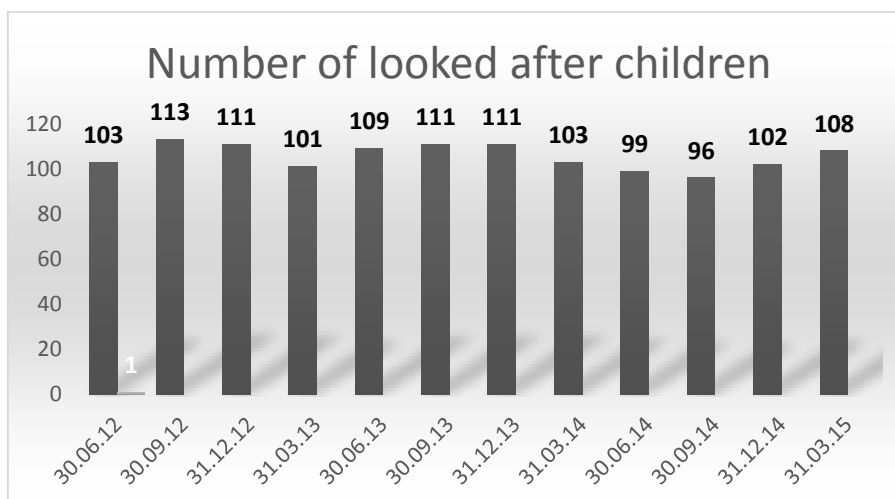


Corporate Parenting Report 2014/15 – Looked After Children

1. Looked After Children

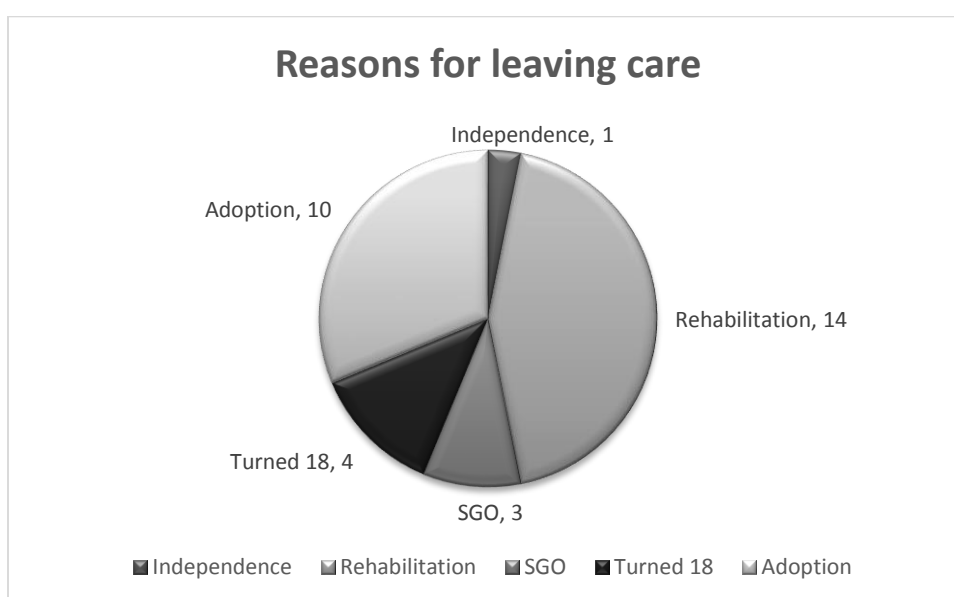
The table below details the numbers of children that were looked after between April 2012 and March 2015. The average number of looked after children during this period was 106. This pattern is similar to other Local Authorities across Wales. The Looked after Children population in Wales increased by 23% between 2009-14 but has been relatively stable since 2012.

Monmouthshire continues to have one of the lowest rates of Looked after Children in Wales. In March 2014 there were 56 of every 10,000 children who were looked after in Monmouthshire in comparison with a Welsh average of 91.



All of Monmouthshire's looked after children have an allocated social worker and have had statutory reviews held on time.

Thirty-seven children were admitted to care and thirty-two left care during the year. The chart below indicates the reasons that children left care during 2014-15.



Ten children were adopted during the year and a further three children are currently placed for adoption which means they are living with prospective adopters pending an adoption order

being made. This is a significant change from one child being adopted in 2012/13 and two children in 2013/14.

There has been a significant shift in the patterns of permanency planning for looked after children in the last few years. In 2012 51% of looked after children were rehabilitated home to their parents and only 10% achieved permanency in an alternative family through an Adoption, Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order. In 2014/15 this had altered to 35% of children being rehabilitated home and the numbers being placed in alternative families with an Order had risen to 47%. This would suggest that those children who are admitted to care are appropriate in that a Court later finds that their needs cannot be met by their parents and also that children are being supported into permanent living arrangements with carers more quickly and therefore are less at risk from the negative aspects of being a looked after child and the risk of placement breakdowns is reduced.

2. Fostering

Monmouthshire currently has a total of forty-six fostering households. Of these twenty-seven are generic foster carers, seven are kinship carers, eight are short break carers and four are approved to provide supported lodgings for young people aged over sixteen. During 2014/15 the Fostering Panel approved seven new foster carer households. Four of these were kinship carer households and three generic carer households (of these two were short break carers). In addition four kinship carer assessments were presented to Panel but not approved and one kinship carer assessment withdrew at Panel stage although the assessment was completed.

During the year eleven fostering households have left the service. Three became Special Guardianship carers committing long-term to the children in their care which is very positive. Five kinship carer placements came to an end and three generic foster carers resigned. Overall the Service has increased the number of foster carers within the Service by one during 2014/15.

Looked after children are placed with Monmouthshire in-house carers unless it is identified that the assessed needs of the child cannot be met from this provision. This will be either because there are no vacancies or because the needs of the child are complex. For these reasons there were thirty-two children placed in independent foster placements on the 31st March 2015. All but three of these children were placed in Wales and of these two are placed just across the border and still attend their school in Chepstow.

The resources of the team to assess foster carers have been consumed by the demands of the Court where increasingly the Service is required to assess multiple family members within very tight timescales. During 2014/15 a total of twenty viability assessments, six partial assessments and eight full assessments of family members were completed out of which only one child was placed. This leaves very little resource for the team to invest in recruiting and assessing generic foster carers.

In May 2015 Cabinet approved plans for additional investment of £228,688 during 2015-17 into the Fostering Service to address these difficulties. The new funding will provide for additional staffing to support recruitment, assessment and support of foster carers as well as a Social Worker to support Special Guardians which should encourage more carers to consider this option and increase the likelihood of these placements being successful in the long-term. The Placement and Support Team have begun planning for recruitment activity specifically aimed at attracting carers for children aged ten and over and carers able to offer long-term placements.

3. Residential and specialist placements

For children with complex needs it is sometimes necessary for them to be placed in residential units or schools in order for their needs to be met. On the 31st March 2015 there were eleven looked after children in such placements which is a significant increase from five children on the same date last year. Of these four were children with disabilities who attend residential schools. All of these children have an autistic spectrum disorder and currently there is no provision to meet their needs within Monmouthshire. One young person is currently placed in hospital due to their mental health needs, one young person is in a secure unit due to the level of risk their behaviour was placing them at and five young people are placed in residential units because their needs cannot be met within a foster placement. All of these young people have significant emotional and mental health needs and were placing themselves at risk due to some of their self-harming behaviours. Children's Services are concerned that the numbers of young people who are presenting with serious emotional and mental health needs is increasing and are working with colleagues in health services to meet the needs of these young people and to keep them safe.

Children's Services work jointly with colleagues in education and health through the complex needs panel to plan and agree how the needs of these children can best be met.

4. Risk profile for looked after children

In April 2014 CSSIW undertook a thematic national inspection of Safeguarding and Care Planning of looked after children and care leavers who exhibit vulnerable and risky behaviours. The inspection report identified that elected members did not have a good understanding of the level of needs of vulnerable and at risk looked after young people.

A needs assessment has been completed for all looked after children as at the 31st March 2015. The risk factors considered included sixteen different factors including issues such as being placed in a residential unit, absconding, being at risk of exploitation, offending and substance misuse. The most prevalent risk factor for children aged over 11 was self-harm or in need of mental health services (25% of children in this age group). Two young people aged over 11 were identified as at risk from exploitation, five young people as displaying sexually harmful activity and seven young people as having absconded or been reported missing in the last twelve months.

The assessment shows that only three young people had been involved in anti-social or offending behaviour, only one young person was NEET (not in education, training or employment) and none were either parents or expectant parents.

Most children and young people had no more than two risk factors however there were some concerning exceptions. Of young people aged over 11 there were five young people who had five or more risk factors including one young person who was identified as having ten.

Children Services work closely with multi-agency partners to support our most vulnerable looked after children but clearly the safeguarding and reduction of risk for our looked after children must be a priority. There is a particular gap in support for children with mental health needs. Cabinet have recently agreed proposals to recruit an additional 0.4 Clinical Psychologist and a full-time play therapist for our therapeutic service BASE. It is anticipated that this will provide improved support to carers, children and young people but that this will not in itself meet the need for all of these children and young people.

5. Outcomes for looked after children

All five pupils at Key Stage 4 achieved a qualification and in academic year 2013-2014, the average points score of these 5 pupils was 308 points. This represented a rise of 86 points on the previous year and consequently the three year rolling average points score rose from 183 points to 239 points. However despite this improvement, this still remains below achievements of the universal population.

Within Key Stage 3, four out of seven pupils achieved the CSI and the three year rolling average rose from 35.3% to 47.3% which again despite this being an improvement remains below the achievements of the universal population.

Within Key Stage 2, two out of three pupils achieved the CSI and the three year rolling average rose from 50% to 54.54% which as above is an improvement but still below the achievements of the universal population.

Attendance of secondary LAC pupils within Monmouthshire was 94.1% which was an increase on the previous year's figure of 93.3% and was just below the LA figure (94.5%) for universal students. Attendance of primary LAC pupils was 96.9% which was an increase on the previous year's figure of 95.9%.

Exclusion levels amongst LAC pupils rose from 21.5 to 26.5 days. This accounted for six pupils. The number of days lost per episode of fixed term exclusion would be 1.75.

The LAC Grant was delegated to schools in 2014/15 but from 2015/16 will be distributed on a consortia basis.

Personal Education Plans have been revised and are now more appropriate to targeting of intervention. As in previous years, schools have been challenged to ensure that LAC pupils have the opportunity to succeed. Where LAC pupils have been at risk of exclusions or where there are attendance issues then intervention has been provided by the Pupil Referral Service and cases of non-attendance have been prioritised by Education Welfare Service.

Children's Services continues to work with colleagues in education and health to improve joint planning in accordance with the Brighter Futures guidance, particularly for children with disabilities.

Cabinet have agreed a number of initiatives to support looked after children in care and care leavers in gaining employment. Unfortunately although commitment in principle remains good this has not translated into actual work experience or apprenticeship roles so far. Work will continue to develop these opportunities.

The Corporate Parenting Panel is developing ways to better recognise and reward the achievements of our looked after children and care leavers in all aspects of their lives.

6. Care Leavers

There were 36 care leavers receiving support from Children's Services on the 31st March 2014 which has reduced from 47 in 2014 and from 57 in 2013. The reduction is partly due to the large group of unaccompanied asylum seeking children who were accommodated in Monmouthshire in 2009 who have almost all now left the service. A care leaver is defined under legislation as a child or young person who has been looked after by the local authority for at least thirteen weeks since their fourteenth birthday.

The Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act 2014 includes requirements for Local Authorities to implement a "When I'm Ready" scheme. This will entitle all care leavers to ask to remain living with their foster carers up to the age of 21 or until they have completed an agreed

programme of education or training. The guidance was published in April 2015 and clearly states that Local Authorities are expected to implement the scheme this year and not wait until the legislation comes into effect in April 2016. The financial implications are complex and the Service is currently working with colleagues within our region to develop policies and procedures. In the meantime the Local Authority are continuing to facilitate young people to remain with their foster carers beyond the age of 18 where this is what the young person and the foster carer wants to happen.

The development and impact of the When I'm Ready scheme will be reported to and monitored by the Corporate Parenting Panel.

7. Children and Young People's Participation

Funding was provided by Public Health Wales to run a group for care leavers that aimed to increase their awareness of issues impacting upon their health. The group learnt about substance misuse, alcohol, self-esteem, healthy relationships and sexual health and invited Children's Services and members of the Corporate Parenting Panel to an evening where they presented what they had learnt and the support that they felt they needed from the Corporate Parenting Panel.

Since that time the group has continued to meet and to grow. The group have started to work with an ex-care leaver, Scott King, who now trains across the UK to help improve understanding of the needs of looked after children and care leavers. Scott is working to support the group to develop their own ideas about what they want to communicate to their corporate parents. It is hoped that young people will be able to present these ideas and views to a joint event between Children's Services and foster carers in the autumn.

Appointment of an Apprentice to support the development of the Children in Care Council has been delayed due to difficulties in recruitment. However two young people have recently been appointed to job share and commenced in post in July.

8. Leadership

The Corporate Parenting Panel has continued to meet during the last year and has now been formalised with terms of reference and a wider representation which includes our Advocacy Service, housing and an invitation to mental health services.

All reports submitted for decision making to a Single Member or to Cabinet must now include consideration of the Corporate Parenting implications. The Corporate Parenting Strategy is available on the Hub and work to promote awareness of Corporate Parenting responsibilities for all Officers and Councillors continues.

9. Summary

- The numbers of Looked after Children in Monmouthshire have remained high during the last year.
- All our looked after children have an allocated social worker.
- Significant increase in children achieving stability in their care via adoption and Special Guardianship Orders.
- The fostering service has increased the number of approved foster carers by one household but has been significantly affected by demands from the Court for kinship assessments.

- Cabinet have approved plans for increased investment into the Placement and Support Team which will fund additional staff to recruit, assess and support foster carers and special guardians.
- Plans to recruit an additional 0.4 Clinical Psychologist and full-time Play Therapist have been approved which will support the development of Children's Services therapeutic service, BASE.