

Theme and Overview: 7. Demand Management: Children's Social Care Placements

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Vision for Worcestershire's Children

Children at risk or those with additional needs are identified and once we know about them we make their lives better by keeping them safe or being the best possible parent for them. Our core values are:

- We always act in the best interest of the child (everything else follows this)
- We create safety and stability for our children
- We recognise the importance of family and work with them to find solutions
- We only intervene in family life when we need to (we understand what we are doing and why we are doing it)

This requires child centred decision making, intervening at the right time and getting it right first time.

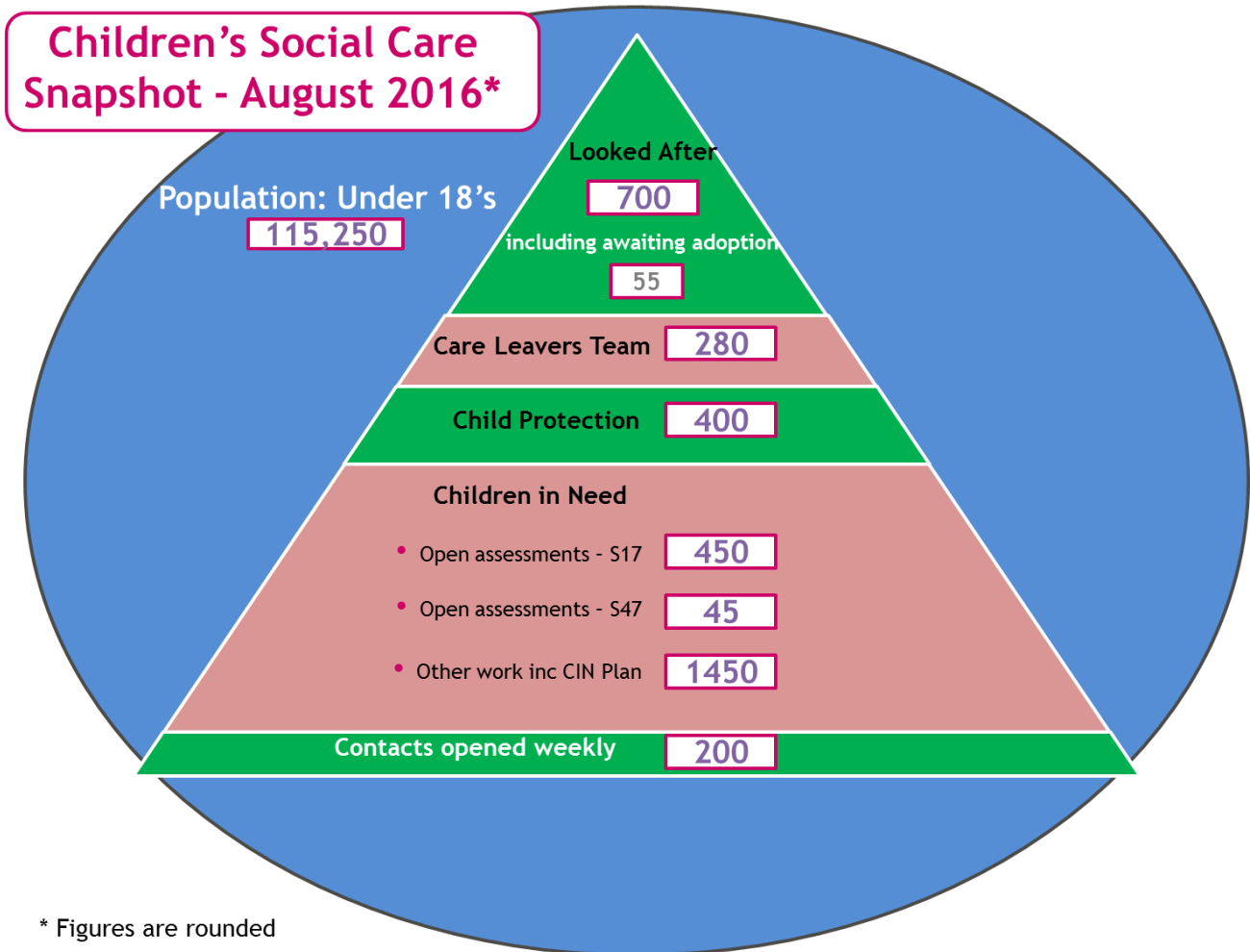
Investment and savings over the last 4 years

Since 2013/14 Children's Services (excluding communities) has had £14.6m investment. The majority of this (£11.3m) was for children's social care with the rest to continue to support positive activities and the Council's role in schools following a reduction in central government funding.

Current placement analysis

As at the end of July, the County Council were funding the costs of safeguarding 1,095 children of which 651 were in placements with a cost, and 444 through direct financial support e.g. through child arrangement orders, special guardianship, adoption support arrangements or direct payments. The number of Looked After Children (LAC) at this time was 700 details of which are given in **Figure 1**. There will always be a difference between the number of LAC and the number of children who are in placement with a cost as there are LAC who are placed with parents with no attributable placement cost and those remaining with their foster carers under staying put arrangements who are over 18 and no longer LAC.

Figure 1



It is on average £24k cheaper per year to place a child within an internal placement (e.g. foster carer, residential home, supported living house) than it is to place them with an 'external' provider (bought from the open market). This demonstrates the need to maximise the use of internal placements wherever possible, whilst ensuring each placement meets the needs of individual children, as part of our statutory duty to provide sufficient high quality and range of placements.

Overview of savings proposal:

In 2015/16 the budget overspent by c£5.8 million. The Council invested £4.5 million into the 2016/17 budget which will reduce to £3m in 2017/18. Children's Services have plans to meet the overspend and also for an additional £1m reduction in £2017/18. This is summarised in table 1 overleaf.

Table 1

Budget				
2016/17	£38 million			
Savings				
Initiative	2017/18 £,000	2018/19 £,000	2019/20 £,000	Post 2020 £,000
Additional savings	1,000			
Total	1,000			

Investment required:

- Capital investment of £2m was recommended by September Cabinet and additional staffing requirements for in-house units, the costs of which will be repaid from the savings generated from the schemes
- Additional social care / safeguarding staff due to the increased cost of recruiting and retaining the right quality of staff and additional staff to help focus on the required improvement, culture change and necessary oversight as well as managing the day to day demands of the service
- Enhanced management capacity – to reduce spans of control and to bring traction to concentrate on improvement and culture change and case oversight as well as the strategic demands on the service

What will be the key outcomes?

- The service will increase the capacity of in-house units and reduce reliance on more expensive agency placements
- More children living with families and / or in more permanent settings
- Less children entering, and children staying less time in, the care system
- Improved understanding and application of thresholds across the wider children's sector
- Social workers with more manageable caseloads which should improve morale, decrease absence and increase recruitment and retention.

What additional savings are targeted and when is this expected to be delivered?

£1m additional savings targeted in 2017/18, are to be generated from:

- **extension of current savings plans** relating to placing more children into in-house services as an alternative to agency placements, further in-house supported living places as step down from residential care prior to independence and more effective use of internal provision and short break alternatives for children with disabilities
- **new savings plans which are in the process of being developed** relating to encouraging more foster carers to become Special Guardians and recruitment of intensive foster carers to support children with complex needs

What will be the key work streams that will enable the delivery of this theme and who will lead their ongoing development?

1.	<p>Workstream – Changing Culture Implementation of the next phase of practice standards through the Back to Basics Improvement Plan.</p>		
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Lead Head of Service:</td> <td>Tina Russell</td> </tr> </table>	Lead Head of Service:	Tina Russell
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2.	<p>Workstream – Improving the entry point into social care Improving the entry point via the Integrated Family Front Door to make it more robust in ensuring only those children and young people that require social care support come into the care system.</p>		
	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>Lead Heads of Service:</td> <td>Tina Russell / Hannah Needham</td> </tr> </table>	Lead Heads of Service:	Tina Russell / Hannah Needham
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3.	<p>Workstream – Achieving Permanency more quickly Streamlining processes and defining standards to drive up efficiency and work effectiveness with an aim to shorten the length of time children are 'in the care system'.</p>		
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4.	<p>Workstream – High Cost Placements Agency Residential Challenge panel to identify more cost effective options and negotiation with suppliers to reduce unit costs.</p>		
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5.	<p>Workstream – Placement and Sufficiency Strategy This will inform future placement planning including the improvement in the process for ensuring value for money decision making for placements including market management, development of internal provision and service awareness to drive any prevention activity.</p>		
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What are the key milestones for delivery?

Workstream	Key Milestones	Planned Date
Improving the entry point into social care	Sexual health and outreach support project to target parents who have had a child / children removed previously and for Looked after Children and care leavers	Apr 17
Achieving Permanency more quickly	Additional Targeted Family Support – to speed up reunifications and manage complex Edge of Care requiring high intense support	Apr 17
High Cost Placements	Implementation of special guardianship policy	Dec 16
	Increase in-house provision	Apr 17
Placement Sufficiency	First 4 intensive fostering placements commence	Oct 16
	Fostering Ratio split, in-house: Independent = 60:40.	Mar 17
	Additional in-house supported living properties and additional residential facilities operational	Apr 17
	Implementation of strategy	Apr 17
	Fostering Ratio split, in-house: Independent = 66:34.	Oct 17
Changing Culture	Workforce redesign initial report	Dec 16
	New group managers in post	Mar 17

Risks

#	There is a risk that.....	Which could (impact).....	Mitigation
1	Insufficient properties available for new properties	Delay in savings being achieved	Place Partnership working on securing properties from the open market
2	More children enter care than expected and children not moving through the system as quickly as hoped	Outcomes for children Increased demand and cost for care Drift and delay Additional costs Increased case loads	Family Front Door in operation Concentration on improving culture and practice
3	All agencies across the whole system don't play their full part in managing demand	Time is wasted debating thresholds rather than delivering timely help and support to children	Deploy resources to be as efficient and effective as possible
4	Recruitment and retention	High caseloads for social workers, ability to drive forward culture change and practice improvements	Revised recruitment and workforce strategy to be developed