

Corporate Parenting Annual Report

1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023

Report Author: Sharon Godfrey, Head of Corporate Parenting

Approved by: Mac Heath, Director of Children's Services and Sophie Marshall, Group Head, Children and Families



Introduction

Welcome to our Corporate Parenting Annual Report and my second report for Panel as the Head of Corporate Parenting Service. It has been a challenging and busy year for us all within Children's Services. Positively, we have managed to maintain a stable looked after children's population, due to continuous throughput and maintaining a strong family support ethos to support children remaining within their families where it is safe to do so.

In October, we invited Local Government Association (LGA) to hold a peer review. We felt this was a valuable piece of work and assisted us with thinking how we can develop our Corporate Parenting Panel and continue the support to our children in care. This review led to the most significant change this year for Corporate Parenting Panel, moving from a public to a private Corporate Parenting Panel. We held the first private meeting in March and going forward it will ensure panel has a more open discussion and is more inclusive for children and young people.

In November, we welcomed Ofsted colleagues for a focused visit on children in care, although, this inspection did not provide a specific judgement on the visit, the feedback was positive and recognised the progress we had made for children in our care since the full inspection in 2021, where we were judged to be requires improvement.

This report sets out a picture of our children in care over the last twelve months, including those entering care and who have left our care. I will provide details about permanence and placement stability, to enable oversight of how we have progressed children's care plans during the year. I will look at how we have worked with our partner agencies to meet the health and education needs of our children. I will draw your attention to how our children and young people with care experience have contributed to the service over the last twelve months and finally setting out some proposed objectives for the future.

Definition of Corporate Parent and Principles

Milton Keynes City Council is a 'Corporate Parent' which means it is the 'collective responsibility' of the whole Council, elected member, employees, and partner agencies to provide the best possible care and safeguarding for Children in Care (CIC), young people with care experience (CL) and vulnerable children. As 'Corporate Parents', the Corporate Parenting Panel oversees the Council's fulfilment of this 'collective responsibility'. The Panel is a separate committee of the Council and not part of the Council's Cabinet Scrutiny arrangements.

The work of the Corporate Parenting Panel is underpinned by the seven key principles introduced by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which state that when Local Authorities exercise their function or role in relation to CIC and CL, they must consider that they:

- act in the Best Interests and promote the physical and mental health and well-being of those children and young people;
- encourage children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings, but also consider them;
- ensure our children and young people have access to services;
- make sure our children and young people are safe, in stable homes, relationships, education and work;

- promote high aspirations, securing best outcomes for our children and young people; and
- prepare them for adulthood and Independent Living. The question Corporate Parents should be asking when considering the needs of our Corporate Children is 'What would I want for my own child, or children I care deeply for?'

Corporate Parenting Panel Contributions 2022/23

Corporate Parenting Panel has met throughout the year on the following dates, 8 June, 13 October, 7 December and 1 March. We had an additional panel on 4 January to consider taking the panel from a public to a private meeting.

Cllr Marie Bradburn has remained the Chair of Corporate Parenting panel during this time.

During the year, Panel have had updates and reports on the following:

- Updated report on annual engagement for Children's Services with Ofsted from March 2022.
- Report and data from CAMHS on number of looked after children waiting and in receipt of a service.
- Updated Terms of Reference CPP.
- Annual report for CPP 2021/2022.
- Update and refresh of Champion model, introducing role profiles and performance data.
- Special Guardianship Reports.
- Fostering Annual Report.
- Fostering Friendly Council policy.
- Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy.
- Virtual School Annual Report.
- Adoption Connects Annual Report.
- Adoption Connects Panel Chair Annual Report.
- Adoption Connects recruitment strategy.
- Private Fostering Annual report.
- Pathway Plan Audit report.
- Sufficiency Strategy 2022 to 2025.
- Fostering review report.
- Bright spots feedback report.
- Participation report.
- SGO finance report.

- Contextual safeguarding presentation.
- Young people with care experience local offer.
- Joint housing allocations protocol.
- IRO annual report.
- Financial support for young people with care experience.

Service Review Over the Year

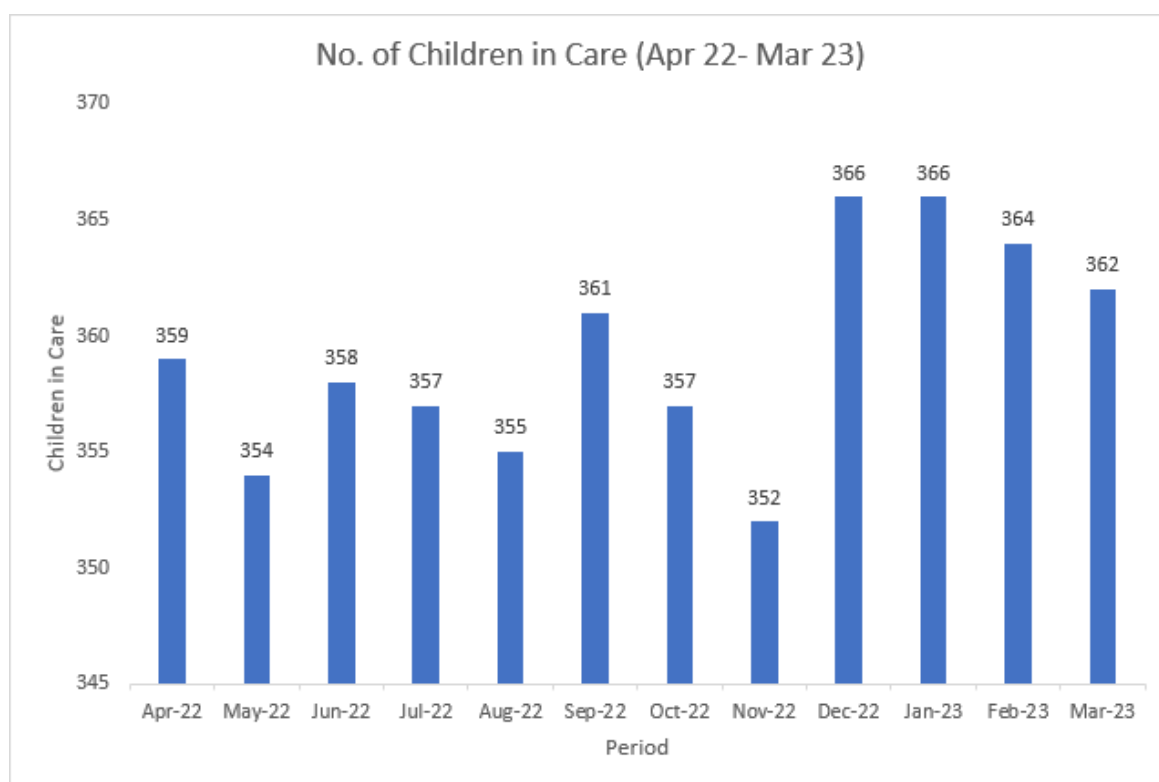
- Children's Service Plan finalised April 2022.
- LGA Diagnostics of children in care and Corporate Parenting October 2022.
- Ofsted focused visit on Children in Care November 2022.
- March 2023 Annual Ofsted conversation.
- March 2023 Annual Ofsted inspection of Westminster House.

Our Key Priorities 2022/2023 - What we Achieved

- A. We have reviewed our Fostering Service to consider if a restructure of the Service would be necessary to look at specialist Kinship Team. The outcome of the review did not currently support any change to the structure of the Team but concluded to continue to embed and support the existing structure to ensure robust retention and development of the whole fostering service.
- B. The Local Government Agency (LGA) supported us with undertaking a Corporate Parenting Diagnostic. This took place in October 2022. The review made a number of recommendations, including Corporate Parenting Panel moving from a public to a private meeting. This has since been implemented.
- C. We have worked closely with our commissioning colleagues to recommission the Young People's Supported Living and Accommodation alongside new 'published offer' for Care Leavers. A 'Block contract' will be published in May 2023 for tender. Commissioners have also been working hard to implement a dynamic purchasing scheme, for semi-independent providers to register on. A proposed paper has been prepared to look at residential children's homes to be run by Milton Keynes City Council.
- D. Over the course of the year, we have held regular Virtual School Performance Board to strengthen the Virtual School Governing Body to ensure 'Good' Virtual School performance and Governance and embed in School Improvement framework.
- E. A Children in Care conference has been scheduled for 24 June 2023.
- F. We have approved nine new carers in total (seven mainstream foster carers and two supported lodgings carers). We have a further ten assessments in progress.
- G. We have improved the quality and frequency of supervision and support of foster carers. This is monitored by managers within Fostering Service and shared with Senior Leaders in Performance Management Meeting.

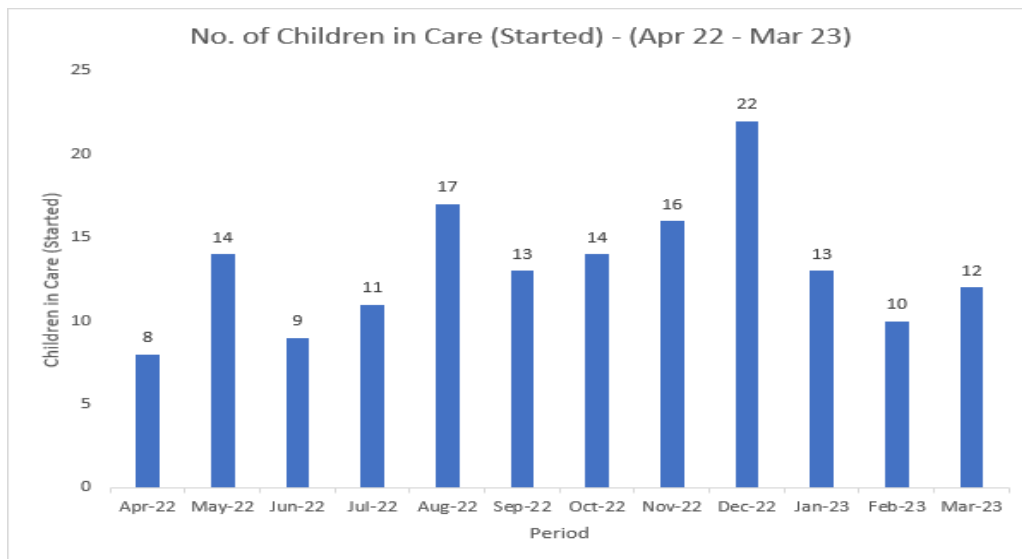
- H. We have reviewed the arrangements and monitoring of those children placed with parents under Placement with Parents regulations to ensure permanence is achieved timely for these children where it is appropriate to do so.
- I. We have worked collaboratively with Adult Social Care and Housing Colleagues to formulate a new Joint Housing protocol for young people with care leavers. No young person is made homeless and young people are supported to secure a housing tenancy when it is right for them. We have also reviewed our offer of accommodation and introduced a shared house living arrangement as requested by our young people.
- J. The Virtual School has robust oversight of all children in school through Personal Education Plan meetings. Additionally, we hold a regular operational meeting to consider young people with care experience have education/training and employment plans and opportunities appropriate to the young person's aspirations and skill set. This meeting provides information to the strategic meeting to ensure all opportunities are being explored and we focus on supporting young people to access education/employment and training.

Our Children in Care



Over the last 12 months the children in care population has remained relatively steady ranging from 352 to 366. We continue to ensure throughput for those children who have a permanent plan of adoption, Special Guardianship Order or have returned home to the care of a parent. Our children in care population are currently below national average at 52.6 per 10,000, the national average is 70 per 10,000 and statistical neighbour is 65.2 per 10,000.

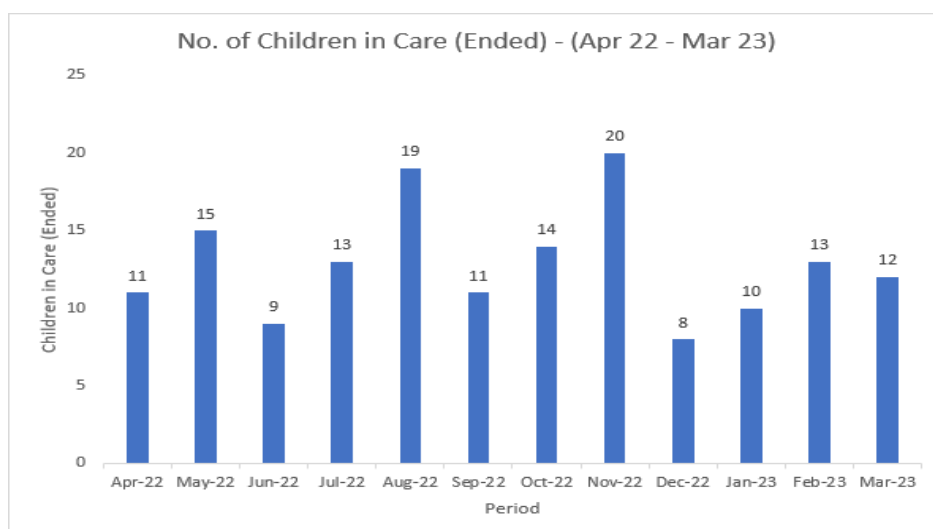
Children Who Have Entered Care Between 1 April 2022 - 31 March 2023



A total of 159 have entered care during the last financial year. The number remain steady with peaks in August and December (during school holiday period). We have a steady number of children coming into care, during the last 12 months. The average age of a child entering care is eight years.

Milton Keynes City Council is part of the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). We continue to accept two unaccompanied children seeking asylum per month as part of NTS. We may be asked to take additional children to ease the pressure from Kent and Southampton, both of which have high numbers of UASC's arriving. We are working closely with Home Office, Refugee Council, and partner agencies to appropriately support these children upon arrival in Milton Keynes.

Children who have left care between 1 April 2022 to March 2023

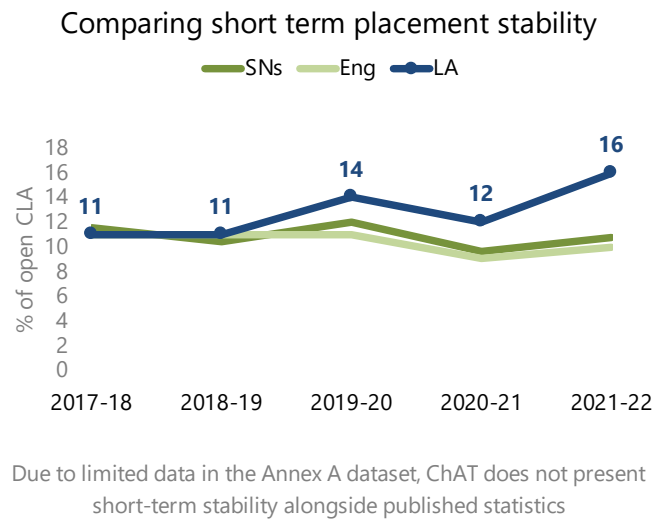
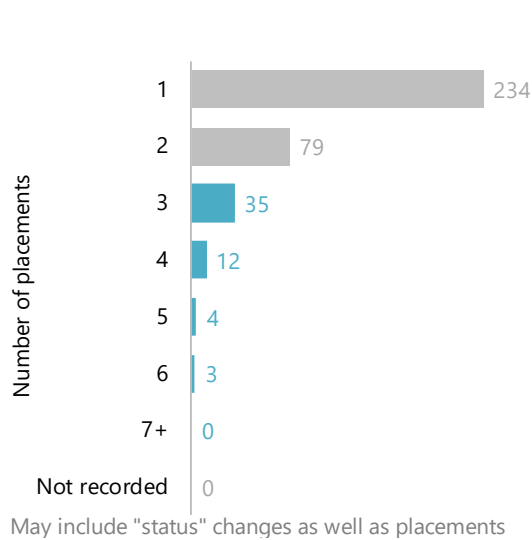


We had a total of 155 children leave care between April 2022 to March 2023. We continue to see a steady flow of children leaving care, through Special Guardianship Orders, Adoption Orders, turning 18 or children who have returned to care of parents.

It is very positive picture ensuring throughput remains high on our agenda to ensure we have the right children in care and progressing care plans in a timely manner for children.

Placement Stability

Number of placements in the last 12 months



Most children in care experience one or two placements, but a smaller proportion experience multiple moves, this can be due to placement breakdown, because of carers ability to manage child's presenting behaviour, clash of personalities or placement unable to meet the child's needs.

Some children who come into care on an emergency basis may have to go into an emergency accommodation until a short-term placement can be identified, whilst other children struggle to settle in a type of placement and experience multiple breakdowns before settling in a more specialist provision.

Our priority is to focus on ensuring less children have multiple moves and children are placed in a provision that best suits their needs.

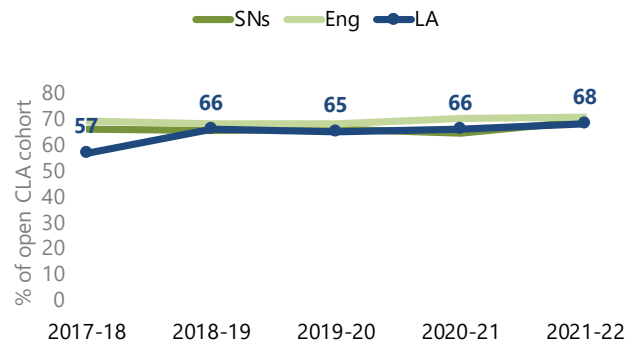
Duration of placements

Duration of latest placement for each current CLA aged under 16 who have been looked after for 2½ years or more



May include "status" changes as well as placements

Comparing long term placement stability



Due to limited data in the Annex A dataset, ChAT does not present long-term stability alongside published statistics

Given the number of children entering and leaving care, there is always a constant throughflow of movement of children in and out of Milton Keynes care. The above data shows 50 children under the age of 16 who have been in care for 2½ years or more. Majority of these children are likely to have a long-term plan of foster care. It is our responsibility to undertake annual child and family assessments to consider if the care plan should remain the same or if appropriate to consider a return home to care of parents or other family members.

Securing Permanence

When children enter care, we have a statutory duty to formulate a permanent plan for each child by the second childcare review. We always first consider if the child is able to return to birth parents if this is not possible then close family are considered and assessed as appropriate, where neither of these options are not possible and the child is young enough, permanence through adoption will be considered, for some children none of these options are possible and the child needs to remain in long term foster care potentially through to independence at adulthood.

From April 2022 to March 2023

Returned home to family 42 children

Special Guardianship Order 23 children

Adoption 19 children

Adoption: (Annual Report will be available later in the year)

The Adoption Service for children who require adoption, and post-adoption support is provided through Adoption Connects. This is a joint Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) established in 2019 with Milton Keynes City Council and hosted by Central Bedfordshire Council Children's Services. Effective system leadership has resulted in coalition building and efficient mobilisation of shared services.

Adoption Connects has flexed to the needs and circumstances of our families, providing a comprehensive, continued and developing service.

Adoption connects have continued to provide independent services to birth families, and adoption support universal and therapeutic interventions to adopted children and their families. A varied range of services has been valued by the people using them.

Access to information about adoption was adapted and improved by the remote offer of information sessions. This significantly increased attendance and access to information about adoption for all enabling and maintaining a positive rate of applications of prospective adopters. Recruitment of prospective adopters is stable and supports sufficiency and placement choice for children. Nationwide family finding is progressed without delay to achieve permanency in a placement that meets children's individual needs.

Children for whom the plan is adoption are placed with their adoptive family on average within 403 days of becoming looked after. Sixteen children were matched with prospective adoptive parents and nineteen Adoption Orders were granted. Eight out of the nineteen children adopted were aged over five years or part of a sibling group and fourteen out of nineteen waited less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family. This is strong performance within the expected national performance.

A robust permanency planning process is embedded and continually developed throughout our service, offering parallel planning for children. Permanency planning meetings take place alongside consultations with Adoption Connects to consider all permanence options.

Special Guardianship Orders

Over the last 12 months we have reviewed and developed our post Special Guardianship Order service to those children living with Kinship Carers. We have a rising population of children living with family/friends under a Special Guardianship Order. We have statutory duties to support, advise and assist these families who live in our area, below is a list of what we have done over the last year to improve the service.

- General advice, guidance, and information around the role of a Special Guardian, including managing issues such as contact, education and behaviour.
- Coordinating services to work as a team around the family, including education.
- Signposting carers to organisations who specifically offer support and guidance to Special Guardians.
- Advocating on behalf of carers to ensure that the family's voice is heard, and decisions are made in their best interests.
- Management of financial queries, including completing the annual financial assessment and access to additional financial support.
- Signposting carers to services who can support their family and support with accessing resources.
- Details of our local Kinship Support Group, run *by* a Special Guardian *for* Special Guardians.
- Monthly 'drop ins' for emotional support and a safe space to talk.
- Access to specialist online/face-to-face training and webinars on a variety of subjects.
- A newsletter produced for Special Guardians circulated every four months.

- Access to Clinical Supervision with an attachment-expert.
- Networking events where you can connect with other Special Guardians.
- Assessment of need for families with children subject to Special Guardianship Orders.

Sufficiency

Foster Care

Most children in care in Milton Keynes are placed with foster carers (73%), either with in house mainstream carers, kinship arrangement or with external providers (IFAs). We would like more of our children to be cared for by our own foster carers and remain locally to their families.

We have continued with our recruitment of new foster carers and have made progress, between April 2022 to March 2023 we have recruited a total of seven mainstream foster carers and two supported lodgings carers: totalling of nine carers with six in assessment. Since April 2023, we have approved three mainstream foster carers and have a further six mainstream foster carers in assessment.

We had a target to recruit 15 foster carers last year and a new target of 15 this year. We are currently looking at a refreshed marketing campaign to increase recruitment of foster carers. We want to attract more carers who provide specialist care to support parent and child placements, children with complex health needs or teenagers with complex behavioural needs. We are continually working hard to maintain our current foster carers, through effective supervision and support, broad training offer and financial package.

Residential Provision

Some children in care need a more specialist provision. We have a small number of children in care who live in a residential children's home. Currently, Milton Keynes City Council only runs one children's home, Westminster House, which caters for children with complex disabilities. We are therefore exploring the feasibility of increased inhouse children's residential home provision locally. Commissioning colleagues are currently in the process of preparing a paper with all the viable options. Plans are considered at our Placement Budget and Sufficiency Panel with a view to considering all options and how best to proceed. We are considering the viability of two separate units, one as an emergency provision where children could be cared for short term, thus mitigating the need for an unregulated provision. A further children's home is also under consideration as a short to medium term option to enable an increase in children being able to be locally placed.

Semi-independent Accommodation

For those young people who are older and approaching adulthood with a level of independent skills, these young people prefer to live in semi-independent accommodation. There has been significant work in developing the provision of semi-independent accommodation with the dynamic purchasing system inviting providers to register who are able to offer a range of care for those young people aged 16+ who wish to live more independently and not within a family setting. All providers are aware of the changes in legislation due in this area and providers will be required to register with Ofsted between end of April 2023 to October 2023. This significant change will ensure quality of provision for young people through robust inspection framework and provide Milton Keynes City Council with additional assurance of quality of service.

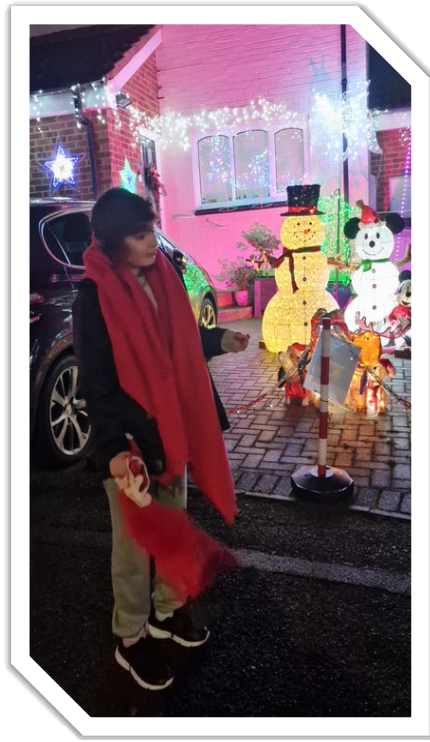
Following a consultation with young people, we have widened our offer of accommodation options for young people with care experience, to include a shared house 'community style living', if successful, we will look to expand on this offer. We have also reviewed and revised the joint housing protocol with adult social care and housing colleagues to ensure no young person is made homeless and all young people with care experience receive priority status if and when trying to access council housing.

Residential Care Service - Westminster House

We had our annual Ofsted inspection of Westminster House in March 2023. The outcome of this inspection was good. We have already completed the suggested actions and are looking at models of practice that can be implemented which will support us in securing an Outstanding rating.

We have seen two young people move on to adult social care services and one new young person move into Westminster House. Currently, we have four young people in the home. The children are very settled and making good progress. The children have enjoyed a range of celebrations over the last year, including summer BBQ, Halloween party, True Triumph, and Christmas party (photos below).





Participation

Raise Your Voice has had a busy year, creating a new logo, attending several Corporate Parenting Panel meetings, supporting with interviews for senior management positions within Children's Services and creating videos of our experiences for use within the council and wider social care teaching partnership. We celebrated our Children in Care and Care Experienced young people through our annual True Triumph celebrations and also social activities including ice skating and a football tournament between our New2UK team, the Police and an MKCC team. True Triumph for Children in Care was an outing to Gulliver's Land including free entry for children and carers as well as lunch provided. Our Care Leavers celebrated in Bistro live, with free food and entertainment provided. Our New2UK team also played home and away ties with several other local authority teams, and to date are undefeated across a home and away tie! CPP members have regularly engaged with RYV and our wider cohort of children in care and care leavers including at archery tag, ice skating and summer BBQs. The Children in Care Youth Club continues to be well attended with specialist sports providers delivering expert training across a number of sports. The Champion model has seen officers supporting Members to be assured of good practice, plans to develop and positive news stories for our children. Young people have also supported Children's Social Care with the recent LGA peer diagnostic review and Ofsted Focus Visit on Corporate Parenting.

We conducted the Coram Voice Brightspots surveys: Your Life, Your Care for our children in care, and Your Life Beyond care for our Care Leavers. Our Children gave us lots of feedback which we are using to develop the service to Children in Care and Care Leavers, a few of the key bits of feedback are:

Positives noted:

- Family Support managers identified that most young people felt their lives had improved since coming into care, which demonstrates the right decisions are being made.
- Feedback from young people with care experience demonstrates that PAs go above and beyond for their young people, even if this is not reflected in our recording.
- Our Children in Care feel safe and trust the people they live with and are happy at home.
- We are pleased to hear how children feel about their social workers.
- Our children trust and can get hold of their Social Workers.
- Our young people enjoy the activities that we put on for them, e.g. New2UK and the music group.
- We know our children and young people well.
- Activities children enjoy, include, playing music, watching TV and social media.

Areas for development noted:

- Young people with care experience have too many changes of worker.
- Our young people are lonely, this increases the older they get, they want friends and cannot afford to go to the things they want to.

- We need to consider more funding for hobbies, social opportunities and holidays for our young people aged 16+.
- Young people should be supported to access activities like the gym and music lessons.
- Our children and young people don't feel they are able to do the same things as their friends.
- Finances are a struggle for our young people with care experience.
- Our care leavers have low life satisfaction and emotional and mental wellbeing, and do not identify as 'high' or 'very high' in happiness, possibly due to trauma of coming into care.
- Our children face stigma at school and are less likely to enjoy school than their peers.
- Accommodation is not a choice-based lettings scheme, they must take the first property they are given so are unlikely to stay near to where their support network is, they do not feel safe where they live.
- Young people are not happy with the amount of family time that they have, a mix of too much for some and not enough for others.

Health of Our Children and Young People

Looked After Children Nursing Team CNWL-MK (LAC Central & North West London- Milton Keynes)

The LAC Nursing Team continue to work in partnership alongside Milton Keynes Children's Services including providing all statutory health duties including Initial Health Assessments and Review Health Assessments.

We work within a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Framework for all looked after children and provide case support/advice across Social Work Teams, Foster Carers, Universal Services, Schools, Voluntary organisations, and any relevant professional body caring for these children and young people.

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board & Bedfordshire (BLMK) Luton and Milton Keynes Health and Care Partnership

Services Commissioned by BLMK

The Designate Nurse for Safeguarding Children and Looked after Children is a full-time role within Bedford, Luton, and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (ICB). Currently, this is a development post to work in partnership with the health provider Central and Northwest London NHS Foundation Trust, Corporate Parenting and Social Care. The role ensures unmet health needs are addressed, concerns are escalated regarding individual Children and liaison is secure with other LAC health teams and Designates across the country. The role also represents Looked After Children along with Care Leavers at board, strategic and operational meetings.

Review Health Assessments Clinics:

The Looked after Children's Nurses see the same children for their health assessment to provide ongoing continuity. If we have a child or young person with a known or suspected health concern we will pull forward their health assessment so that we can assess and support any area of health that requires attention.

Clinics are held at Neath Hill Centre and nurses will complete home visits for children/young people who require a home assessment.

We will travel out of area on a case-by-case basis, and we will liaise with Out of Area Looked After Children (LAC) Teams for children placed too far away for us to complete.

Young People who decline an appointment:

If we do have a young person who declines their statutory assessment the allocated Looked after Child's Nurse will review their previous assessment, review their health record, liaise with the Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer, and write a letter to the young person which will offer them an open door to contact us at any time.

Themes-Safeguarding:

The level of strategy meetings being called for Looked After Children has evidently increased, requiring LAC Nurses to attend multi-agency meetings where needed to ensure a robust approach for safeguarding young people.

Themes-Neurodevelopmental Disorders:

We appear to be seeing an increase in presentation of suspected Autism/Attention Deficit Disorder. This includes young people who are on the verge of or are brought into the care system who it would appear have fallen through a gap in their younger years. Often, we see a pattern of young people with a history of multiple school exclusions, social disconnect, family disconnect and high vulnerability to exploitation.

As a diagnosis, it is important to ensure neurodevelopmental disorder is ruled in or ruled out. This is a complex area of health as Adverse Childhood Experience can cause similar presentations.

Partnership work with MK CAMHS positive outcome of an ADHD Pathway which will now include direct work with foster carers to support children who are on the waiting list for assessment.

Cases of concern are escalated for CAMHS Management review.

Themes-Emotional Wellbeing & Mental Health

This remains a recognised key area for LAC where there is a high need for targeted and preventative work and support. Children and Young People will have Adverse Childhood Experiences and multi-additional complexities which can impact on a child's development and experience of the world, including parental and genetic vulnerabilities.

Capturing Data

We are aiming to improve capturing key data of health themes which are evident/or emerging within this group of children and young people so we can ensure there is targeted and sustained provision to improve outcomes and their life chances.

Covid Vaccination

We worked in partnership with Public Health, alongside social care teams, providing a co-ordinated approach to continue to promote Covid Vaccination uptake in LAC to ensure as many children as possible were vaccinated as per public health guidance and also carers who were vulnerable also had correct and up to date advice.

New Process Implemented:

*The **Pre-IHA-Risk Assessment Tool** was devised and implemented to provide an additional brief health check overview of key areas:*

Known diagnosis, known allergies, medication, key professionals and provide guidance for the allocated Social Worker and Independent Reviewing Officer. This is in addition to the **Statutory Initial Health Assessment.**

This has been well received by Social Workers/Independent Reviewing Officers.

Un-accompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

We continue to work to progress the health needs of this cohort of young people.

We developed information leaflets in relation to the TB to support young people to the importance of awareness of this condition and screening opportunity. These were translated into 11 different languages.

We devised a health information poster-health topic Tuberculosis- for the CSC Newsletter to raise awareness for foster carers.

We continue to actively source evidence-based practice for UASC and are currently comparing health advice and promotion with CNWL Ealing London.

A current challenge raised to our ICB is that our BCG Pathway, which screens for TB, is not currently in place, following our health provider ending contract. This is on our risk register and Public Health to be supporting progress to source service. All young people who have missed screening-will be picked up once a new service has been sourced.

Audit:

Looked After Children Pregnancy & Identifying Risk Factors

An audit was completed by Looked after Children's Nurse Tara Harris looking at care experienced young people in Milton Keynes Children's Social Care to identify trends in risk and pregnancy outcome, which can then be used to explore areas in need of additional support for LAC. 24 LAC or Care Leavers up to the age of 25 who were under the care of MK in April 2022, and were pregnant, expectant fathers, or have one or more children, were reviewed.

The findings of this data collection show that the risk areas present before a pregnancy can influence the outcome regarding Children Social Care involvement. Young people who have a combination of coming into care at a late age, having a history of mental health issues or additional learning needs, being placed into semi-independent housing, not engaging with education or employment, or having additional learning needs are at a higher risk of their children being brought into care or placed for adoption. A recommendation from this audit is research into the services available for each key risk area, what support they offer and how efficiently it is meeting the need.

This audit is pending CNWL final ratification, but discussions have taken place with Public Health for a joint approach in this key area of health care.

Training Provided:

For Social Workers- monthly sessions continue in relation to Corporate Parenting.

For Foster Carers in the area of Good Health for Children in Care.

We are working currently with our Workforce Development Officer to review training offered and streamline training which will include covering specific age ranges and involving external speakers from Specialist Universal Services.

We provided training in London to the CNWL Trust Council of Governors Conference in relation to the health needs of Looked After Children.

Education of Our Children in Care

Virtual School Update April 22-March 23

Milton Keynes Virtual School works with children aged 2-18 who are in the care of Milton Keynes City Council (MKCC). Many of these children will have experienced distress, loss and trauma which may affect their development and education. The Virtual School (VS) also offers advice and guidance to parents, carers, education settings and social workers working with children who are previously looked after (PLAC) and those who have a social worker.

Specifically, the Virtual School are here to:

- **Promote** the educational achievement of children and young people who are looked after, previously looked after children and those who have social care involvement.
- **Raise** attainment for the children and young people that are looked after by Milton Keynes City Council.
- **Advise** and guide professionals working with looked after children, previously looked after children and children with a social worker.
- **Support** schools to develop programmes and systems which will ensure the gap is narrowed between looked after children and their non-looked after peers.
- **Train** professionals working with children that come under the remit of the Virtual School.
- **Champion** the educational needs of all children with partner agencies who are involved with those children who are looked after, previously looked after or have social care involvement.

As outlined in the Virtual School Annual Report 21/22, key areas for development with associated actions were identified. An update on the progress of these areas in the April 22-March 23 reporting period are outlined below:

Key Area for Development	Key Actions Identified	Update as of 31/03/23
<p>Improve understanding and practice around the work of the Virtual School, increasing aspirations for our children and young people and championing their educational progress</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the Virtual School Governing Board • Delivery of the Virtual School Conference with a focus on working to secure the best outcomes for children with social workers • Updating the Virtual School website to improve communication with all stakeholders 	<p>The VS Conference was delivered to a mixture of Designated Teachers and Designated Safeguarding Leads and was positively reviewed by attendees. The practice of the Virtual School is regularly reported to the Education Learning and Inclusion Board, VS Governing Board and School Performance Board. Additionally, the VS work with an Education Champion as part of the MKCC Councillor Champion Model.</p>
<p>Ensuring that Personal Education Plan (PEP) completion is as close to 100% as possible</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater challenge of all professionals to meet deadlines and engage with the PEP process 	<p>The completion of core PEP meetings is consistently between 95-98% in this reporting period. Initial PEP completion requires further intervention in the next reporting period.</p>
<p>To secure adequate staffing within the Virtual School to allow for manageable caseloads as well as fulfilling the wider responsibilities of the Virtual School Head (VSH) with regards to children with a social worker</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Virtual School staffing and potential recruitment 	<p>The team has increased in size with the fixed-term appointments of a Lead VS Officer for Vulnerable Children (to fulfil the Children with Social Worker extended duties) and an additional PEP Quality and Compliance Officer. This has allowed for more manageable caseloads.</p>

Key Area for Development	Key Actions Identified	Update as of 31/03/23
<p>Avoiding 'drift and delay' when a young person needs a school move, especially when this is out of area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued promotion of the need to work closely with social care colleagues to plan school moves where necessary • Continued contact with other virtual schools for advice when a child or young person is placed in another local authority 	<p>Placement referral forms have been updated to note the advice of the VS. Monthly exception reporting of 'non-standard school places' to Head of Corporate Parenting to ensure clear communication. The VSH has challenged professionals responsible for school admissions for children without school places who are placed out of MK and escalated to the Children's Commissioner as necessary. Advice about local education settings and arrangements are sought from appropriate virtual schools to aid decision making. There continue to be children who are not on a school roll due to their personal circumstances however in addition to seeking school places for these children, the Virtual School provide (or support the application for) tutoring arrangements in the interim.</p>
<p>Focussing a strand of the work of the Virtual School on raising aspirations; both raising the aspirations of the children and young people we work with themselves and the adults who work alongside them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PEP Officers asking specific questions where attainment or progress in PEPs in less than expected and working with others to support individual strategies to improve this • Tracking attainment data more effectively 	<p>Quality assurance of all Core PEPs is undertaken by the VSH and Deputy VSH to ensure that PEPs are comprehensive and if they do not meet expectations that actions are taken to remedy this. Progress data is reviewed by VSH and reported to School Performance Board.</p>

Key Area for Development	Key Actions Identified	Update as of 31/03/23
Reduction in the number of children and young people classed as Persistent Absentees and/or are not in full-time education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved attendance monitoring and communication between Virtual School Officers and Social Workers 	New contract for external attendance monitoring implemented for both statutory school age children and post-16 learners. Attendance analysed to identify trends and concerns – these are reported to social workers for information and support. Additionally, monitoring of suspension data has been more accurate because of these arrangements allowing for increased challenge by the VS.
Reduction of suspensions for looked after children and vulnerable children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continued support and robust challenge 	The pattern for number of suspensions has shown an increase in this reporting period despite VS intervention and support. This is due to several complex factors including children in settings that cannot adequately meet their needs and requiring new settings to be agreed. Training on exclusions and suspensions has been delivered to all VS staff to encourage robust challenge in all meetings. Reduction in suspensions remains a key focus in the next reporting period. There have been no permanent exclusions this year and the VS have worked with settings to avoid at least three permanent exclusions this year.

Key Area for Development	Key Actions Identified	Update as of 31/03/23
<p>We are keen that our post-16 support, specifically, the aspirations and interventions for the small cohort of NEET is an area of focus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of post-16 Virtual School support 	<p>There is an embedded Personal Advisor (PA) working four days per week with post-16 LAC who are NEET. The PA has worked hard to build relationships and encourage engagement with opportunities whilst documenting all engagement in PEPs held on the young person's file. This has been positively reviewed in a Matric Accreditation Review in January 23. The Virtual School are active participants in the Operational and Strategic EET Panels.</p>
<p>Ensuring that the quality training sessions that are provided by the Virtual School team have a higher take-up and reach across all stakeholders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training offer delivered to foster carers, education settings, governors, and social workers 	<p>Extensive training sessions delivered across stakeholder groups including foster carers, education settings and school governors. Designated Teacher forums are delivered termly in addition to 'New to Role' training sessions. VS Conference delivered in November 22. There is an extensive free training offer available to schools and professionals advertised on the VS website. Further training for social workers will need to be developed in the next reporting period.</p>

Key Area for Development	Key Actions Identified	Update as of 31/03/23
The strategic implementation of the guidance for children with a social worker (CWSW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued promotion of the services of the Virtual School, including the support for PLAC and CWSW. This includes advice and guidance as well as internal and external training offers in addition to regular communication with Designated Teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendance at weekly Emergency LAC Panel Advice and guidance to Social Workers and Independent Reviewing Officers to support children on CIN and CP plans Training offer advertised on VS website Tailored session delivered as part of VS Conference Reviewing data for CWSW on part-time timetables at Legacy Panel Weekly drop-in sessions for social workers to discuss cases and formulate plans <p>This will remain a focus for the next reporting period.</p>

At the end of the April 2022 - March 2023 reporting period, the Virtual School have identified the following as key strengths:

- The Virtual School team continues to be knowledgeable and committed. PEP Officers are specialists within their educational phases with up-to-date knowledge of attachment and trauma-aware research. Their continued work has ensured that there are strong relationships between schools and providers, especially post-16 links with MK College. Additionally, the Virtual School has strong links with peers across virtual schools in the South East region. The team work well with other professionals including Social Workers, Designated Teachers, Carers, SEN teams and Educational Psychology colleagues to support and challenge others to provide the best for our children and young people. When all of the team are operational, there is sufficient capacity.
- The Virtual School continues to be proud of the preventative and advocacy work undertaken to prevent permanent exclusions.
- Delivery of the Book Trust Letterbox Parcel programme to targeted primary year groups to support literacy and empowerment. These are received positively by children and carers. One letter received by the Virtual School reported the following:

“I am writing to thank you for the books and items you have sent to S. We both enjoyed reading and playing with them. S looked forward to receiving the purple envelopes and the Gruffalo book at the end.”

- The PEP process is well established with built-in quality assurance of requests for Pupil Premium Plus funding. Communication with education settings is clear with information on the MKCC Virtual School website, in the Designated Teacher handbook and in the training sessions offered.
- The Virtual School provision for 16–17-year-olds who are NEET.
- The appropriate scrutiny and challenge provided by the Virtual School SPB and Governing Board.

Further information can be found in the Virtual School Annual Report.

Care Experienced Young People (Care Leavers)

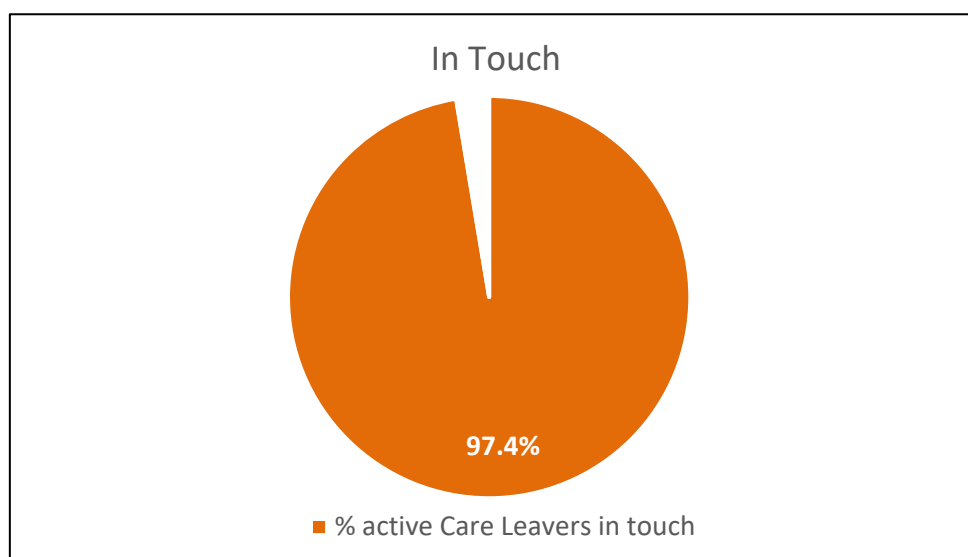
- Number of Care Leavers

Year	Number of care experienced young people
31 March 2023	228
31 March 2022	208
31 March 2021	176
31 March 2020	182

We have an increasing population of care experienced young people who are entitled to a service post 18. To respond to this demand, we have increased capacity of Personal Advisors from 10 to 12 and plan to increase further from 12 to 14 to be able to provide support to those approaching 18.

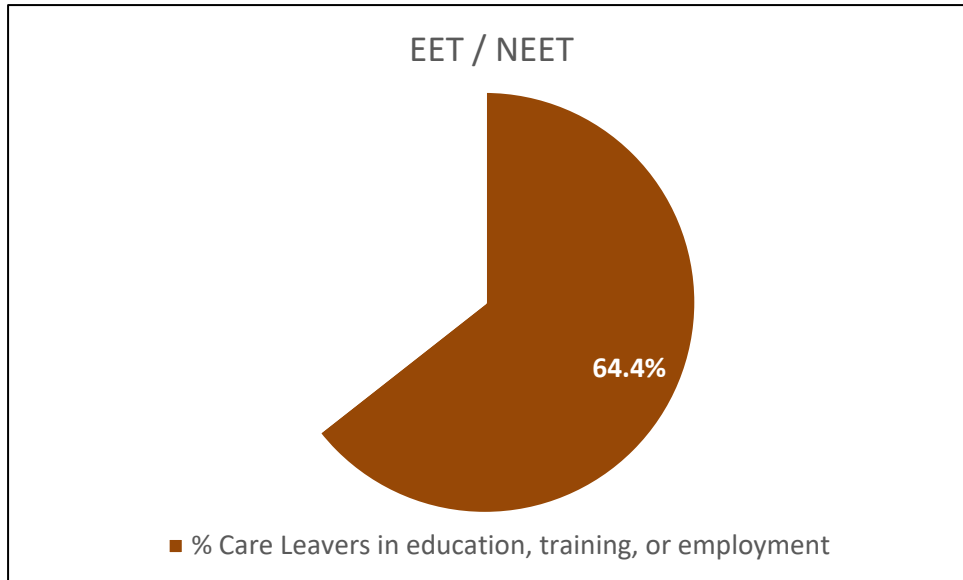
Number of Care Leavers in Touch

We are currently in touch with 97.4% care leavers. This has increased since end of March 2022. Compared to the National rate 2021/22 which is 92%.



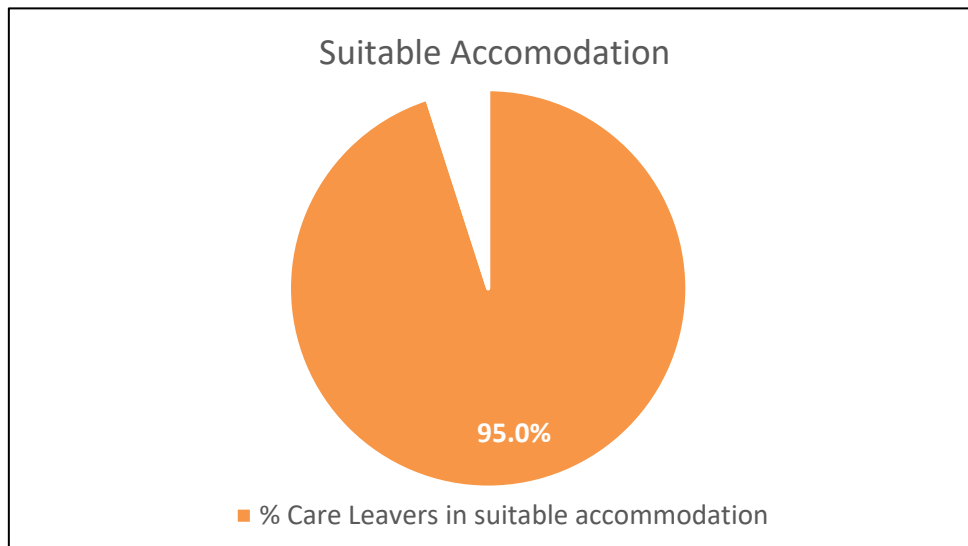
Young People in Education/Employment/Training

We have supported more young people into education/employment and training over the last 12 months from 59.9% to 64.4%. We are working closely with colleagues across the council and partners. We have an ambitious target of 70% this year.



Care Experienced Young People in Suitable Accommodation

We have 95% of our young people in suitable accommodation. Those who are considered not in suitable accommodation are in custody, no fixed abode or in bed and breakfast. The latter two young people have not been contactable, so we do not have an up-to-date record.



Looking Forward to the Year Ahead

- To recruit 15 foster carers, to enable us to grow our fostering community and keep children close to their communities.
- Retention of foster carers through effective support and supervision and valuable training offer.

- Ambitious for young people with care experience with a focus on supporting more young people into education/employment/training with a target of 70%.
- Children's Services to develop a greater understanding of the mental wellbeing needs of children and young people, build on partnership with CAMHS to have better mental health support for children in care.
- Continued throughput to secure permanence early for children.

N/B - This report does not include any information from our Independent Reviewing Officers, a separate annual report will be provided later in the year by Jenny Thomas Safeguarding Manager

