

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee 11/6/15

Corporate Parenting

Objective: for the committee to understand, and make any recommendations in relation to, the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities for Looked After Children, including items highlighted in the report to Cabinet of June 2014.

Witnesses

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| •Cliff James | Head of Corporate Parenting |
| •Fiona Harris | Corporate Parenting Board Manager |
| •Mike Southin | Chair of Suffolk Foster Care Association |
| •Dr Nikki Rycroft | Designated Doctor, Safeguarding |
| •Gareth William –James | Head of Virtual School |

Summary Slide – Areas of Focus

- **Focus areas:**
- Update on implementation of the Corporate Parenting Board strategic priorities as reported to the June 2014 Cabinet, and the issues arising from the Cabinet meeting.
- What are the trends in numbers of Looked After Children in various areas of the county?
- What impact has early intervention had in this area?; What is effective in terms of preventing neglect / abuse and/or improving educational performance and life outcomes?
- Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) additional focus – in light of the 2014 Casey report, what is the Council now doing differently with regard to Looked After Children?
- Making Every Intervention Count (MEIC) focus – What service improvements, or challenges, will the MEIC programme have on the council's Corporate Parenting function?

Summary Slide – Overview and Issues

Overview

- Children in care are the responsibility of the whole council and the Corporate Parenting Board takes its lead responsibility for being corporate parents to our looked after children very seriously. Partner agencies co-operate to provide services and develop strategic plans.
- Key to supporting children effectively is listening to their views and the voice of children in care and care leavers has been prominent in setting the priorities for the Board .
- Good progress is being made in our priority areas resulting in improvements in outcomes for looked after children but there is still considerably more to achieve across the whole system. We need to harness further the collective contributions of our partners to securing the best life chances for our children, in the fields of health, housing, schools, job opportunities and support for employment.

Progress

Areas of progress the Board has made against its priorities have been

- Setting up of a Governing Body to the Virtual School to hold schools and the local authority to account, given the under-achievement of Suffolk's looked after children.
- Holding an Accommodation Task and Finish group and driving forward the resulting action plan in order to improve on already high levels of suitable accommodation, more cost-effectively
- The publication of an Entitlement Guide for young people leaving care by SCC/Catch22
- Requiring health and local authority commissioners and providers to report regularly on the progress being made to improve children's health and well-being

Summary Slide – Overview and Issues cont.

Impact of early intervention and prevention of abuse and neglect on trends in LAC numbers

- Numbers of LAC have risen recently but are still lower than in 2011. The change in the age profile with fewer young children and more older ones puts greater pressure on the availability and cost of finding suitable placements.
- Early intervention through the adoption of the Signs of Safety and Well-being framework and use of Family Network Meetings supports and encourages families to take more responsibility for their children.

CSE and looked after children

- To address risks of CSE, a police officer is being attached to each children's home leading to better joint working and more realistic strategies for to tackle the problems. A LSCB pack is being issued to each foster home to raise their awareness of CSE
- Missing from Care procedures have been strengthened with Independent interviews offered to young people by a voluntary agency trained in SOSWB

Corporate Parenting Service Improvements under MEIC

- MEIC has enabled the establishment of 4 X LAC permanence teams which will help closer working with LACCESS, LAC Health (some co-location) and Catch 22.
- An Integrated Fostering and Adoption Service has resulted in an increase in practitioners to strengthen our recruitment and support to foster carers, adopters and special guardians.

Issues for exercising corporate parenting responsibilities

- Children's achievements at Key Stage 2 and 4(GCSE) remain lower than the national average for looked after children
- Challenges remain in increasing the local provision of placements for
 - foster care, specialist education and supported accommodation for 16/17 year-olds resulting in continued pressure on the purchased placement budget.

Corporate Parenting Responsibilities – Overview

- The Corporate Parenting Board monitors the progress of the LA's Corporate Parenting Strategy through regular reporting by officers and direct feedback and reports from the Children in Care Council (C2C)
- The Board consists of 7 Councillors, senior officers, health, district council and foster care association representatives and the Chair of C2C.
- It takes its lead responsibility for being corporate parents to our looked after children very seriously – 'as if they were our children' and holds an annual seminar to keep fellow Councillors up-to-date with developments and challenges in fulfilling that responsibility.
- The voice of children in care and care leavers is prominent in setting the agenda for the Board
- The February joint workshop with C2C identified 4 priorities; improving education and reducing changes of school, increasing the amount of suitable accommodation, knowing their rights and entitlements and making sure children's' health needs are known and met.

The Board's response was

- Setting up of a Governing Body to the Virtual School to hold schools and the local authority to account
- Holding an Accommodation Task and Finish group and driving forward the resulting action plan
- The publication of an Entitlement Guide for young people leaving care by SCC/Catch22
- Requiring health and local authority commissioners and providers to report regularly on health and well-being progress.

The October joint workshop launched a review of Suffolk's Promise to looked after children and care leavers which is being led by C2C and will report on 26 May to the Board for endorsement and commitment to its implementation.

Update on implementation of the Corporate Parenting Board strategic priorities.

1. Improving the educational attainment of looked after children

Progress

- CYP has a dedicated Education Support Service (LACCESS) operating as the Virtual School for looked after children with a Virtual Head to lead an aspirational improvement agenda
- Setting up of a Governing Body to the Virtual School to hold school leaders to account and provide termly scrutiny of children's progress. This will enable more timely and targeted interventions and follow-up of lack of progression for individuals and schools
- Suffolk from 14/15 has access to dedicated Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) for every looked after child of school age, and from 15/16 for those registered for early years provision which is given to schools to provide additional support to improve educational outcomes for the child
- An PPG budget of £1900 per looked after child generates annual £1m annually
- Expectation is that PPG is passed to schools but some can also be retained and used directly by the Virtual School
 - 75% passed to schools
 - 20% support activity funded directly by Virtual School
 - 5% training for school staff to improve outcomes for children

Impact:

The PPG has contributed to

- a significant increase in the provision by school staff of accurate progress information
- improvement in evidence of school planning for individual children
- School staff challenged if support plans are insufficient and PPG withheld until good plan in place

- Improved information from schools on LAC progress – from 50%(2013) to 90%+ (2015) accurate returns
- Persistent absence from school has reduced significantly but periodic absence has risen recently and requires consistent attention from social workers and carers
- The attainment gap between Suffolk's looked after children and their peers in Suffolk schools at Key Stage 4 improved to 39.9%, lower than statistical neighbours (41.6%) and England (43.3%) (2013). In 2014 the gap in Suffolk improved further to 37.6% .
- The Virtual school has helped to increase the number of children with up-to-date Personal Education Plans from 80% to 95% in 2014/15
- The LACCESS Virtual school will sustain its focus on improving attendance and ensuring children have good educational placements.
- LACCESS has built a partnership with Ofsted in the Eastern Region Network to ensure every school inspection will focus on outcomes for looked after children.

Key Issues

- Children's achievements at Key Stages 2 and 4(GCSE) remain lower than the national average for looked after children
- This is in the context of poorer educational attainment across the Eastern Region
- 6% of children moving placements in Suffolk have to change school compared with 4% in England.

2. Meeting the health and mental health needs of looked after children

Progress

- More children are attending their initial and review health assessments enabling their needs to be monitored. 84.3% in March 2015, compared to 76% in September 2014.
- Immunisation rates are at over 90% although recording of health data remains problematic and can lead to under-reporting.
- LAC nurses worked with care leavers to develop a Health passport and service user information.
- CONNECT, a targeted mental health service for looked after and adopted children with attachment difficulties offers them therapeutic treatment and their carers consultation and support
- A pilot Parent Infant Mental Health service based in the north of the county has prevented 5 babies coming into care. Positive Choices operating in the south of the county supports women who have had one or more children removed from their care and who are at risk of having further children removed to take control of their lives, prevent further pregnancy until they are in a position to parent effectively and assist them in resolving their difficulties. They have achieved a 43% reduction in repeat pregnancies in the past year.

Issues

- Health services struggle to provide for nearly 200 looked after children from other parts of the country, placed in Suffolk
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) provision is patchy and cannot yet provide data on the services it provides to looked after children
- The Designated Professionals for LAC are working on a proposal to redesign the LAC service for health to reflect improved outcomes for this group of vulnerable children and young people. Currently the complex nature of delivery from a number of health Providers across Suffolk does not support a model to reflect outcomes, and this needs to change as a priority.
- Drug and Alcohol treatment Services for LAC need further developing as the numbers of young people with problems is increasing. Work is underway to link a substance misuse worker to Suffolk's children's homes.

3. Improving education, employment and training prospects for care leavers

- The numbers of 18+ care leavers in education, employment or training has risen from 50% in March 2014 to 62% in March 2015; better than our statistical neighbours
- A Care2Work pilot provided 20 care leavers with work experience in 2013 and 2014.
- Learning from the pilot has informed the development of 'Pathways into Learning and Work' for our looked after children/care leavers. This programme is supported by the Exemplar Employer Project Manager and dedicated resources funded by the Public Health Inequalities budget.
- Accredited learning is offered via Passport for Independence and Duke of Edinburgh Awards
- MEIC has provided opportunities to prioritise the work of specialist youth support workers to provide targeted Information, Advice and Guidance and monitoring of LAC / care leavers at risk of NEET, and a work placement broker.
- In February 2015, SCC implemented a 'looked after children friendly' recruitment scheme:
 - Young people can self declare their LAC status if they choose and have a guaranteed interview if the minimum criteria of the post is met
 - Care leavers can now apply for all internally advertised posts within SCC.
 - A new process is in place to enable LAC/ care leavers opportunities to learn about and access council apprenticeships. Already 8 care leavers have been provided work experience in SCC to gain skills and knowledge to support an application as an apprentice, prepare them for the working environment and enable them to make an informed decision as to whether the role is right for them

Issues

- Most care leavers cannot afford to work as an apprentice – Cabinet Member has requested an options paper on offering enhanced apprenticeship rates
- Many young people are not "work ready"- other issues e.g. housing, mental health, substance misuse and lack of confidence are preventing them from undertaking full time work or even fulfilling work experience opportunities flexibly created to meet their needs.

4. Increasing the number of SCC foster carers and the range of needs they meet

Progress

- Foster carers and other stakeholders have been consulted about a revised fees and allowances scheme targeted at harder-to-place children. This will be considered by Cabinet in June.
- The adoption and fostering services have launched a new marketing campaign and have seen an increase of enquiries from a wider range of people
- 24 new households were approved, resulting in a net gain of 14 placements for siblings and older children
- Strengthening the relationship with Suffolk Foster Care Association who play a valuable role in representing carers' views and in working with us on future development of services.

Issues

- Suffolk's current fee structure does not attract enough carers for older children and sibling groups hence the consultation on revising these. This is a part of our Sufficiency Strategy and is the basis of the review of fees, allowances and part of the rationale for restructuring of the adoption and fostering services.

5. Increasing the sufficiency of good quality, supported accommodation for children in care, 16+ and care leavers

Progress

- The number of care leavers living in suitable accommodation has risen from 79% in March 2014 to 92% in March 2015
- B&B usage, while not completely eradicated, is only being used for emergencies and for short periods and is closely monitored by the CPB
- The CPB is monitoring the implementation of its Accommodation Task and finish action plan
- Commissioning of supported accommodation for 16 &17 year-olds is progressing alongside the review of Housing Related Support provision, managed by ACS.
- An engagement event with housing providers and other stakeholders was held in March, providing valuable insight into the scope of services needed
- The Staying Put policy has been revised and 20 young people continue to live with foster families this year post-18, a rise of 2 from 2014.

Issues

- The protocol between SCC and Boroughs and District Councils to manage 16&17 year-olds presenting as homeless could work more smoothly and greater investment in progressing this work is needed. The potential safeguarding risk this presents has been added to the LSCB risk register and Mike Evans, Strategic Director for Babergh and Mid-Suffolk on behalf of the LSCB is actively leading the work to improve this .

6. Increasing the provision of educational placements in Suffolk for children with educational, behavioural and emotional needs

Progress

- The number of Pupil Referral Unit places at Hampden House has doubled since September 2014 to provide 12 day places and 12 residential places. Numbers of PRU places have increased by 54 overall across the county
- The number of children placed in residential provision out of the county has reduced from 31 in March 2014 to 27 in March 2015 with the greatest pressure still to find local placements for children on the autistic spectrum
- A new strategic commissioning framework is being established to improve the quality of alternative education provision and increase the amount of specialist provision
- Fair Access Panels have just been established in the 3 areas of the county, working in partnership with schools to find local education placements for hard-to-place children and those requiring alternative education
- Expanding use of boarding schools both for children in care and as an alternative to care in partnership with the Springboard Bursary Foundation and Buttle UK.

Issues

- Continuing the support to and challenge of schools not to exclude looked after children or provide less than 25 hours education per week

7. Providing placements that achieve permanence for all children who cannot live with birth parents

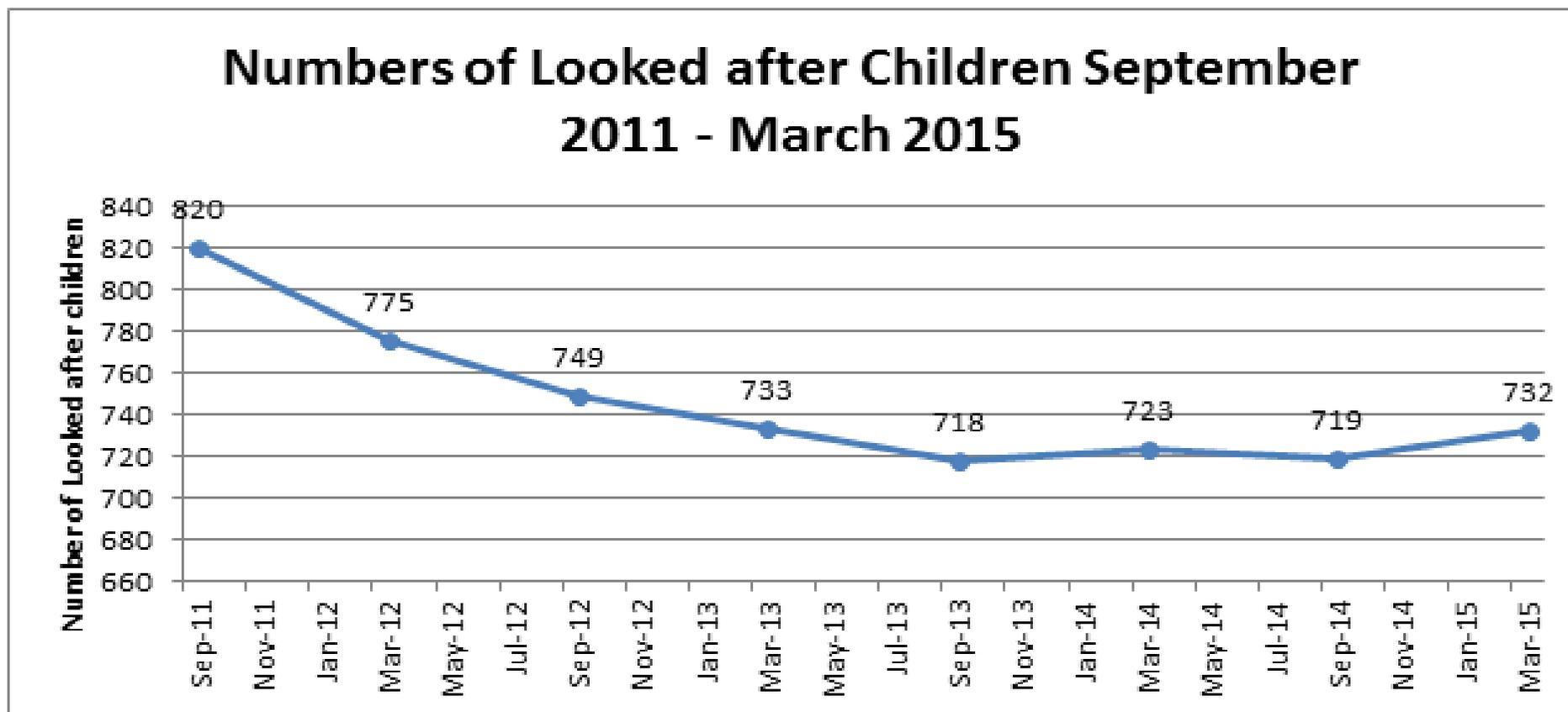
Progress

- Permanent placements are being achieved for a wider range of children with the increase over 3 of the past 4 years of Special Guardianship Orders and permanent fostering arrangements as well as the continued placement of babies and small children for adoption.
- The reduction in adoption plans being agreed by the courts in 2014,15 has resulted in a very small number of children waiting for an adoptive family to be identified – currently 2 and fewer being placed out of county
- Adoption scorecards have been developed by the Government. Suffolk performs very well against national and regional comparators for the timeliness of children's journey through care to an adoptive family and is making improvements in placing children after a court order has been made with adoptive parents.
- A permanence tracker allows children to be monitored from entry to care in order to reduce delay in making permanent plans, including their safe return home.

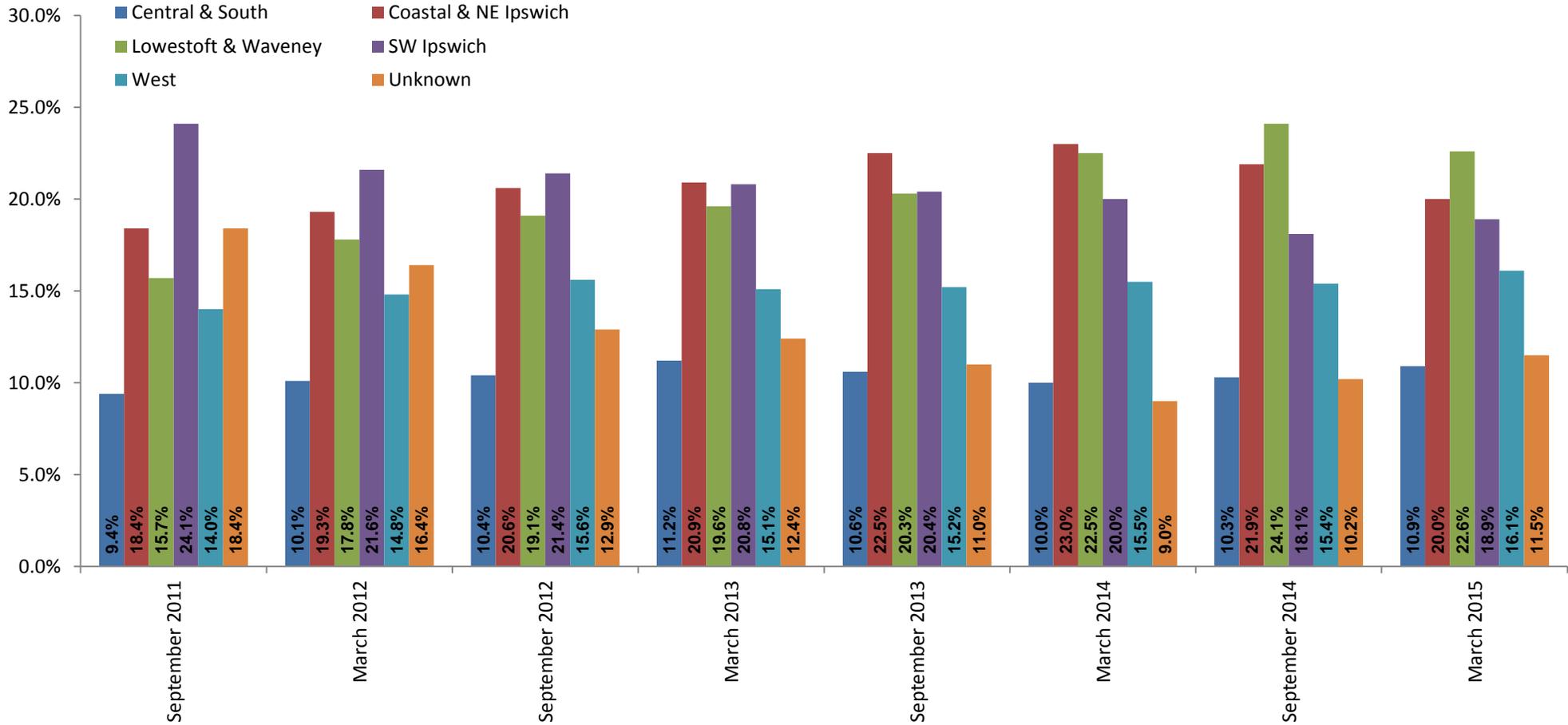
Issues

- Anticipating future need in adoption is currently more challenging due to changes in care planning and court activity
- Increasing numbers of SGOs have implications for the provision of services to support these arrangements, both the specialist permanence and early help offer.

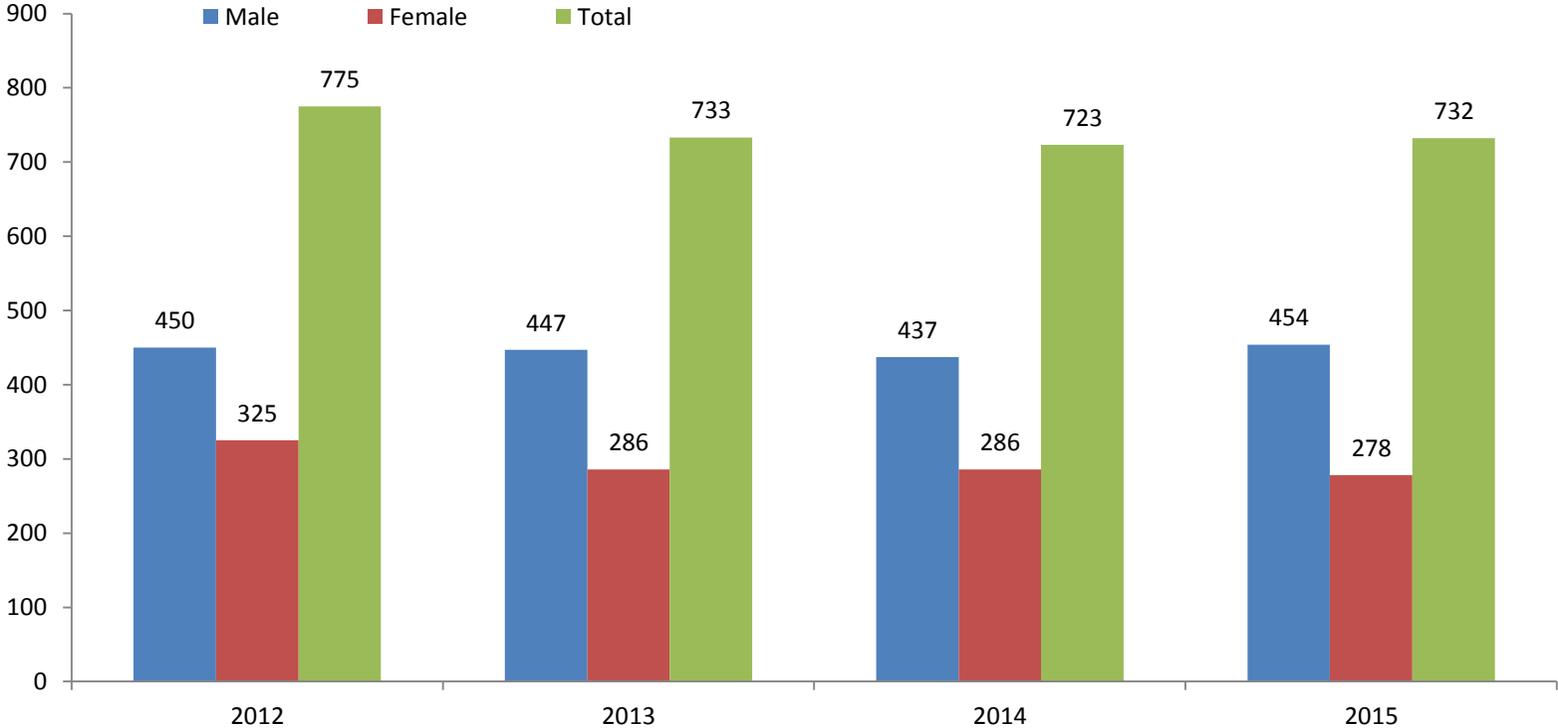
What are the overall trends in looked after children?



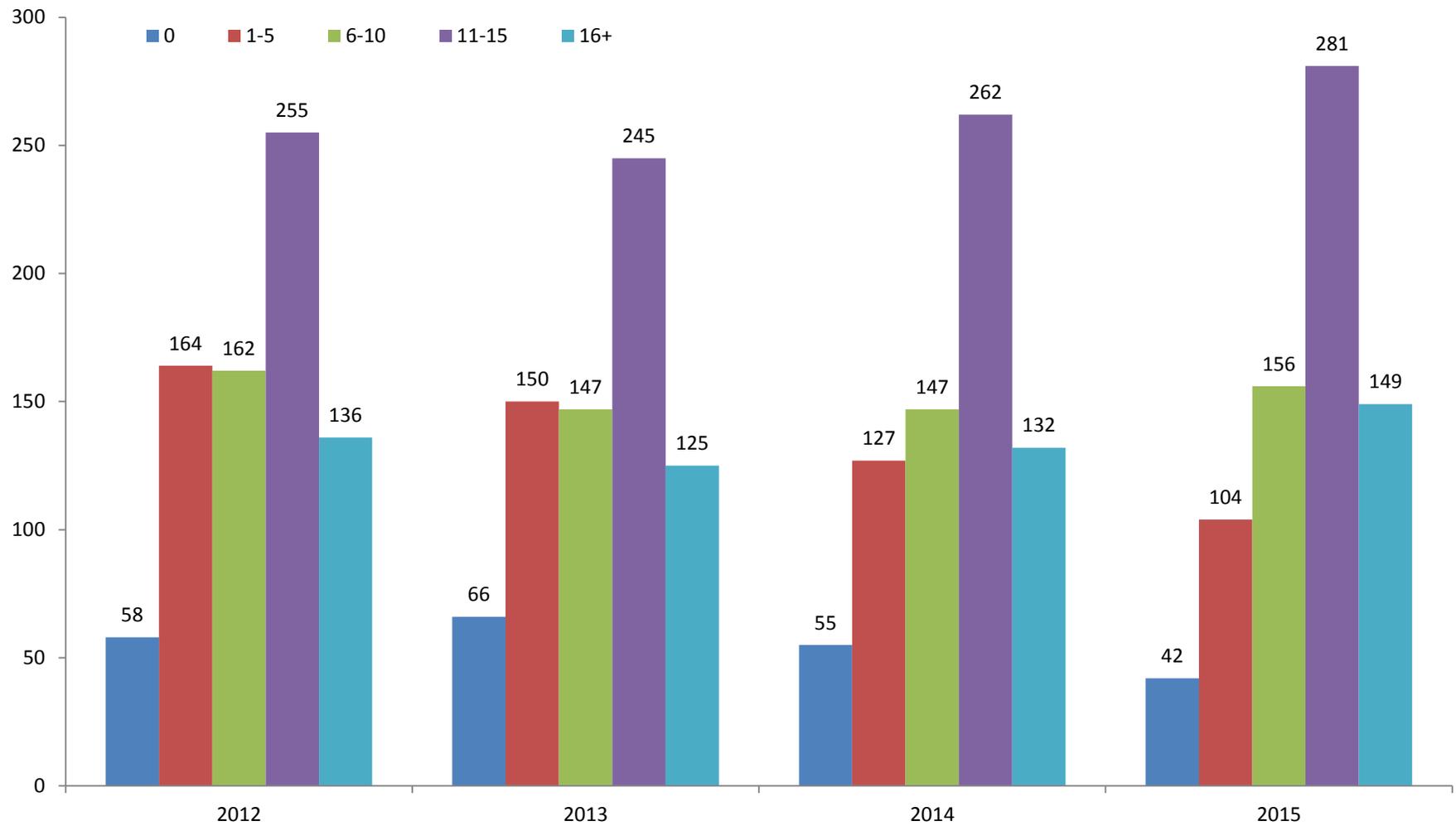
What are the trends in numbers of Looked After Children in various areas of the county?



What are the trends in numbers of Looked After Children by gender?



What are the trends in looked after children by age



What impact has early intervention had in this area?; What is effective in terms of preventing neglect / abuse and/or improving educational performance and life outcomes?

- Numbers of LAC have risen recently but are still lower than in 2011
- The FAST service working at the 'edge of care' is preventing some children coming into care and is appreciated by families in crisis
- Family Network Meetings as part of SOSWB promote wider family support and encourage families to take more responsibility for their children.
- Stronger and more consistent models of assessment and direct work with families through the SOSWB framework can motivate change as families are clear what the problem is and what they need to do to change
- A summer activities programme run by the social work service has been shown to reduce school absence and consequently reduce admissions to care where this is a significant family pressure.
- Stable placements enable children to settle and engage in learning and develop their interests
- Actively supporting children's interests in placement and through the targeted use of the Pupil Premium improves children's self-belief and confidence and will support the improvement of educational and life outcomes
- Early Years service provides additional funding to families for childcare where there is a risk of family breakdown or to support kinship carers

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) – in light of the 2014 Casey report, what is the Council now doing differently with regard to looked after children?

- CSE “screening” tool is being embedded as part of the revised Statutory Assessment and children’s home staff will be using it in their direct work with children
- Wide range of staff have been trained to recognise CSE
- A police officer is being attached to each children’s home as part of the Team around the Children’s Home, to develop working relationships with the children and staff. This is leading to better joint working and more realistic strategies for to tackle the problems.
- This work is being aligned with an increased focus on young people going missing
- A LSCB pack is being issued to each foster home to raise their awareness of CSE
- Missing from Care procedures have been strengthened with Independent interviews offered to young people by a voluntary agency trained in SOSWB
- Strategy meetings are held where missing children are considered at risk of CSE
- The number of children placed out of the county has reduced, so improving the quality of contact with them and the ability to monitor their exposure to grooming.
- Enhanced resources within the Make A Change team (now supporting children at risk of CSE) will facilitate greater consultation and direct work support for SWs and for LAC at risk of CSE and/or becoming missing/absent

Making Every Intervention Count (MEIC) focus – What service improvements, or challenges, will the MEIC programme have on the council’s Corporate Parenting function?

Corporate Parenting Service

- Integrated Fostering and Adoption Service – One Head of Service
- The reorganised service has resulted in an increase in practitioners to strengthen our recruitment and support to foster carers, adopters and special guardians.
- Four new teams established to provide greater focuses on:-
 - Recruitment of foster carers and adopters
 - Deliver improved permanence arrangements for children in long term foster care and those adopted.
 - Development of therapeutic fostering service with enhanced support to carers.
 - Greater support to Kinship and Connected Person carers and Asylum seeking children
- Strengthened management arrangements in our children’s homes to support residential child care staff and revised shift pattern to ensure more staff are available at evenings and weekends when children need attention and help
- Dedicated support to Corporate Parenting Board and Cabinet Member to ensure effective scrutiny of services provided to looked after children and support to delivering SCC’s strategic objectives
- Head of Corporate Parenting to provide greater commitment to commissioning services for LAC jointly with Health, Housing and Education colleagues.

Making Every Intervention Count (MEIC) focus – What service improvements, or challenges, will the MEIC programme have on the council’s Corporate Parenting function?

Social Work Looked after children Service

- Improvements
- 4 X LAC permanence teams will help closer working with LAC ESS, LAC Health (some co-location) and Catch 22.
- Local teams will link better to families and local provision.
- The structure will also support stability of SW/LAC relationships as they will remain with the team until transfer to Catch 22.
- Consultant SWs in LAC teams will not hold case responsibility, but will enhance the supervisory oversight and support to LAC SWs, raising professional standards and quality of service to LAC
- Court work is being assigned to specialist workers to promote efficiency of process, consistent relationships and quality of outcomes.
- Contact Supervision Coordinators have been created across the county to reduce travel for children, promote consistency of supervisor and free SWs time for more direct work with children and families.
- Challenges
- Corporate Parenting provision is under pressure from the current increased demand for services
- The move to 0-19 teams is believed to be a positive development – in supporting the reduction of transitions between workers and removing a fixed separation in services based on age alone.
- This requires the support of the service in developing some practitioner confidence and knowledge of engagement with young people in wider developmental stages.

Evidence

- Expected Evidence Sets / Reports:
- Brief (bullet points / couple of pages) summary addressing the above focus areas.
- Existing reports / reference documents:
 - The June 2014 Cabinet Report (9 pgs) '*Annual Report on Corporate Parenting Board*'
[http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=10/Jun/2014&c=The Cabinet](http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=10/Jun/2014&c=The+Cabinet)
 - ***The updated SCC Corporate Parenting and Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2014-16***
 - Extract of section '*13. Annual Report on Corporate Parenting Board*' from the [Minutes of the 10 June Cabinet](#)
- Work experience case study of care leaver

- Background / Reference:
- 10 June 2014 Cabinet: [http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=10/Jun/2014&c=The Cabinet](http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=10/Jun/2014&c=The+Cabinet)