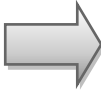


Strategic Risk 1- Looked After Children

Risk title and description	Previous score (June 2015)	Direction of travel	Current score (August 2015)	Target score and date
<p>Looked After Children (LAC) If the number of LAC is not reduced this may result in an increase in costs, budget overspends and an increased demand on children's services.</p> <p>Risk owner: Linda Sanders (Emma Bennett) Cabinet Member: Cllr Val Gibson</p>	20 Red		20 Red	15 Red April 2016

Background

- 1.1 At the July 2015 meeting of the Audit Committee, members requested further information in respect of strategic risk 1 – Looked After Children. This note updates the committee on the progress of the work programme to reduce the number of Looked After Children to 631 by 31 March 2016.
- 1.2 Members will be aware from previous risk reports that the numbers of looked after children reached a peak at 807. Over the last 5 years Wolverhampton has seen a continued growth in Looked After children (LAC) at a greater pace than has been seen nationally to 143 per 10,000. We are now at 126 per 10,000. By achieving a reduction to 631 we will be at 110 per 10,000.
- 1.3 The Families r First programme was established in 2014 in order to ensure that wherever possible children are supported to remain with their families safely. This would in turn enable the right children come into care at the earliest point. The work streams under this have been successful in stabilising the numbers. Since the reconfiguring of edge of care services in mid-June under one Head of Service, admissions have decreased significantly and there are now over 50 fewer Looked After Children, a reduction to 726 as of August 2015.

2 Current position

2.1 The Families r First programme is now embedded in the Children's Services transformation phase 2 which includes:

- Review of whole system with iMPower Consultancy: building on the LGA funded iMPower work that took place between March and April, iMPower have now been awarded a tender to undertake a longer term piece of work including a review and analysis of services currently targeted at early help in order to assess both the effectiveness and efficiency of our current model with a view to informing a high level redesign. The work with iMPower is for three months and began in July 2015. Together with data and financial analysis, a series of interviews are taking place with service leads, workshops with key employees have been established alongside some focus groups with frontline staff and service users. Work is being undertaken with Corporate Landlord leads in order to inform the development of proposals for asset rationalisation to achieve service redesign.
- The 2015/16 budget for the whole of the LAC service is £33 million. The Medium Term Financial Strategy includes a savings proposal for the reduction in the number of LAC of £6 million over the period of 2015/16 to 2018/19.
- Budget 2016/17 plans and modelling continues in order to inform the planning and delivery of the further proposed £4.3 million savings in 2016/17 from a whole system transformation. The Children's transformation programme aims to deliver an accelerated, sustainable and lasting reduction of LAC through redesigning the whole Children's services pathway and systems, ensuring better use of resources with effective targeted early intervention and prevention to keep families together safely.
- A key change in order to accelerate progress was to reconfigure Edge of Care services under one Head of Service. This commenced in June with an objective to significantly improve and better co-ordinate and focus services on support to prevent children becoming looked after. In bringing these services together, work has been undertaken to ensure all resources are targeted at supporting families to remain together. The service is providing both planned and crisis interventions. It was evident that the majority of children were coming into care late in the evening and at weekends due to crisis within the family. A new rota arrangement is being put in place to extend hours of support to 8 p.m. and over the weekend. The work of the Edge of Care team has already significantly impacted on the numbers of children coming into care – with eight in total in July (compared to 24 in January). This enables work to be undertaken closely with the Emergency Duty team to reduce out of hours emergency admissions (including police protection) with all children at risk of becoming looked after being required to be referred to the newly created Edge of Care service.
- The development and implementation of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is being led by a strategic partnership board with support from a weekly operational group. With MASH's already in place in Birmingham, Coventry, Sandwell, Staffordshire and Stoke, West Midlands Police are keen to implement this model across all West Midlands local authorities in order to ensure child protection and vulnerable adults referrals are managed by a multi-agency team that shares

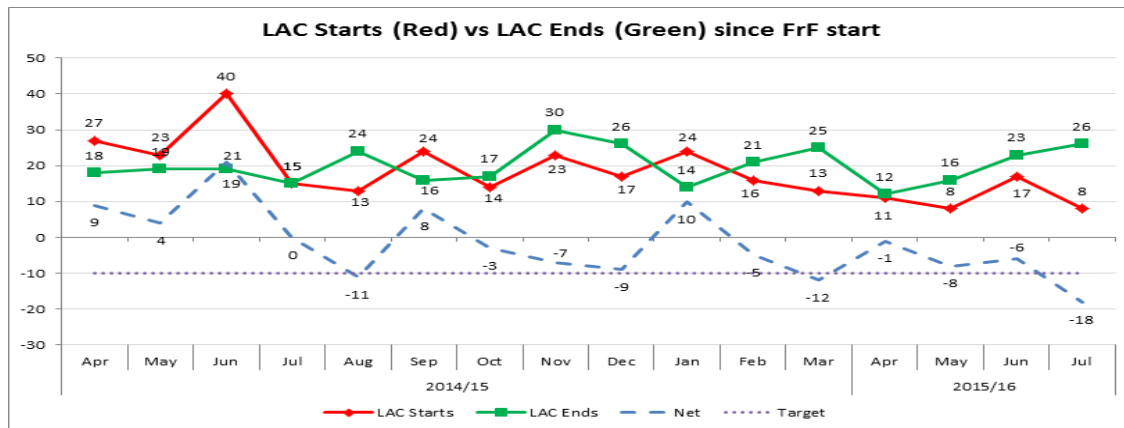
information at the earliest point and ensures multi-agency decision making. Wolverhampton is committed to a single children's and adults MASH and plans to implement this from January 2016. Work is currently being undertaken to plan Civic Centre accommodation and the IT system to support the MASH whilst multi agency dip sampling of referrals will take place in September to inform the resources required.

2.2 Essential elements of the children's transformation process include a focus on workforce, retraining and behaviour change across the system including with partners. The case review and analysis undertaken by Suzanne Coulson (an independent specialist) in spring 2015, has resulted in the following:

- A dedicated legal workshop and on-going work plan and performance management to shift culture and practice to further reduce initiation of care proceedings, increase use of private law options and ensure the revocation of most of the 91 care orders where children and young people are placed at home. A joint schedule has now been developed.
- A dedicated police workshop plus on-going work and performance monitoring to reduce use of police protection through ensuring effective and pro-active social work/Edge of Care intervention.
- A programme of retraining to improve social work practice, assessment and care planning based upon the principle that strong social work practice is key to reducing number of LAC through ensuring effective preventative support to children and families.
- The re-designation of social work services in order to address the long term vacancies at a Consultant Social Worker level, ensuring that resources are aligned with needs across the locality areas, and to target 12 additional social workers in order to ensure caseloads are appropriate and that high quality social work is provided.
- On-going and targeted recruitment campaigns have led to the majority of vacant social worker posts having been recruited to. It is planned that all these posts will be filled by the end of September.

2.3 Whole System Engagement - Integral to the improvement programme is a shared leadership endeavour across all partners through ensuring that key partnership activity (as represented by the Children and Young People Partnership Board, Health and Wellbeing Board, the Strengthening Families Board, the Health and Social Care Joint Commissioning Board and the Children's Safeguarding Board) is engaged over the summer in the children's services transformation journey. This will be built into the next phase of the system redesign work.

2.4 The chart below demonstrates the reduction of LAC over recent months through preventing children from becoming looked after and enabling children to exit from care in a timely manner.



3. Risk mitigation

- 3.1 The risks to managing demand differently and reducing the numbers of LAC have been identified and recorded in the programme risk register and includes the following:
- The demands of partner agencies where there may be a tendency to prefer children and young people to be removed from their families as the primary way to safeguard effectively.
 - The change in culture of social work practice to “think family” before care and the associated challenge and skill of managing risk within families
 - The impact of large sibling groups who may enter care.
 - The lack of preventative services available to support children at home.
 - The impact of the financial costs if targets are not met.

4. The Assurance Framework

- 4.1 Assurances on the effective management of this strategic risk include reporting to:
- Scrutiny Board.
 - Children’s Trust Board
 - Wolverhampton Safeguarding Children’s Board
 - Children’s Service Budget monitoring group (including cabinet members and Head of Finance)
 - Strengthening Families Board
 - Regular update reports to the Strategic Executive Board and the People Leadership Team.