysis; customer and carer feedback and involvement; testing out new models of care; benchmarking and a focus on outcomes for service users and carers.
- 5.2 Providers are sourced through procurement processes which assess quality and price of submitted bids through a panel evaluation. Panels are formed of a broad range of stakeholders, each with expertise in particular fields. Customer input is crucial to ensuring the most appropriate provision is selected.
- 5.3 Placements are commissioned by the People Directorate's Commissioning Service in a number of different ways:
- through block contracts with a specific provider eg the contract with Hexagon Care for 30 residential placements;
 - through framework agreements, where the Council (often working with other local authorities) can access a number of providers eg the West Midlands regional residential framework and the sub-regional fostering framework;
 - through negotiated spot contracts with individual providers, if the block and framework agreements cannot meet a child's needs.

6 Ofsted

- 6.1 Ofsted inspects all children's homes twice a year. In April 2015, the government introduced new regulations to enable inspections to focus more on outcomes for children and the quality of care they receive.
- 6.2 The most recent Ofsted Annual Report on Social Care (2013/2014) states that the performance profile of children's homes (of which there are approximately 2000) has remained relatively stable. Although most homes were judged good or adequate, the proportion judged inadequate (between 2012-13 and 2013-14) has increased from 5% to 6% and there has been a fall in the proportion of outstanding homes in the same period, from 16% to 12%.
- 6.3 The table below shows the Ofsted ratings for external residential homes and independent fostering agencies used by Coventry City Council. Ratings are reported monthly to the People Directorate Market Management Group and quarterly to the Corporate Parenting Board.

Rating	External Fostering	External Residential *
Outstanding	9	1
Good	23	27
Requires improvement	2	6
Inadequate	0	1
Not yet inspected	1	9

*NB in addition to the above CCC has one other placement which comes under the Welsh regime

7 Regulation 44 Visits

- 7.1 The Children's Home Regulations 2015 require providers to commission an independent individual to carry out monthly inspections of individual homes. Inspectors are expected to cover a range of issues including the presentation of the home, complaints and allegations, notable incidents, education, staffing and health and safety, including the use of restraint. They are also expected to talk to young people, their families and social workers.
- 7.2 The reports are sent monthly to local authorities who have children placed in the home and are reviewed by contract monitoring officers. Any issues noted by contract monitoring officers are discussed with providers to agree remedial actions; these concerns are monitored by the commissioning team and shared with placements team and social workers accordingly.

8 Voice of the Child

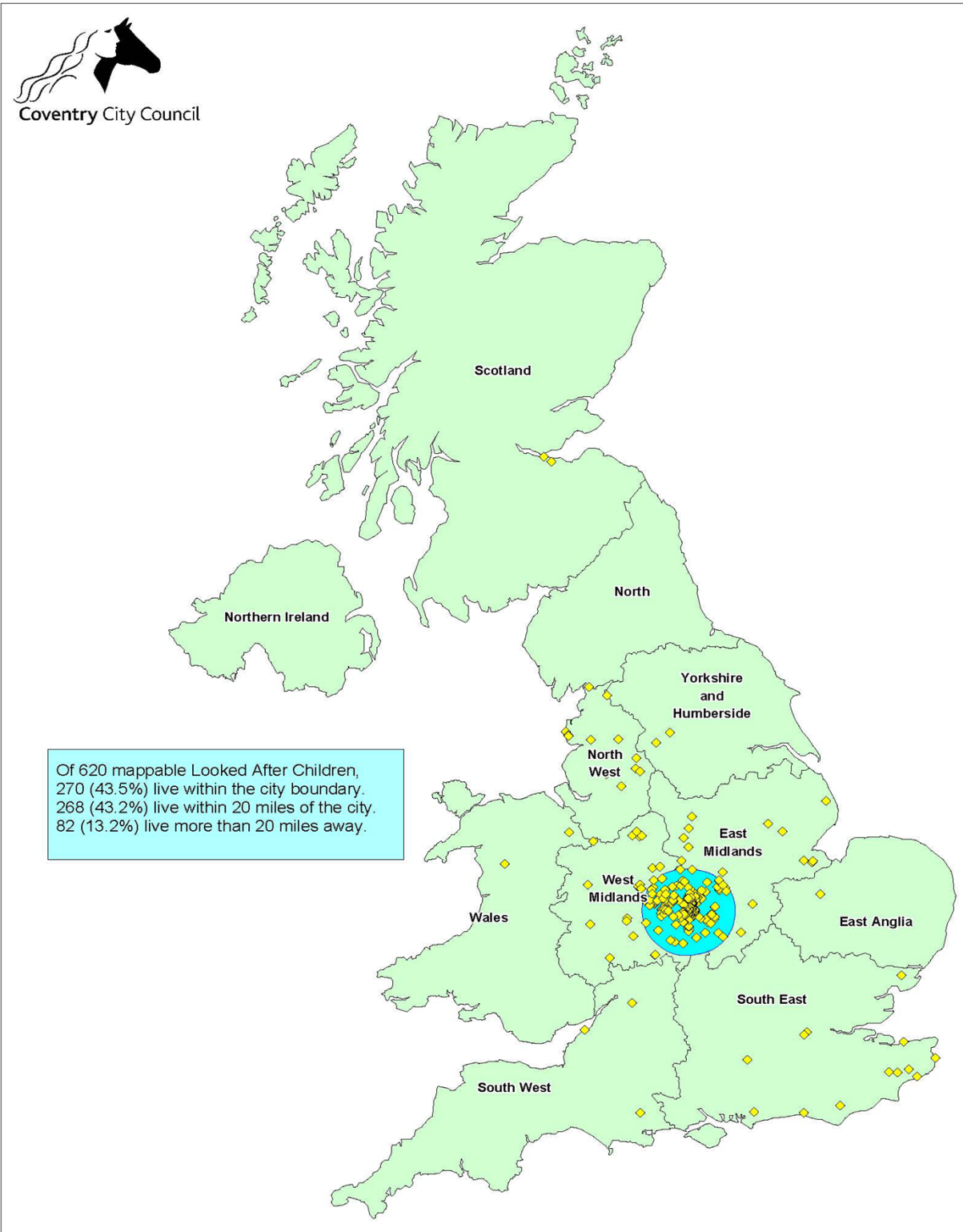
- 8.1 Social workers must undertake visits to children in care with at least the minimum regularity set down in regulation. Children must be visited within 7 days of placement and at stipulated intervals thereafter. Part of the work of the social worker with the child is to seek their views on their placements. In addition, the Participation Team undertakes an annual survey of children and young people in residential provision. The survey covers a range of issues; including how safe they feel and what support they receive. This enables professionals to understand the feelings of our children and young people in care to ensure provision is fit for purpose and that services understand issues from a young person's perspective. The Participation Team also supports the engagement of children and young people in commissioning and procurement processes.

9 Conclusions

- 9.1 There are a range of robust mechanisms in place through which the City Council seeks to achieve good quality, value for money placements for the children and young people in its care. A range of stakeholders including commissioning and procurement teams, social workers, placements team, and through feedback from children and young people, contribute to the quality assurance of placements. Improvements will continue to be made, for example, work is in hand to develop access to more appropriate residential placements in Coventry. There is on occasion a lack of suitable specialised residential provision to meet the very complex needs of some of the children and young people in care. In addition, there is work being undertaken to ensure that social workers and the placements team work more effectively together on placement planning.

Sally Giles, Head of Children's Commissioning (x3699)
 Yolanda Corden, Interim Assistant Director, Children's Social Care and Early Intervention Service (x1901)
 Craig Dutton, Commissioning Manager (x3435)

Coventry's Looked After Children - Placements in the UK Plot by Current Address - January 2015



Appendix 2
Case Study of Quality Assurance Process Undertaken with Residential Provider Rated
'inadequate' by Ofsted

Type of service provision	The residential home being described is a 4 bedded modernised house. The unit is staffed and equipped to provide medium and long term care for children and young people between the ages of 10 and 18 who have a moderate to severe learning difficulties
What were the main concerns or reasons for inadequate rating from Ofsted?	<p>Key concerns were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of an up to date children's guide • Suitable rota management • Management oversight and experience • Supervision of staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gaps in staff training • Timeliness of completion of Regulation 44s (these are regular independent visits which scrutinise a range of matters) • Making statutory notifications of incidents to Ofsted in a timely manner
What actions did commissioning team undertake to ensure quality issues were being rectified appropriately and in timely manner?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contract officer immediately visited to ascertain severity of these concerns and issues • Instigated meeting between Commissioning and owner of organisation to discuss action plan and next steps • Reviewed provider action plan, including setting timescales to address concerns • Informed and liaised with relevant professionals i.e. health, social worker and other key stakeholders • A local voluntary sector organisation was commissioned to do engagement work with the young people to understand their views of the service • Explored whether a placement stop should be instigated on any new referrals. • Initiated social care and health review of the young people to determine whether the home was still meeting needs and consider whether any Coventry young person should be moved. • Undertook regular unannounced visits to verify actions and ascertain progress, including evidencing actions completed
What were the outcomes of the visits completed by Commissioning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim review from Ofsted indicated progress towards meeting statutory requirements set out in the inspection report had been made • A full review from Ofsted 7 months after the inadequate inspection rating changed the rating to "requires improvement" • On-going contract monitoring in place to ensure sustainability of improvements