

BY:	Kay Weiss
TO:	Children's Champions Board
DATE:	2 December 2009
CLASSIFICATION:	Unrestricted

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

The placement of Looked After Children by other local authorities in Kent

The report focuses on children and young people placed into Kent by other local authorities (OLA LAC), and outlines actions which KCC CFE are undertaking to reduce the number and impact of OLA LAC placed in Kent.

The report does not focus on issues relating to KCC Citizen LAC placed out of authority or unaccompanied asylum seeking children and the pressures this places on Kent as a gateway authority in securing sufficient and appropriate placements for them.

BACKGROUND

1. (1) KCC has advocated for over 10 years the need to reduce the number of children/young people in care being placed into Kent, which is comparable in number to those children looked after by KCC, excluding unaccompanied asylum seeking children. In 2004, KCC developed specific multi-agency practice protocols to guide its own practice and encouraged DCSF to develop national protocols like these to guide the practice of all authorities. The practice protocols are still used by KCC when making decisions regarding the placement of its LAC out of authority. The author is not aware of any national protocols or guidance that has been developed by the DCSF or any government offices to influence practice in this area. Such guidance would be useful in ensuring a consistent approach to how the legislative changes outlined under section 2.2 should be delivered in practice as well as commissioning of suitable placements.
 - (2) KCC CFE was also influential in the inclusion of a specific proposal within Care Matters to address the issue of out of authority placements. This followed a visit by Beverly Hughes in 2006 to Kent, which helped raise the profile of the welfare needs of these children/young people – as well as the impact that such high numbers of OLA LAC was placing on resources in Kent.
 - (3) Alongside advocating for a reduction in the numbers of OLA LAC, KCC has ensured that it maintains its responsibilities to these children whilst they remain living in Kent. This has included specific commitments to OLA LAC in Kent's Pledge with respect to supporting their education, health and promoting sport and leisure opportunities. The needs of OLA LAC in Kent are included within the remit of Kent's Corporate Parenting Forum (made up from the Children's Champion Board and Kent's Corporate Parenting Group).
 - (4) With respect to monitoring OLA LAC numbers, placing authorities have a legal duty to inform the host authority when placing LAC in their area. A specific form was developed by the ADSS in 1991 which has failed to reflect practice and
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partnership working between children's social services, education and health since 2004 at least. In 2004, KCC developed an up-to-date notification form when placing KCC children out of authority (see section 3 of report). The routine practice of MIU contacting other local authorities throughout the year appears to have stopped, although it is understood from conversations with MIU that this is to be re-introduced this year. A proactive approach by KCC to establishing the accuracy of data on OLA LAC is necessary to ensure information records are as accurate as possible. LAC Education Advisors, through the Integrated LAC Support Service (ILSS) also have an important role in contributing to information on school aged OLA LAC and maintain close links with schools and MIU and the placing (responsible) authority for the child/young person. Their role will need to be included in any review of the data collection process by MIU.

2. Forthcoming legislative changes

- (1) Care Matters (white paper) 2007 raised the profile of the need to reduce long distance placements (originally highlighted by Utting and others in the 80's and 90's following reviews of residential children's homes). This is reflected in the Children and Young Person's Act 2008 (Part 2, section 9), which seeks to reduce the number of children and young people in care placed out of authority by placing a duty on the local authority to secure sufficient accommodation. This legislative change is expected to become law sometime in 2009/10, although the exact timescales are not yet known.
- (2) Once in place, the legislation should ensure that:
 - a) Each local authority will arrange for sufficient accommodation within their area to meet the needs of their children
 - b) Demonstrate for those children who continue to be placed out of authority that it is consistent with promoting their welfare that they are provided with accommodation outside of the local authority area
- (3) The new legislation should result in a reduction of the number of children being placed in Kent, although a decrease is likely to be slow. It is unlikely, for example, that OLA LAC already in settled placements in Kent will be moved back to their responsible authority's area. The Children's Director, Roger Morgan, has criticised authorities who have moved children from settled long distance placements to placements within their own authority. It is important therefore, that any action taken by KCC to support the implementation of the new legislation is mindful of the need to promote the welfare of this group of children and young people in care.

KEY DETAILS

3. Looked after children placed in Kent by other local authorities

- (1) As at 2/11/09 KCC records show that there were 1425 children/young people looked after by another authority placed in Kent. This is an increase of 98 OLA LAC since March 2009 and an increase of 201 since March 2007. A detailed breakdown of OLA LAC by placing authority is presented at Appendix 1.
 - (2) Based upon a detailed analysis of March 2009 data, which showed 1325 OLA LAC, 554 (42%) of these children/young people are placed in East Kent (Thanet, Swale and Canterbury), with Thanet being the district with the highest number of
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placements (235 [18%]). The average for the three EK districts is 185, with Canterbury having the lowest number at 132.

- (3) Mid Kent (Dover, Ashford, Shepway and Maidstone) have 293 children/young people placed in its districts (22%), with an average number per district of 73 children/young people.
- (4) With the West Kent districts (Dartford, Gravesham, Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells) KCC data shows a total of 250 (19%) children/young people being placed in the area. The average number per WK district is 50 with a range from 11 (Tunbridge Wells) to 76 (Sevenoaks and Dartford each).
- (5) There are also 230 children/young people (17%) whose details on KCC's information system do not show the district where they are placed. This is most likely because this information has not been provided to KCC by the placing authority. It would be assumed based on the demographics of the other children/young people in the OLA LAC group that the majority of these children/young people will be living in the EK area.
- (6) With respect to age breakdown, the majority of these children/young people are aged between 11 years and 17 years inclusive (889 [67%]) – with 14 and 15 years being the highest (180 and 181 respectively). Based on data from an earlier report (January 2008) it would be expected that the majority of these children/young people are male (62%). This is a slightly higher proportion when compared to KCC LAC (55% male) and national average (55%).
- (7) The most recent OLA data available (2 November 2009) shows that there are 94 authorities who have one or more of their looked after children placed in Kent, with a range of 1 to 5 child/young person (44 authorities) to 10 or more children/young people (39 authorities). The highest placing authorities are:

Authority	Number of Children/ Young People	% of Total LAC	Number in East Kent Area	Increase/ Decrease
Greenwich	108	20	51	Increase of 47 since April 2005 , 27 since March 2009
Medway	71	21	43	Increase of 53 since April 2005
Bexley	62	29	10	Increase of 18 since April 2005, 1 since March 2009
Newham	72	11	37	Increase of 20 since April 2005, 11 since March 2009
Lewisham	72	13	26	Increase of 24 since April 2005, 18 since March 2009
Southwark	47	7	10	Increase of 7 since April 2005, 4 since March 2009
Lambeth	46	7	22	Decrease of 6 since April 2005, 5 since

Authority	Number of Children/ Young People	% of Total LAC	Number in East Kent Area	Increase/ Decrease
				March 2009
Waltham Forest	43	12	16	Increase of 6 since April 2005, 5 since March 2009
Essex	39	3	11	Decrease of 15 since April 2005, an increase of 3 since March 2009
Islington	34	11	15	Decrease of 8 since April 2005, decrease of 2 since March 2009
Tower Hamlets	29	9	12	Decrease of 22 since April 2005, decrease of 6 since March 2009
Hertfordshire	42	5	15	Increase of 28 since April 2005, 8 since March 2009
Hillingdon	33	7	20	Decrease of 12 since April 2005, no change since March 2009
Hounslow	33	10	19	Decrease of 1 since April 2005, up 1 since March 2009
Bromley	28	12	6	Decrease of 8 since April 2005, a decrease of 3 since March 2009
Surrey	37	4	10	No change since April 2005, an increase of 6 since March 2009

- (9) The number of children/young people placed in the EK area has dropped overall between April 2005 and November 2009 by 181 (from 790 to 609) but has increased by 55 since March 2009. This pattern is also reflected in the numbers of OLA LAC placed in the Thanet district (from 333 to 255 – an increase of 20 since March 2009).

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20 November 2009

