

Report of the Interim Director of Children's Services

Children and Young People in Care Update

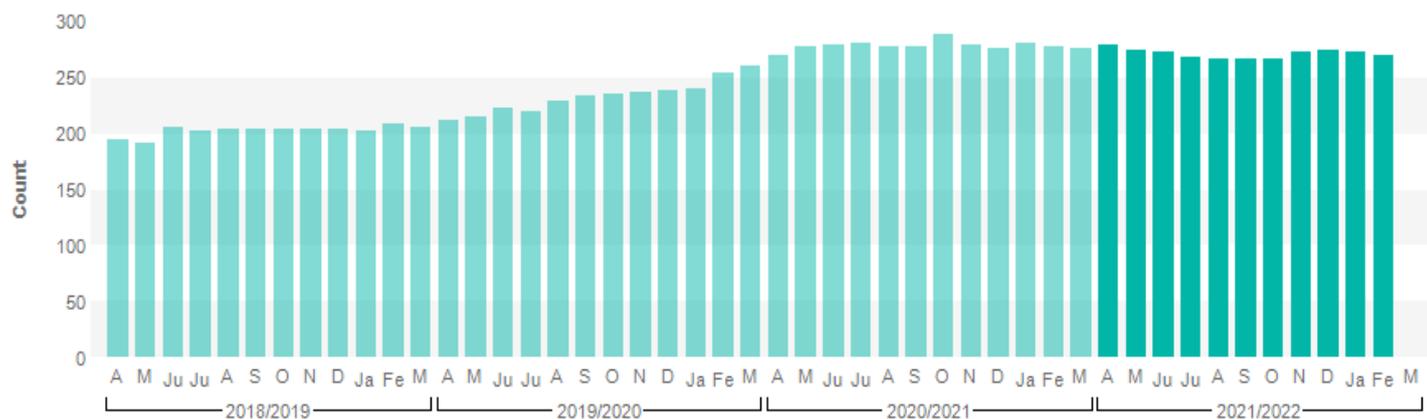
Summary

1. This paper provides an update relating to children and young people in care, key performance information and areas of priority.

Background

2. Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and when a child, for whatever reason, can't safely stay at home, it is up to the local authority to step in and give them the care, support and stability that they need.
3. At the end of February 2022 there were 271 children and young people who were in care. When a child comes into our care we then execute our 'corporate parenting' responsibilities. It is the collective responsibility of the Council to prioritise the needs of children in care and seek for them the same outcomes any good parent would want for their own children.
4. The chart and table below demonstrates how the profile of children and young people has changed over recent years. In 2019/20 we had a steady increase in the number of children that we look after, with the number of children now stabilising throughout the later part of 2021.

Number of children in care, excluding Short Breaks - (Snapshot) (by Month) - Historic



	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
2021/2022	281	277	274	270	268	268	269	275	276	274	271	
2020/2021	272	279	281	282	280	279	291	281	278	282	280	278
2019/2020	213	216	224	221	231	235	237	239	240	242	256	262
2018/2019	196	194	207	204	206	206	205	205	206	204	211	208

5. The number of children in care (per 10k) was 73.24 at the end of February 2022. This compares to 78 per 10k regionally, 67 per 10k nationally and 62.5 per 10k for statistical comparators (2020/21 comparison data).
6. At the end of Q3 2021/22 there were 47 children in care living with parents, known as Placement with Parents (PWP). This equates to 16.9% of the population of children and young people in care at that time. Comparative data is not available for this cohort, we are working hard to understand the high numbers of children subject to PWP and how we will safely and appropriately reduce the numbers of children in this position.

What children and young people in care tell us:

7. A 'U Matter' Consultation is undertaken every two years and explores the views and experiences of children and young people in care and care leavers. A total of 93 children and young people aged 11-25 took part in the most recent 'U Matter' survey completed in October 2021. Key messages from this survey are summarised below.
 - a. The majority of young people in care and leaving care reported that they felt happy and safe where they were living and, young people in care reported that they trust the adults they live with. There has been a dip in the numbers of young people in care who state they would talk to their carers or social workers if they were

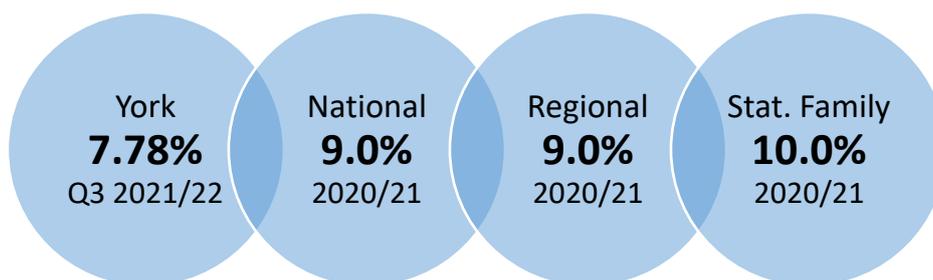
feeling unhappy about where they were living (from 92% in 2017 to 63% (20)).

- b. When invited to reflect on the support they received whilst living in care, care leavers provided suggestions on how they could have been better supported to prepare for leaving care, including more of an emphasis on money management and developing other independence skills.
- c. A significant number of young people felt their social worker listened to them (70% (30)) and did what they said they were going to do (69% (29)) and the majority were happy with the frequency of contact they had with their social worker. Improvements are needed in celebrating young people's achievements, acknowledging special occasions and managing changes in social worker.
- d. Ensuring that young people have an understanding of the story of their life and the reasons for being in care is another area for improvement.
- e. Young people's awareness of who their Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is and how to contact them has increased (currently at 76% (31)), as well as the number of young people reporting they are involved in planning how the meetings take place (currently at 71% (29)).
- f. Care leavers report good relationships with their pathway workers and results indicate a happiness with the support offered including frequency of contact, knowing how to contact their worker and feeling involved in their pathway planning.
- g. Feedback from young people about the support they received with their education from schools, carers and social workers is positive and most were able to identify an adult in school that they could talk to. However findings show that there are improvements to be made in respect of engaging young people further in the Personal Education Planning (PEP) process.
- h. All young people shared that they had someone who they trusted and most young people knew who to speak to if they were unhappy with arrangements for seeing family and friends (92% (36)). For young people who have experienced supervised family time, most young people felt Hamilton House was welcoming and that workers were consistent, friendly and supportive. Areas for

improvement relate to privacy and the provision of age appropriate activities.

- i. Despite a decrease in young people's awareness of Health Assessments (currently at 69% (29)), there was a reported increase in the number of young people who found Health Assessment helpful (from 49% in 2019 to 68% (19)). The majority of young people knew who to talk to if they needed help with their emotional wellbeing and a high proportion would feel confident in asking for help.
 - j. Whilst the awareness of advocacy and the right to make a complaint amongst young people in care and care leavers remains high (71% (30) for children in care and 90% (35) for care leavers), the survey identifies a need to raise the awareness of the Children in Care Council and to make clear the process for complaints, comments and compliments. There is also a need to review the information sent in the New to Care Information Pack and to ensure that young people receive a copy of the Guarantee for Children and Young People in Care.
8. As many local authorities we face challenges with the sufficiency of suitable and sustainable accommodation for children with complex needs. We are in the process of registering our own Children's Homes as identified in our Sufficiency Strategy. Progress has been impacted by the pandemic and we now have a dedicated project manager taking this work forward.
 9. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service promotes direct participation to promote co-produced child focused plans. Meaningful and relationship based visits by children's social workers alongside, consultation and the participation of children and young people in meetings continues to be closely monitored through key performance indicators and monthly service reports. Whilst multi-agency attendance and professional participation at reviews is good, the feedback from some young people and families is that they find virtual meetings are difficult and they are keen to return to a more in person experience.
 10. We are promoting a return to in person meetings as standard practice, supplemented by hybrid meeting technology. The format of the meeting will continue to be driven by what will be right for the child first and foremost.

11. The percentage of children in care for more than one year with an up-to-date dental check deteriorated significantly over the COVID period. Focussed work in this area and the easing of lockdown realised 68.4% of CYPIC had their annual dental check by the end of December 2021.
12. Our performance in relation to Initial Health Assessments for children and young people entering care has been improving in recent years. Health data is telling us 16% (2018/19) to 41% (2020/21). Where children have been in care for longer than 12 months 83.6% have had an annual Review Health Assessment (RHA) in timescale. We know that a number of our 16+ year old young people have chosen not to engage with their RHA, which impacts on performance data. 100% of children in care who are under 5 years old and have been in care for over 12 months have had their RHA within statutory timescales.
13. We have undertaken work to return children to York, and/or step them out of residential children's homes that are out of the York area. Our aim is to care for our children closer to home and where possible to ensure that our children experience care within foster families or are enabled to live well in semi-independent care at a time that is right for them. April 2022 will see the establishment of a children in permanent care review panel that will consider all children in care outside of York and review the suitability of their care arrangements.
14. Placement stability has dipped slightly during 2021/22, but remains better than comparator averages at 7.78% of children in care having 3 or more moves in 12 months.



The Virtual School

15. The Virtual School acts as a local authority champion to promote the progress and educational attainment of children and young people who are or who have been in care so that they achieve good educational attainment and where their achievements are comparable and better to that of their peers.

16. The virtual school cohort contains a small number of children and young people who have significant psychological wellbeing needs which are impacting on their engagement with education. The individual circumstances of each child is being reviewed and individual action plans to support re-integration with education are being put in place to improve virtual school's oversight of these students.
17. Promoting high aspirations is the key area of focus and challenging schools to achieve accelerated progress and better outcomes is embedded in the work of the virtual school.

Attendance

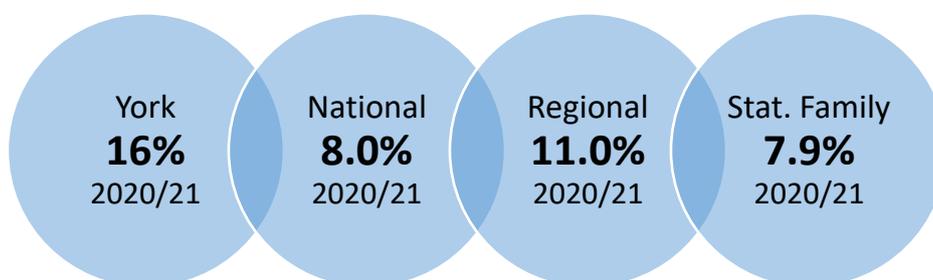
18. Attendance remains a key area of focus and in February 2021 overall attendance was 85% with 62% of children and young people having above 90% attendance and 24% below 70% attendance. In February 2022 overall attendance has risen to 87% with 76% of children and young people having above 90% attendance and 13% below 70% attendance.

Attainment and Progress:

19. There was no national data collected at Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), KS1 or KS2 in 2020 or 2021. Progress data was collected by the virtual school via the ePEP (Personal Education Plans) system. Summer term reported progress by schools shows that 82% of primary aged pupils were making expected progress from their starting point and 73% of secondary aged pupils were making expected progress. The current focus is to ensure schools make use of Pupil Premium Plus funding and recovery premium funds to ensure interventions and support for children and young people's learning is in place to ensure our children achieve and we are relentlessly aspirational for them.
20. Interventions to accelerate the progress of children and young people include 1:1 tuition to close identified gaps in learning, delivery of evidence based intervention programmes as part of school catch up programmes (particularly in English and maths), targeted support from the school wellbeing workers, providing additional resources where schools have identified a specific need to support learning. Regular review of the impact of interventions for identified children is being used to refine support for individual children.

Care leavers and transitions

21. Young people are currently allocated a pathway worker at age 17.5 years. It is planned to bring this support forward so a young person is allocated a personal advisor (PA) on or around their 16th birthday. In January 2022, we had 119 care leavers, 92 were aged 17-21 years old. Young people aged 21+ have access to a pathway worker, the level of support required is subject to assessment and many of our young people over 21 year olds are receiving a full service.
22. Young people are encouraged to remain looked after until their 18th birthday. A panel will be established to review monthly all young people in unregulated settings (currently 2 young people). This is chaired by the Head of Corporate Parenting. Where a young person is living in unregulated provision, robust oversight and monitoring is provided by the IRO Service to ensure that the placement is meeting the young person's needs.
23. At the end of Q1 2021/22, 20 young people (26%) under 21 remain with their foster carers under Staying Put arrangements. In 2020/21 the percentage of care leavers (19 to 21 years old) living with former foster carers was 16% in York compared to 8% nationally, 11% regionally and 7.9% among statistical neighbours.



24. We have no young people residing in bed and breakfast or Houses of Multiple Occupancy. At the end of November 2021 82.86% (17-18 years old) and 94.1% (19-21 years old) of our care leavers reside in suitable accommodation.
25. Our local offer for care leavers is published on our web site and annually reviewed. The Local Offer provides a bus pass, gym membership, Council Tax relief for the first year, driving lessons, Theory & Driving Tests and for those going on to higher education a bursary and accommodation cost.

Care Leavers and attainment

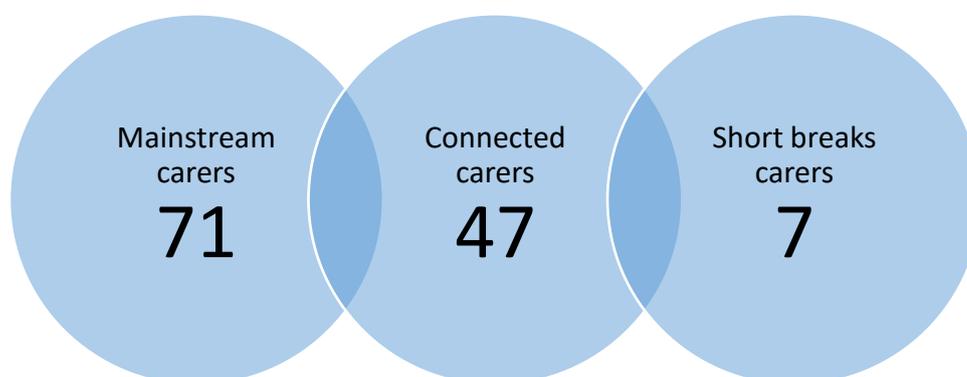
26. We have high aspirations for our care leavers. We pay care leavers' accommodation during Higher Education and support them to remain in education or training and move into employment.
27. Our success can be measured using the number of care leavers in Education, Employment or Training EET/NEET data. We are proud to say that our Care Leavers do better than their counterparts at national, regional and statistical neighbour levels. Performance has recently dipped due to changes within the team. As for all authorities staff sickness has been a challenge over the pandemic. This will be a priority for the new Pathway Manager alongside the Virtual School Head.

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22 Q3
% of care leavers aged 17-18 in employment, education or training	71.43%	75.86%	60.87%
% of care leavers aged 19-21 in employment, education or training	63.75%	53.66%	67.07%

28. The pandemic has impacted on employment opportunities especially in hospitality with York a popular City for tourists, both from the UK and from abroad. Projects such as the Prince's Trust have started up again and we have supported care leavers into college and other Further Education placements so they will have increased opportunities in the future. If young people reside out of area we do look at sourcing provision where they live in order to increase education, training and employment opportunities.

Fostering

29. At the 31st May 2021 we had 123 approved foster carer households:



30. Placement sufficiency for teenagers continues to be an ongoing challenge. During the assessment process we are focusing fostering on applicants being prepared to consider a wider age range of children and young people matched to their skills and experience.

Foster Carer Recruitment

31. We are currently in the process of developing a new recruitment strategy which will underpin our refreshed campaigns. The recruitment strategy will focus on recruitment of all types of fostering families to meet the needs of our children in York. The strategy will include redesign of our digital media campaign, as well as increasing face to face information and recruitment events – these will be supported by our current foster carers, our Care Advisors and York Area Foster Carers Association (YAFCA).
32. Our Skills to Foster preparation training course has been re-written and is more flexible to meet the needs of applicants and also ensuring applicants understand what the fostering role entails.
33. From April 2021 to February 2022, 8 mainstream foster carers were approved at fostering panel. We know we need to do more to ensure we attract more carers and more of the right carers to meet the needs of our children.

Foster Carer Training

34. We have a blended approach to Foster Carer training and support with a partial return to face-to-face training alongside e-learning courses where appropriate (i.e. Reflective Fostering with the NSPCC in spring 2021 and Therapeutic Crisis Intervention training delivered via Zoom).
35. A support group for newly approved foster carers has recently been established, to support new carers as they commence their fostering careers. Feedback to date has been very positive and we anticipate it will help with our recruitment and retention.
36. Our Fostering Panel is robust. The Chair is very experienced and the quality of discussion and the overall quality of the panel minutes is good. A quarterly meeting with the agency advisor to panel, the agency decision maker, and panel chair considers any quality assurance issues and also how the panel is running overall. This enables any issues/positives to be shared and responded to promptly. The quality of paperwork submitted to panel and also panel outcomes are reflected in case audits.

The Corporate Parenting Board

37. We are committed to York being an effective, caring, and ambitious corporate parent and we will do everything we can to make sure that children in our care and care leavers receive the best possible care and support.
38. The purpose of the Corporate Parenting Board is:
 - a. To actively listen to the views of our children and young people so that the Council is able to adapt its corporate parenting in line with their wishes, feeling and needs.
 - b. To act as a forum where our young people are able to hold Members and Officers to account as their parents.
 - c. To raise the awareness of the Council's Corporate Parenting responsibilities and knowledge among elected Members and officers.
 - d. To support and make recommendations to relevant Council bodies on matters related to corporate parenting.
39. The remodelling of the Corporate Parenting Board is an area of focus and a new constitution has been agreed in 2022. This new model has been developed with children and young people and will be supported following the recent recruitment of Corporate Parenting Advisors to the Director of Children's Services (DCS). Currently in their infancy the new Corporate Parenting Board arrangements will strengthen the corporate sense of responsibility for children in care and care leavers.

Areas of priority

40. The development of our approach to Corporate Parenting is a key priority. Key priorities are outlined below.
 - a. Strengthen our approach to Corporate Parenting
 - b. Review and revise our Sufficiency Strategy to ensure we have the 'right accommodation in the right place at the right time'
 - c. Deliver a rapid improvement plan for our Fostering Service.
 - d. Revise and refresh our fostering recruitment campaign. We recruited very low numbers in 20/21 and 21/22.

- e. Reunification of children with their families
- f. We will ensure management oversight and grip to reduce the number of children subject to Placement with Parents Regulations.
- g. Review all children who have had 3 or more moves in 12 months
- h. We will continue to improve our permanence planning for all children who are in our care subject to S20.
- i. Review all children in unregulated placements to ensure stability and permanence and securing of a regulated home.
- j. Improve the timeliness of Initial Health Assessments for children in care and access to Health Passports.
- k. Refresh our package of support to young people to help them prepare for independence prior to leaving care.
- l. Ensure all our children and young people are supported to understand their Life Story.
- m. Strengthen how the Authority celebrates the achievements of children and young people in care.

Options

- 41. This report is for discussion and comment, there are no options put forward for consideration. However, support from the Scrutiny Committee is sought in the ongoing children's services improvement journey.

Implications

- 42. **Financial** - There are significant financial commitments arising from our responsibilities as Corporate Parents. This paper identifies a number of themes (placement sufficiency, fostering recruitment, children in care population, practice) and areas in need of improvement that have financial implications. Delivering these improvements will draw upon growth allocation set out in the 2022/23 budget and will help to address significant budget pressures for this area.
- 43. **Human Resources (HR)** - There are no implications.
- 44. **Equalities** – There are no implications.

- 45. **Legal** - There are no implications.
- 46. **Crime and Disorder** - There are no implications.
- 47. **Information Technology (IT)** - There are no implications.
- 48. **Property** - There are no implications.

Contact Details

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Anne Coyle
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Report
 Approved



Date 28 March 2022

All



For further information please contact the author of the report

Abbreviations

- CYPIC – Children and Young People in Care
- DCS – Director of Children's Services
- EET/NEET – Education, Employment or Training / Not in Education, Employment or Training
- EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage
- IHA – Initial Health Assessments
- IRO – Independent Reviewing Officers
- PA – Personal Advisor
- PEP – Personal Education Plan
- PWP – Placement With Parents
- RHA – Review Health Assessments
- S20 – Section 20 (of the Children Act 1989)
- YAFCA – York Area Foster Carers Association