

Vulnerable Groups

Looked After Children (LAC)

Revised: 30/08/2017

Introduction

A child becomes 'looked after' when they are no longer solely cared for by their birth parents but arrangements are made with the local authority to provide ongoing care. This can be in either a temporary or permanent capacity. Children can be looked after either as part of a voluntary agreement with their parents or as a result of a Court Order.

What do we know?

The number (and rate per 10,000) of Looked After Children in West Berkshire has increased over the last 3 years. Our rate per 10,000 is below the [national average](#) but above that of our comparators.

In 2013/14 82% of our Looked After Children were in Family Placements and this has been fairly consistent over the past 3 years. The national average is closer to 80%.

At March 2014, 58% of children looked after by West Berkshire were placed within 20 miles of their home address. The comparator average is 66% and the national average is 77%.

Of the children looked after at March 2014, 43% were voluntarily accommodated under S20. This is significantly higher than the comparator average of 34% and the national average of 28%.

Over the past 3 years, West Berkshire has continued to receive a small number of unaccompanied asylum seekers. The numbers are low (between 5 and 10) but these young people often have very complex needs.

The age and gender profile of Looked After Children in West Berkshire is fairly consistent both with our comparator group and national average. West Berkshire's highest percentages of children are aged 10-15 (44%) with the lowest percentage aged under 1-4 (16%). The percentage of male children is 54%, with 46% females.

What is the data telling us?

The increase in the number of Looked After Children is likely to place significant pressure both on Children's Services and other services and agencies that play a

role in the health and wellbeing of this client group. Continued work is needed to ensure that we intervene early wherever possible and prevent the escalation of need.

The high percentage of Looked After Children in family placements is positive, although a significant minority (33%) is more than 20 miles from home. There are sometimes good reasons why a decision is made to place a child some distance from their home (relative carer, specialist unit etc.) The rural nature of West Berkshire also means that a placement is more likely to be distant than in urban authorities. Nonetheless, a higher number of local foster carers would increase the choice of available placements.

The elevated percentage of those Looked After Children voluntarily accommodated under S20 needs focused attention to ensure that these arrangements continue to be appropriate.

Recommendations for consideration

The drive to recruit high quality local foster carers needs to continue.

Initiatives that aim to intervene early and (longer term) reduce the number of children in care are critical both financially and in terms of achieving good outcomes for children and young people.

Young People placed in voluntarily accommodation need to be subject to regular review to ensure that the placement continues to be appropriate.

Other services and partner organisations

Health
Youth Offending Team

National and local strategies

[Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children \(National Guidance\)](#)

Local Sufficiency Strategy for Looked After Children (awaiting completion)

Other chapters you might be interested in

Adult Safeguarding
Adults with Autism
Adults with Disabilities in Employment
Carer
Child Protection
Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and Missing Young People
Children in Need
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller People
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

West Berkshire Council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Physical Disability and Sensory Impairment
Referral to Children's Social Care

If you have any questions about this chapter, please contact Public Health and Wellbeing Team on publichealthandwellbeing@westberks.gov.uk or 01635 503437